

# Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

## Crafts

*edited by*

Laura Gilli

Andrea Mecacci

Poste Italiane spa - Tassa pagata - Piego di libro  
Aut. n. 072/DCB/FI/VF del 31.03.2005



13 • 1/2020

ISSN 2035-8466  
[www.fupress.net](http://www.fupress.net)

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Vol 13, No 1 (2020)

Firenze University Press

Opera edita con il contributo dell'Università IULM Milano  
(quota premiale fondi Apeiron 2017, primo quartile Area  
Umanistica, assegnato a Laura Gilli)



**Citation:** L. Gilli, A. Mecacci (2020) Crafts. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 3-5. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11615

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Crafts

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Talking about crafts today may seem like a comeback on paths that have been trodden away too much. An impression that may probably arise from the idea that such a matter has recurred since the very beginning of human thought, i.e. the classification of the arts whose reflection involves the whole human being in its various activities. The theme is therefore definitely an ancient one, yet demanding for further investigations as of today. In the contemporary world, where the differences between the wide spectrum of activities are always in perennial movement, the theoretical debate requires focusing back on craftsmanship through its bringing to the fore the problem of its own essence, mixing levels that have sometimes been perceived as distant, as is the case of notions such as beauty and usefulness, often thought of as antithetical in the history of aesthetics. First and foremost, however, when investigating craftsmanship there is necessarily a convergence emerging between the notions of art and technique, which in contemporary world shall always raise new questions about their own definition, the role they play in society and the possible interactions, if not overlapping, that might take place within their dialogue.

Moreover, at a quick glance, craftsmanship may appear very circumscribed in well-defined scientific fields, whereas at a more in-depth investigation, it can open up questions concerning the very heart of human activity. The theoretical boundaries of craftsmanship are rather vague, today; this explaining the need to focus on the theoretical roots following the paths that have developed within the conceptual area of craftsmanship, examining what the features recognized as specific to craft itself are. The main interest of the issue has concerned the outlining of the contours of craftsmanship in their perennial flowing influenced by cultural mutations. In particular, the issue aimed at promoting a reflection that could inquire at a theoretical level the notion of craftsmanship, studying its aesthet-

ic boundaries. The issue also intended to explore the pervasive capability of the subject, highlighting the modes of penetration of craft concepts, structures and languages in different areas. It also sought to understand how the distinctive traits that define craftsmanship emerge in different spheres.

This volume thus welcomes, among the various contributions, some articles marked by a stronger theoretical focus on the concept of craftsmanship often related to the definition of other fields, as in the case of Aurosa Alison's essay on Artidesign (*L'Artidesign: il dialogo fruttuoso*), which presents a theory concerning the relationship between art, technique and craftsmanship. The question of art is also discussed in its relationship with new technologies: this is the case of James Krasner's contribution (*Embodied Craft in Lia Cook's Textiles and «The Lady of Shalott»*) which portrays the work of the artist Lia Cook showing how a very ancient activity such as weaving can feed on the most innovative inputs of technology.

These intertwinement emerge, though declined under other perspectives, in the contribution of Alessandro Cazzola, *Art as Formative Technique. The Human Behaviour Between Art and Nature*, which focuses on the notions of artistry and formativity, respectively introduced by Dino Formaggio and Luigi Pareyson, and in Gregorio Tenti's, *Pratiche viventi: Temi di una poetica contemporanea*, which analyzes the theme of poiesis in Gilbert Simondon's reflection.

A field close to craftsmanship is obviously design. In the present-day world it arises the need to rethink its relationship with craftsmanship, whose discourse is increasingly present in the culture of design. A classic example of this complex relationship is the *Bauspiel* designed by Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, the most famous toy of Bauhaus, key to the reflection of Andrea Mecacci (*Ontologia del giocattolo. Il Bauspiel di Alma Siedhoff-Buscher*).

Some articles, on the other hand, focus on the development of craftsmanship aiming at some distinctive declinations. The article by Riikka Latva-

Somppi and Maarit Mäkelä shows how it blends-in with the very topical issue of environment: the experimental essay *Exploring Ecological and Material Sensitivity through Craft Practice in the Context of the Venice Lagoon*, engages with the multisensorial aesthetic experience of environmental materiality. The paper takes advantage of an artistic research project in which craft is put into place in order to explore the human imprint in the unique environment that is the Venice Lagoon. In the wake of this multidisciplinary viewpoint also sits Martha Friel's paper *Crafts in the contemporary creative economy*, which, after an introductory look at the role of today's craftsmanship within the framework of "creative economy" enucleates the critical issues related to this productive and cultural sector while outlining the challenges up to come. The various contributions demonstrate how craft has become a concept projecting well beyond the field of the so-called "applied arts" to turn in a conceptual category suitable for application to different fields. One might recall, for example, Colin Campbell's 2005 study "*The Craft Consumer*", which highlights a two-folded dimension of contemporary consumption, with a crafts logic on the one hand and an aesthetic dimension on the other.

The *Varia* section of the issue covers a wide range of topics. Two essays are dedicated to Foucault's. Andrea Nicolini's reconnaissance of Foucault's ethical thinking over the period of eight years between the first and the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* in which Foucault released nothing but interviews (*Se dépandre de soi-même: A Critique of Foucault's Ethics*) and the comparative analysis provided by Maryam Madadzadeh and Mohsen Hanif between Foucault's notion of biopower and E.M. Fortster's novel *A Passage to India*. Two essays are dedicated to the literary field: *Riscrittura e maschere dell'io* by Laura Brignoli which investigates the theme of the rewriting of a classic, namely the *Liaisons Dangereuses* by Laclos in *Le Mauvais genre* by Laurent de Graeve; and Lucia Rodler's *La post-fisiognomica di Goffredo Parise* in which the author poses the problem, theorized by Parise during the 1960s, of the overcoming of a traditional physiognomy,

anticipating a post-human vision. Fabio Tononi in *Aesthetic Response to the Unfinished: Empathy, Imagination and Imitation Learning* analyzes the way beholders may internally process unfinished works of art by accounting for five incomplete sculptures by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The interweaving of material culture and identity construction, in the light of the notion of performativity developed by J.L. Austin and Judith Butler, is at the basis of Anna Caterina Dalmasso's contribution *Things That Matter: Agency and Performativity*. Finally, the essay by Darius Pacauskas and Ossi Naukkarinen *Finnish Aesthetics in Academic Databases*, examines a specific case, i.e. the scientific production of a non-English speaking country (Finland), and proposes an approach that allows a critical gaze into the representation of local art or studies related to humanities in wide-spectrum academic databases such as *Scopus* or *Web of Science*, trying to understand to what extent we can trust those sources in displaying realistic pictures of the research fields.

The final section of this issue hosts a thorough book symposium around Nicola Perullo's most recent publication *Estetica ecologia. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente* (Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2020), in which the author puts forward a new interpretation of the aesthetic experience in terms of being embedded in and "in correspondence with" an environment ("correspondence" in a critical concept of the book). The symposium features a short piece by Perullo himself and two insightful commentaries by Manlio Iofrida, on the relationship between Perullo's idea of "haptic experience" and the classical concept of "logos" in the Greek-Latin tradition, and Giovanni Fava, on the implications of Perullo's ecological aesthetics for ecology as a science.





**Citation:** J. Krasner (2020) Embodied Craft in Lia Cook's Textiles and «The Lady of Shalott». *Aisthesis* 13(1): 7-16. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11146

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

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## Embodied Craft in Lia Cook's Textiles and «The Lady of Shalott»

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### INTRODUCTION

Theoretical distinctions between craft objects and industrial products often turn on the operation of the artisan's body in relation to machines, tools, and materials. Colin Campbell identifies control of the body as the defining issue: «The contrast is not really between hand production and machine production, but rather between a production system in which the worker is in control of the machine and one in which the machine is in control of the worker» (Campbell [2005]: 28). Distinctions between craft objects and art objects, on the other hand, often turn on the body of the viewer, purchaser, or user of the object in question. Arthur Risatti asserts that «the basic functions of craft objects, all spring from the same purpose, that of fulfilling the body's needs»; for example, «chairs and beds support the human body; blankets and clothes cover the body» (Risatti [2007]: 72). Margaret Boden describes psychological responses to craft work as «enactive» or «arousing impulses to bodily action» (Boden [2000]: 294), whereas works of art incite «indicative» responses, which arise from «visual processes» (Boden [2000]: 292) and encourage the intellectual processing of information. I would like to engage with this discussion of embodiment and craft by looking at the work of Lia Cook, a contemporary textile artist who combines digital machine weaving and hand weaving. Cook's large-format textile installations address the engagement of body and technology, both in her creative process and as a thematic of the works' aesthetic argument. While textile artists such as Norma Minkowitz have used sculpted figures of the female body to



approach issues related to embodiment, Cook's creations are more useful for a discussion of craft embodiment because they incorporate her artisanal process, and its associated embodied operations, into the craft works themselves. My argument will frame Cook's work with a discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century artworks that investigate the textile worker's body: Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1842 poem «The Lady of Shalott» which has become an iconic representation of a textile artist at work, and William Holman Hunt's painting based on that poem. I am reaching back to Hunt's work because of the close relationship between Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and the discourse of craft associated with John Ruskin and William Morris. As Morna O'Neill notes, the «crafting of a Pre-Raphaelite canvas conceptualized an approach to artistic process that would become central to the Arts and Crafts movement» (O'Neill [2015]). Moreover, Hunt's painting, which he began in 1886 and was exhibited in 1905, concerns itself with the embodied interaction of the craft worker with her tools and materials in ways that prefigure, and are extensively expanded upon by, Lia Cook's textiles.

### 1. LIA COOK'S ENACTIVE WEAVING

Lia Cook established her reputation with her *New Master Draperies* series from the early 1990s; her woven tapestries recreated the textiles portrayed in paintings by Old Masters such as Leonardo da Vinci and Artemesia Gentileschi. Her subsequent move toward digital weaving technologies became apparent in her *Childhood Traces* series from the early 2000s, in which she created very large tapestries based on her personal childhood photographs. Both of these series negotiate the way different art forms (painting, photography) and different aspects of art history and personal history are impressed into textiles. Janet Koplos notes that Cook's use of her own childhood images makes her «present in the work in two doubled ways, which might be described as past and present, and object and subject» (Koplos [2015]). This self-reflexive quality is also appar-

ent in her *Point of Touch: Material Pleasures*, series from the late 1990s. These pieces, mostly of pressed linen treated with oils and dyes, portray hands, legs, and torsos touching and being touched by various textiles. «Presence/Absence: In the Folds» is a 192 inch by 41 inch panel in which several images of Cook herself appear positioned vertically with black bars between. The effect is at once of a tapestry and a roll of exposed film. In each image, Cook's hands touch her face, covering cheeks, mouth, or chin. At the bottom, the fabric tumbles onto the floor, and Cook's self-portrait is disrupted by folds of drapery. As both object and subject of the piece, Cook elides her face and hands; her identity as the maker of the tapestry is as important as her self-presentation to the world. On these panels Cook touches her own face with the same hands that touched and wove the fabric on which her face appears; the folds of the panel are echoed by the folds of her skin. Judith Leeman describes this metahaptic reflexiveness as a «tight cycle of self-reference. [...] Doublings abound. Recursive circles loop and repeat» (Leeman [2007]: 336).

According to Cook, her work explores « the sensuality of the woven image and the emotional connections to memories of touch and cloth» (Cook [2019]). The grammar of her sentence here is evocatively ambiguous. Does touching the cloth create memories, or are we remembering the feel of cloth fabrics we associate with past emotion? Are these only Cook's memories, or the viewer's as well? Even more strikingly, does cloth itself bear memory? Is cloth sensual in the same way that our response to it is sensual? These questions scramble sensory agency among artist, viewer, and object.

As the title *Point of Touch: Material Pleasures* suggests, Cook is interested in the pleasures of the body's engagement with woven materials, and doesn't shy away from representing sexual as well as sensual stimulation. In «Presence/Absence: Gather» two hands meet, their thumbs gently squeezing some sort of bodily form through a loosely worn garment, perhaps a robe or towel. The natural place for hands to meet would be

the lower torso, and the sexual suggestiveness of the weaving is both apparent and relatively non-explicit. The 48 inch square piece hangs by its upper corners, the drape of the fabric paralleling the curve made by the joined hands, emphasizing the soft tactility of the fabric that lies between the hands and the hidden body. Self-touching is more explicit in *Point of Touch: Bathsheba*, in which a repeated pattern of stylized hands in black and white creates a screen behind which a leg and lower torso, only partly covered by a folded piece of fabric, touch each other and the cloth. Both works elide the maker's touch on the fabric she creates, the sensuous touch of fabric on the body, and the reflexive touch of hand on skin.

David M. Roth, writing about Cook's childhood photograph works, enunciates the counter-intuitively intimate quality of these large-format hangings. «The enlargement should, by all rights, make it less intimate; but the warp and weft of it produce the opposite effect, turning the grain (or perhaps digital noise) of the source image into a maze of interlocking markings» (Cook [2019]). The shift from «grain» to «interlocking» indicates the way a 3-dimensional textile surface complicates a 2-dimensional photograph, and suggests that, in doing so, it evokes tactile interactivity. Interlocking markings are more intimate because, like interlocking hands, something is touching something else. The weave evokes touch even as it elicits the desire to touch it, as Margaret Boden argues in her discussion of enactive aesthetics. Boden distinguishes craft works from art works based on their power to inspire bodily action. «Fine textiles, from silken gossamers to rough-woven hessians, prompt one to feel their texture against one's skin, and to drape them over our bodies or furniture. A well-crafted teddy-bear naturally cries out to be hugged. And a well-made cup or goblet naturally invites one not only to touch its surface but to pick it up and hold it in an attitude fit for drinking» (Boden [2000]: 294). Boden's claim that objects cry out to be touched echoes Merleau-Ponty's description of the body's movement among material objects: «To move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to

allow oneself to respond to their call» ([1945]: 161). Such enactive responses, Boden argues, are distinct from the «indicative» responses we have to works of art, which inspire visual appreciation and intellectual engagement, offering «information about the real or imagined state of the world» (Boden [2000]: 291). Enactive responses impel us to stroke, lift, lie on and hug; they rouse a latent impulse to intimacy with the physical world. In the case of well-crafted teddy bears, or childhood photographs, such intimacy is affectionately nostalgic. In works like «Point of Touch --Bathsheba», in which the textile being touched itself portrays intimate touching, the enactive impulse becomes implicitly transgressive. In both cases, the work establishes a material bridge between the hand of the artist who creates the work and that of the gallery visitor who reaches out to stroke it, the cup owner who lifts and drinks from it, the teddy bear snuggler who wraps herself around it as she sleeps.

## 2. THE WEAVER'S CURSE

When looking for literary archetypes of weaving, Penelope and Procne come immediately to mind. But unlike these amateur weavers whose tapestries serve a communicative or political function, Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*, and even more explicitly the Pre-Raphaelite adaptations of his character, is a craftswoman, marked by her work ethic and artisanal innovation. Tennyson's 1832 poem «The Lady of Shalott» (which was revised in 1842) recasts Elaine of Astolat, the sweet, impressionable, and doomed young woman of Arthurian legend, as an industrious, mature, and independent craft laborer. An expert and devoted weaver, the Lady (she is never called Elaine), is steadily employed in the creation of a tapestry: « There she weaves by night and day/ A magic web with colours gay» (Tennyson [1842]: ll. 37-38) . The weaving represents the world outside her window, which she can only see through a mirror; if she ever looks at the world directly she will be cursed. When Lancelot rides by she does look, with disastrous results:

*She left the web, she left the loom  
 She made three paces thro' the room  
 She saw the water-flower bloom,  
 She saw the helmet and the plume,  
 She look'd down to Camelot.  
 Out flew the web and floated wide;  
 The mirror crack'd from side to side;  
 'The curse is come upon me,' cried  
 The Lady of Shalott. ([1842]:ll. 109-117)*

The rest of the poem follows the Lady as she leaves the tower, floats down the river to Camelot, and dies singing her own dirge.

The Lady's craftwork and her tragic fate are intimately related. She declares that the "curse has come upon me" at the moment when her tapestry erupts from its frame and her mirror cracks – that is, when the artifact she has produced and a central element of its production are destroyed. Yet, the precise events resulting from the curse, especially in relation to the Lady's tapestry, are unclear. Clearly something has gone awry with the Lady's tapestry, but Tennyson's phrasing is at once murky and absurd. «Out flew the web», presumably of the frame, but the verb «flew» seems comically dynamic, and raises the possibility that it flew out the window. Suddenly its dramatic flight is arrested, and it «floated wide» which could mean that it unravels and spreads its threads widely, or that it remains intact but travels widely, like a magic carpet. While the term «web» encourages us to picture unravelling, the tapestry can hardly spread itself «wide» in the Lady's enclosed apartment, so perhaps it flies out the window, and proceeds to drop yarn across the nearby fields of barley and rye. Tennyson's phrase effectively suggests the violent disruption of the Lady's weaving, but it doesn't help us answer crucial questions about what the curse entails, or the fate of the Lady's laboriously created handiwork. The Lady's departure from the tower, journey by boat to Camelot, and death, may be part of the curse, but they may also be willful acts on her part.

«The Lady of Shalott» became something of a preoccupation of Pre-Raphaelite painters 60 years after its publication. William Holman Hunt spent 19 years on his version, which was finally com-

pleted by Arthur Hughes in 1905. John William Waterhouse painted three interpretations: *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Lady of Shalott Looking at Lancelot*, and *I Am Half Sick of Shadows said the Lady of Shalott* in 1888, 1894 and 1911 respectively. The processes and materials of craft labor were of central interest to the Pre-Raphaelites, whose artistic practice emerged directly from John Ruskin's writings and were heavily influenced by William Morris. William Holman Hunt's *The Shadow of Death* (1873) and John Everett Millais' *Christ in the House of his Parents* (185) offer minute depictions of the workspace and techniques of ancient Israeli carpentry. Millais chose an actual carpenter as a model for Joseph so that his muscles would reflect his craft's impact on his body (Codell [1986]: 258). Hunt, who had travelled to Jerusalem for greater accuracy, offers a taxonomic display of historically correct tools, and both artists seem to have a particular affection for lovingly-rendered curly wood-shavings. In his description of his work on *The Shadow of Death*, Hunt includes an anecdote about a local craftsman coming into his studio. «He was mason, dusty and splashed with lime-wash» who wished to touch the painted surface of *The Shadow of Death* «to feel what is the difference between the linen and the flesh, the sky and the shavings; we have seen it with our eyes, and we want to feel it with our hands» (Holman Hunt [1905]: 306). The anecdote establishes a direct link between old-world craftsmanship and the tactile, embodied apprehension of the artwork. While the laborer is comically naïve about paintings (he insists Hunt turn the canvas around so he can see Jesus' back) he has a kind of wisdom of the hands that associates him with Jesus the carpenter in Hunt's painting and with Hunt himself.

Placing Hunt's *The Shadow of Death* beside his *The Lady of Shalott* makes it apparent the degree to which both works are as much about the tools, processes, and raw materials of craftsmanship as they are about their sacred or poetic source material. In particular, Hunt is interested in the entwining of the worker's body with the materials of his labor. Christ's feet are awash in wood shav-

ings; his thigh presses against a saw horse; he has stopped sawing a board to stand and stretch his sore muscles. The painting's theological symbolism emerges from the shadow of Christ's head and arms which, as he stretches, form a crucifix on the back wall. The carpenters' tools, which hang on the wall where the shadow of his hands falls, evoke the nails that will pierce those hands. In Millais' *Christ in the House of his Parents*, the boy Jesus stands in front of his parents' work table holding up his hand to show the splinter that has pierced his palm. Such a scrape is not surprising, given the number of nails, sharp tools, and rough scraps of wood scattered about, and no one seems too upset about it. Both works suggest the proximity of crucifixion and carpentry, and the vulnerability of the carpenter's body in both forms of woodworking. Carol Jacobi compares *The Shadow of Death* to a cartoonish self-portrait drawn by Hunt in a letter to Edward Lear, in which he portrays himself juggling knives. «The tools surrounding Christ in the painting itself, types of the instruments of his torture at the hands of man, echo the early self-portrait, the knives and tools which Hunt associates with his own vulnerability to "the power of the world"» (Jacobi [2002]: 609). For Hunt, the craftsman's body is always implicitly at risk from his own tools.

Hunt's painting of *The Lady of Shalott* also shows the craft worker's body entwined with and imperiled by her workspace. Her tapestry is stretched on a horizontal loom consisting of a circular metal hoop parallel to the floor and supported by decorative pillars. She works by walking inside the loom, her hands weaving the weft as she steps in and out of the warp's strands, her body moving in circles between its woven and unwoven sections. Linda Parry has discussed Hunt's extensive interest in textiles, and his early employment at a textile manufacturing company (Parry [2008]: 59), which makes his elaborately ungainly portrayal of the Lady's weaving process all the more striking. Thomas L. Jeffers notes the impracticality of Hunt's rendering: «within an embroidery frame no more than a foot above the floor, and, with no place to sit, she must have

been painfully on her way to scoliosis. Inside the frame, moreover, Hunt's Lady could never make the called-for three paces across the room» (Jeffers [2002]: 248).

Hunt has captured the moment when the curse falls and the tapestry begins to unwind. It is the Lady's hair that flies up and floats wide, not the web as in Tennyson's poem, forming a grand circle of heavy, lustrous, interwoven strands around her head that mirrors the circular tapestry. The yarn has begun to entangle her, wrapping in graceful arcs around her body, so that the fabrics of her skirt and bodice seem contiguous with the textiles near her feet. Her right arm is bowed gracefully, like a cellist's, and her right hand is caught by a thread so that her fingers fan upward. But her left arm is twisted uncomfortably backward, twisted by the thread into a painful and ungainly position. Her body thus offers the combined beauty and struggle of full engagement with her artwork. Tennyson was dissatisfied with the fact that Hunt's version placed so much emphasis on the interweaving of the Lady's body and tapestry. In *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905) Hunt describes Tennyson's irritation that the Lady's hair is «wildly tossed about as if by a tornado» and that the web winds «round and round her like the threads of a cocoon» (Holman Hunt [1905]: 124-125).

Waterhouse's second painting, *The Lady of Shalott Looking at Lancelot*, also shows the Lady wrapped up by the tapestry's yarn. A thick band of threads wraps tightly around her knees; she leans at an ungainly angle, apparently losing her balance, with the complex folds of her dress binding her further. Thomas L. Jeffers describes the Lady's vivid embodiment as a sign of her sexual agency: we see «a woman who could conceivably run a studio *and* have a man; who could find satisfaction in work *and* in love» (Jeffers [2002]: 248). I would suggest, by contrast, that the Lady's body is so directly engaged with the materials of the studio she is running, and the tapestry she is creating, that its sexual power seems of far less interest to the Pre-Raphaelite painters than its creative power in the studio space. As in *The Shadow*

*of Death*, the Lady's workshop in Hunt's painting presents an exhaustive, and visually exhausting, array of craft materials interspersed with personal items: balls of yarn, spindles, a vase of flowers, the Lady's discarded pattens (she weaves barefoot). An elaborate and monolithically large silver samovar sits within the ring of the loom, which would seem to block the Lady's ability to weave easily, but perhaps, like many artists, she needs her tea. Hunt's and Waterhouse's painting suggest that Pre-Raphaelites interpreted the Lady's «curse» as the fulfillment of the creator's bodily engagement with the tapestry, when woman and textile become indistinguishable. The creator's body in the midst of its artistic process is subsumed into the materials of creation. When the tapestry flies "out" and floats "wide" it is becoming enwrapped with the physical world it represents, and in doing so it takes the weaver's body, which is already entwined with her craft, along with it.

Such a reading of the curse would help explain a puzzling aspect of Tennyson's portrayal of *The Lady*. The poem emphasizes the consistency of the Lady's labor at her loom, and her lack of anxiety about the curse hanging over her.

*There she weaves by night and day  
A magic web with colours gay.  
She has heard a whisper say,  
A curse is on her if she stay  
To look down to Camelot.  
She knows not what the curse may be,  
And so she weaveth steadily,  
And little other care hath she,  
The Lady of Shalott. ([1842]:ll. 37-45)*

Erik Gray contrasts the Lady with fairytale heroines like *Sleeping Beauty* whose curses «are not brought on consciously or deliberately» ([2009]: 45). Where *Sleeping Beauty* accidentally pricks her finger, the Lady «by contrast, is aware of the curse that hangs over her, and brings it upon herself with a series of decisive actions» ([2009]: 45). Yet the Lady's awareness is missing one crucial element: while she clearly has heard that she is cursed, and knows the mechanism of the curse's activation, Tennyson makes it clear that

she «knows not what the curse may be». Something bad will certainly happen to her if she looks down to Camelot, but she cannot say what. Lines 43 and 44 both begin with «And», suggesting that, in the Lady's mind, the reasonable response to having an unspecified curse hanging over one's head is to continue working «steadily» and without great anxiety. She does not seem to be curious or angry about the curse, and has «little other care». The Lady thus differs from Pandora-like fairytale heroines of *Bluebeard* or *Beauty and the Beast* who can't resist pushing their luck to find out the secret being withheld from them. She also differs from those Gray mentions who are simply unaware of the sinister magical system in which they are ensnared. It is this combination of unflappable industry and mild-tempered contentment that seems to characterize most of the Lady's life in the tower.

The Lady's lack of interest suggests that she views the curse not as a magical punishment so much as an inevitable part of life. While the term curse may suggest a specific magical contract imposed by a god or a witch – open this box and evil will be released – it also evokes a cyclic travail that recurs every month, year, or lifetime. God's curse on humanity of menstrual pain and difficult agricultural labor is an example. The Lady seems to expect that she will someday be forced out of the tower, her body sent out into the world, and the steady recursive character of her weaving enacts that understanding. Merleau-Ponty also expresses the inevitability of this exchange between body and world through a metaphor of weaving: "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts" ([1945]: 101).

There is an eerie similarity between Hunt's painting and the image of Lia Cook in her studio that she has placed on her website. Cook stands at her jacquard loom, her hands on the tapestry. Fibers are everywhere. In the foreground is a table laden with brightly-colored spools of yarn; bundles of wires indicating the loom's digital technol-

ogy sprout from its top, while chords for hanging tapestries from the studio's ceiling vault up the walls. The entire top half of the photograph is occupied by *Neurothread Head* (2017), a cotton and rayon tapestry showing Cook's face overlaid by twining multicolored threads. Like the paintings of the Lady, the image emphasizes the interpenetration of textile and textile artist. Cook's recent work incorporates neurological mapping patterns into her textiles, so the threads are both wrapping her from without, and expressing the tangle of neurological fibers that control her hands and creative mind. The photograph intensifies the embodied portrayal of the artist in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, showing her body entwined with her artwork from within and without.

### 3. THE DIGITAL WEB

How is Cook's innovative use of digital technology consistent with her attention to the reflexive physicality of craft work? I would like to suggest that Cook's rematerializing of photographs, and her physical engagement with the digitally programmed jacquard loom, update a Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic principle concerning the materiality of representation. In Pre-Raphaelite art, the Christian symbolic mode of typology is incorporated into artistic meaning; Hunt's representation of Christ's shadow in *The Shadow of Death* is one example. Christ's position in the carpentry shop, adjacent to and in physical contact with his tools and materials, allows for a symbolic elision over temporal and spiritual realms between his physical/aesthetic labor and his physical/spiritual self-sacrifice. The crucifixion reaches out and touches the carpentry tools through his stretched arms. Both hand touching tool and hand touching cross have a sacramental structure. Hunt's interest in typological art was sparked by Ruskin who, in *Modern Painters*, also chooses a carpenter's tool to illustrate its operation. Discussing Tintoretto's *Annunciation*, Ruskin points to «a narrow line of light, the edge of a carpenter's square, which connects these unused tools with an object at the top of the brickwork, a white stone,

four square, the corner-stone of the old edifice, the base of its supporting column. This, I think, sufficiently explains the typical character of the whole» (Ruskin [1891]: 175).

Howard Risatti's analysis of the distinction between tools and craft objects is worth addressing in relation to Holman Hunt's portrayal of antique carpenter's tools. Risatti argues that tools can be identified by their management of kinetic energy from the worker's body, while craft objects are «self-reliant» or «self-contained» serving to support the body rather than transfer energy from it (Risatti [2007]: 57). «So, unlike tools which are always concerned with using and directing energy in motion in order to make things, craft objects are typically concerned with preservation and stasis» (Risatti [2007]: 57). Even «old tools that are no longer necessary» for creating things, and are not, in fact, channeling the body's energy, can be identified as having once done so, and are therefore not craft objects (Risatti [2007]: 25). I would suggest, however, that Holman's Hunt sacramental portrayal of the tools makes the hand touching them as symbolic as it is kinetic, and thus a static container of meaning to the same degree as it is a kinetic object. The tools on the wall are part of a typological system in which Christ's body is preserved through material symbols. This is intensified by the viewer's awareness that they are antique tools. Larry Shiner distinguishes between a craft «carving made for a specific ritual use» and those «isolated in the art museum case» which have entered «a new system of meanings» to become «only art» (Shiner [2001 ]:272-273). Hunt's aesthetic works in opposition to Shiner's distinction, as the tools are at once vividly rendered reminders of the craft process and ritual objects represented on the highly «crafted» Pre-Raphaelite canvas (O'Neill [2015 ]: 18).

Holman's Hunt's portrayal of carpentry tools in *The Shadow of Death* thus foregrounds his interest in rendering the materials of the craft process as craft objects themselves. In Hunt's *The Lady of Shalott*, the loom is unquestionably a craft object, as is the samovar, as are the rug on the floor and the decorations on the walls. The tools and stu-

dio environment of the craft worker is composed entirely of craft objects; everything meets William Morris' standard of being both beautiful and useful. Morna O'Neill argues that the motion between thing and object in Pre-Raphaelite painting parallels that between type and material form.

*[T]he painted object is always a thing, since its status as representation means that it is unintelligible as an object. [...] Morris praises the "things" in Pre-Raphaelite painting ("here are such and such things") in a way that suggests he would be familiar with this paradox: the viewer recognizes the specific qualities of a quotidian object—its shape, colour, surface—only through its representation in painting. (O'Neill [2015 ]: 14)*

The carpenter's or weaver's tools, which allow for the functional engagement of their hands with wood or yarn, move from functional object to craft object and back through the viewer's apprehension of them in the painting.

A similar process is at work in Lia Cook's use of digital tools and artifacts. This impulse can be seen in Cook's early *New Master* works, in which the painted cloth in the Old Masters paintings is returned to its object status as woven cloth. In her work with photographs, Cook renders dots or pixels into the material presence of textile's weave. As Janet Koplos notes, the « threads make systems of plusses and minuses or dots and dashes» (Koplos [2015]) so that the binary digital units of information become tactile. By reinstating the material presence of photographs, and reminding us of the artist's body's presence in the artwork, Cook updates this Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic for the digital age. Judith Leeman describes the experience of viewing Cook's photographic weavings as one of re-embodiment: «The material has body; the image is re-embodied» (Leeman [2007]: 334).

This re-embodiment process is enacted through the digital programming of the jacquard loom. Jacquard looms were the technological ancestor of computers, through their card-punch programming system, and they can be associated with the historical moment when, in Campbell's terms, the craft worker's body ceased to control the machine.

Cook's hybrid use of hand and digital weaving both interrogates and celebrates the craft worker's bodily engagement with technology. Lacey Jane Roberts addresses the productive dualism of Cook's aesthetic in her discussion of Queer Theory and craft work.

*Although the jacquard pulses with digital savvy, Cook must integrate the warp and the weft by hand. Weaving requires the constant, repetitive physical motion of the maker, and while the Jacquard is a high-tech, air-compressed beast, it is no exception. The conflation of cutting-edge technology with the tedious handwork that is required of Cook is simultaneously typical and atypical of craft. (Roberts [2011]: 188)*

While Cook's body cannot be said to be fully in control of the jacquard loom, the machine's motions shadow her body's «tedious handwork». Cook's labor in her workshop in combination with the loom's programmed activity enacts a blending of identities between artist and machine which is interactive without being alienating. Cook's work allows the interaction of her hand and the machine in a way that evokes the inescapable engagement of our modern bodies with digital technology, even as the artworks she produces from the process reclaim the sensuous material presence of enacted apprehension.

In her description of her current work weaving textiles based on neural mapping, Lia Cook emphasizes multidirectional exchange between artist, subject, craft, and scientist across neurological pathways.

*Working in collaboration with neuroscientists, I am investigating the nature of the emotional response to woven faces by mapping these responses in the brain. I draw on the laboratory experience both with process and tools to stimulate new work in reaction to these investigations. I am interested in both the scientific study as well as my artistic response to these unexpected sources, exploring the territory between in several different ways. (Cook [2019])*

Cook uses the word «response» to describe the emotions of scientific test participants, the neuro-

logical activity in their brains, and her own artistic undertaking inspired by monitoring that activity. Her art is a «reaction» that is «stimulate[d]» by watching the subjects react neurologically to stimulation. The process begins with subjects looking at weavings of faces, and ends with weavings of the neurological patterns occurring behind the subjects' faces. As Leeman says of Cook's work with photographs, «Doublings abound. Recursive circles loop and repeat» (Leeman [2007]: 336). Cook's re-embodiment aesthetic is intensified here, as she is re-embodiment processes that are already bodily, though we tend not to imagine them this way. «In my work I have used DSI (Diffusion Spectrum Imaging of the brain) [...] to look at the structural neuronal connections between parts of the brain, and integrate these "fiber tracks" with the actual fiber connections that make up the woven translation of an image» (Cook [2019]). The metaphorical «fiber tracks» of neurons become «actual fiber» in the tapestry, which reminds us that neuronal connections were already actual, material phenomena occurring in the brain. It should be no surprise, then, that *Neurothread Head*, which re-embodies the artistic self-portrait from the inside out, hangs above her loom.

#### CONCLUSION: THE TERRITORY BETWEEN

Cook identifies the location of her work spatially, in «the territory between» scientific study and artistic response. Such a spatialized aesthetic is consistent with the way embodiment is deployed in her work, and in critical responses to it. Janet Koplos makes the rather extravagant claim that Cook's large-format weavings «read most clearly from a considerable distance—across the room or even across the street!» (Koplos [2015]). Such a topographical placement of the viewer returns us to our initial discussion of the distinction between art and craft being based on the consumer's bodily relationship to the object. As we have seen, Cook's work, like Tennyson's poem and the Pre-Raphaelite renderings of it,

reminds us of the perils and pleasures of the craft worker's bodily engagement with her creations. If, as Boden suggests, a successful craftwork is enactive, reaching out to the viewer and inspiring the viewer to reach out to it, then craft involves a triangular entwining of bodies and artworks. Gail Kenning argues that digital culture allows a similar exchange between a community of craft workers: «as information about craft activities is shared and exchanged online by participants, processes, practices, information and memes flow through digital networks and social media sites, creating the potential for greater collaborative and participatory creative practice» (Kenning [2015]: 455). In Tennyson's words, the web of a craftwork flies out and floats wide, existing around, upon, and within the bodies that accompany it.

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**Citation:** A. Mecacci (2020) Ontologia del giocattolo. Il *Bauspiel* di Alma Siedhoff-Buscher. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 17-30. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11565

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Ontologia del giocattolo. Il *Bauspiel* di Alma Siedhoff-Buscher

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**Abstract.** *Bauspiel: ein Schiff* by Alma Siedhoff-Buscher is one of the most important toys of the twentieth century, designed and built in 1923 when the designer was part of the Bauhaus Woodcarving Workshop. Having become an icon of an entire era, a symbol of a design utopia, Siedhoff-Buscher's *Bauspiel* remains an object that makes us wonder not only for the fascination it emanates, its perennial aesthetic relevance that still legitimates its production and marketing up until nowadays, but for the strength of its evidencing and its ability to force us questioning ourselves about who a child is (how he sees the world, how he relates to reality, how he transforms this same reality), and therefore, obviously about who the man is. *Mimesis*, game, toy thus become the dimensions that *Bauspiel* manifests to the highest degree, in which anthropological questioning and aesthetic analysis are intertwined in the same research.

**Keywords.** Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, Bauhaus, toys, mimesis, play.

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...il vascello fatato che allora ci rapiva...  
Benjamin, *Infanzia berlinese*

«Non vuole essere niente – nè cubismo, nè espressionismo, solo un gioco di colori divertente fatto di forme lisce e spigolose secondo il principio dei vecchi giochi di costruzione» (Siebenbrodt [2004]: 29)<sup>1</sup>. È con questa laconica nota che Alma Siedhoff-Buscher descrisse uno dei giocattoli più importanti del Novecento, il gioco che progettò e realizzò nel 1923 quando faceva parte del Laboratorio di Scultura in legno del Bauhaus: *Bauspiel: Ein Schiff*. Divenuto icona di un'intera epoca, simbolo di un'utopia progettuale ed umana naufragata nella tragedia (il nazismo certo, ma anche l'epilogo della stessa progettista, morta il 25 settembre del 1944 nei sobborghi di Francoforte durante un bombardamento dell'aviazione americana), il *Bauspiel* di Siedhoff-Buscher rimane un oggetto che ci interro-

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<sup>1</sup> Ringrazio Marina Montanelli per alcuni suggerimenti terminologici decisivi.



Kleines Schiffbauspiel, Bauhaus-Museum, Weimar



Bauspiel: Ein Schiff, proprietà di Joost Siedhoff, foto di Roman März

ga non solo per la fascinazione che emana, la sua perenne attualità estetica che ne legittima ancora oggi la messa in produzione e commercializzazione, ma per la sua forza di testimonianza e la sua capacità di costringerci a interrogarci su chi sia un bambino (come vede il mondo, come si relaziona alla realtà, come trasforma questa stessa realtà), e quindi, ovviamente su chi sia l'uomo. Il *Bauspiel* è un monito imperituro a quella *mimesis* del possibile che l'uomo coglie per la prima volta in quegli oggetti specifici rubricati sotto la dicitura un po' frettolosa e sminuente di "giocattoli". *Mimesis*, gioco, giocattolo diventano allora le dimensioni che il *Bauspiel* manifesta al massimo grado, in cui interrogazione antropologica e analisi estetica si intrecciano nella stessa ricerca.

## 1. UN'ESTETICA LUDICA

Il *Bauspiel* non è un'immediata traduzione dei principi del Bauhaus come potrebbe sembrare a prima vista. Gli anni trascorsi dalla progettista presso il Bauhaus, dal 1922 al 1927, indicano alcuni lati oscuri che la mitografia bauhausiana tende a rimuovere (Baumhoff 2001, 2008; Vadiello 2016). Entrata nella scuola nel 1922, Siedhoff-Buscher frequenta il *Vorkurs* di Johannes Itten – e non è improbabile che rimanga impressionata dalle lezioni che la musicista Gertrud Gernow

impartiva all'interno del modulo propedeutico di Itten – e i corsi di pittura di Klee e Kandinsky. Nell'ottobre dello stesso anno, come accadeva agli allievi di sesso femminile, è iscritta al Laboratorio tessile diretto da Georg Muche e Helene Börner. La scarsa disposizione alla tessitura e alcune critiche di Muche inducono Siedhoff-Buscher a chiedere a Gropius di cambiare laboratorio. Gropius acconsente e la sposta al Laboratorio di Scultura in legno sotto la direzione di Josef Hartwig. Ed è come membro di questo laboratorio che Siedhoff-Buscher partecipa in modo determinante alla mostra del Bauhaus del 1923, la cosiddetta *Haus am Horn*: la casa modello dell'intera filosofia Bauhaus allestita sotto la direzione di Muche. Incaricata dell'allestimento della stanza dei bambini, Siedhoff-Buscher progetta oltre al mobiliario anche un piccolo accessorio, un giocattolo, che in miniatura riprendeva l'intera idea formale e funzionale della stanza. Nasce così *Bauspiel: Ein Schiff*.

Gli oggetti di Siedhoff-Buscher furono i primi prodotti del Bauhaus a riscuotere un certo riscontro commerciale, ma alla progettista fu sempre negato il passaggio allo status di insegnante. Il rifiuto definitivo di Gropius, che si rivelò sempre diffidente verso la produzione della *designer*, di concedere a Siedhoff-Buscher la direzione di un laboratorio segnò il suo congedo dal Bauhaus. Emblematici di questa condizione problematica i giudizi contrapposti che furono espressi da Moholy-Nagy e Gropius. Il primo, riferendosi alla

stanza dei bambini della *Haus am Horn*, dichiarò in un suo intervento dell'anno successivo alla mostra, che «nel giocattolo e nell'armadio dei giocattoli si esprimono chiaramente i principi pedagogici del Bauhaus: autoaffermazione creativa come fondamento dell'espressione vitale elementare» (Moholy-Nagy [1924]: 323). Al contrario Gropius, in una lettera del 27 settembre del 1927, nella quale esplicitava il diniego di concedere a Siedhoff-Buscher il laboratorio, affermò senza troppo giri di parole: «il destino della sua attività, e lo è da anni, è di rimanere alla periferia dell'intera struttura interna e quindi ha sempre dovuto essere messo all'ultimo posto» (Baumhoff [2008]: 77).

La produzione di Siedhoff-Buscher negli anni della sua appartenenza al Bauhaus trova un proprio sostegno teorico in tre brevi contributi in cui si esplicita con nettezza l'estetica dell'infanzia proposta dalla *designer*: *Kind. Märchen. Spiel. Spielzeug* (Siedhoff-Buscher 1925); *Kindermöbel und Kinderkleidung* (Siedhoff-Buscher 1926) e *Freie Spiele – Lehrspiele* (Siedhoff-Buscher 1927). Riflettendo sul proprio lavoro, e facendolo pubblicamente, Siedhoff-Buscher offre probabilmente quella che rimane l'elaborazione teorica più importante che il Bauhaus abbia mai formulato rispetto all'universo infantile. Emergono alcuni nodi decisivi: il rifiuto di una idea fiabesca dell'infanzia e l'adesione a una concezione percettivo-immaginativa delle potenzialità del bambino, la tematizzazione del gioco libero in contrasto col gioco didattico, la conseguente rivisitazione critica degli esiti della pedagogia moderna (da Friedrich Fröbel a Maria Montessori), la traduzione pratica di questa concezione nella forma operativa del giocattolo come oggetto del possibile e non come oggetto mimetico.

Per arrivare a comprendere cosa sia veramente il *Bauspiel* occorre partire dalla stanza dei bambini di *Haus am Horn*. Erede etorodossa del *Kindergarten* di Fröbel e della «casa dei bambini» di Montessori, questa stanza bandisce di fatto l'intervento dell'adulto. Nessun fine pedagogico, anche implicito, è consentito tranne quello di avviare il bambino a un suo percorso di totale autonomia. La stanza di Siedhoff-Buscher non è un luogo che in miniatura riproduce lo spazio degli adul-



Kinderzimmer (Haus am Horn), Bauhaus-Archiv

ti, un luogo mimetico disseminato di oggetti che rimandano alla futura vita adulta (come nel caso della casa del bambino montessoriana). La stanza, visibile sia dalla cucina sia dalla sala da pranzo e quindi sempre controllabile dagli adulti per assicurare la sicurezza dei bambini, ha le seguenti caratteristiche: «le pareti sono rivestite da lastre di legno in vari colori (utilizzabili come lavagne per scrivervi o disegnarvi). Cassette multicolori possono fungere da sedie, tavolini o cubi da costruzione. L'elemento dell'armadio dei giocattoli [...] è utilizzabile anche come teatro dei burattini» (Wingler [1962]: 379)<sup>2</sup>. La stanza è quindi uno spazio perennemente costruibile in cui soprattutto i cubi grazie alla loro modularità si aprono a una polifunzionalità potenzialmente infinita. A registrare questa esclusività dello spazio infantile è ciò che Siedhoff-Buscher indica col termine di *Phantasie* da considerarsi nella sua accezione kantiana di immaginazione produttiva<sup>3</sup> come esplicita del

<sup>2</sup> Per una dettagliata analisi dei mobili di Siedhoff-Buscher cfr. Boyaki (2010, 113-123).

<sup>3</sup> Non entriamo qui nel merito della complessa distinzione tra fantasia e immaginazione che a partire dal Settecento troverà riformulazioni non solo teoriche (Kant: *Phantasie/Einbildungskraft*; Coleridge: *Fancy/Imagination*), ma anche pedagogiche come in Montessori che riprende i due termini differenziandoli con nettezza o progettuali come nel caso di Munari che a fantasia, però, non contrappone l'immaginazione, ma la creatività.

resto il titolo del terzo saggio della progettista, *Freie Spiele – Lehrspiele*, in cui l'opposizione tra gioco libero e gioco didattico rinvia al libero gioco delle facoltà della terza critica kantiana. La stanza del bambino, e parallelamente il *Bauspiel*, rendono visibile questo libero gioco in cui l'autonomia dell'immaginazione che si attiva nella pratica del giocare si oppone a un'immaginazione eterodiretta che Siedhoff-Buscher identifica con la fiaba. Ed è in questa assimilazione che Siedhoff-Buscher si rivela totalmente fedele alla filosofia antiromantica del funzionalismo tedesco.

*I bambini, se possibile, dovrebbero avere una stanza dove possono essere ciò che vogliono, dove sono a loro a decidere. Tutto appartiene a loro, ed è la loro fantasia che modella ogni cosa, nessuna inibizione esterna li disturba – l'esortazione "lascialo stare". Tutto si adatta a loro, la forma in base alle loro dimensioni, lo scopo pratico non impedisce le possibilità di gioco* (Siedhoff-Buscher [1926]: 156).

*Bambino e favola = confuse concatenazioni di idee. Bambino e fantasia = naturale abbondanza di pensiero* (Siedhoff-Buscher [1925]: 189).

Il rifiuto della favola è un punto decisivo. La «semplicità e la chiarezza» del giocattolo doveva emancipare il bambino dalla fiaba, «un fardello inutile per un cervello piccolo [quello del bambino]» (189). La fiaba è interpretata come un elemento estrinseco alla capacità cognitive del bambino, un'imposizione artificiosa sullo sviluppo naturale del pensiero. La fiaba inoltre, implicitamente o espressamente, veicola contenuti morali, è il modo in cui l'universo dell'adulto inizia a modellare quello del bambino. Come la fiaba è una dimensione esterna alla natura del bambino così la decorazione è una dimensione esterna alla natura dell'oggetto. È in questo parallelismo che Siedhoff-Buscher si allinea al rifiuto funzionalista dell'ideologia romantica (il «falso Romanticismo», come già Gropius aveva denunciato nel 1910 sulla scia delle critiche antiromantiche espresse dal Deutscher Werkbund) o, meglio, della riformulazione che l'Ottocento borghese fece di questa eredità. La fiaba rappresenta un mondo già chiu-



Schiffbauspiel, Naef Spiele AG

so allo stesso modo in cui il giocattolo borghese rappresenta un oggetto finito. Sono ambedue espressioni che annullano ogni esercizio del possibile, ossia dell'immaginazione. La fiaba confonde il bambino come la decorazione confonde il soggetto che deve usare un oggetto: vi è nella fiaba e nella decorazione un eccesso di informazione che svia, disorienta. Il *Bauspiel* è l'oggetto che, al contrario, consente al bambino di trovare la propria via, una pratica capace di far sì che il bambino definisca, per usare una formula di Hölderlin, un «mondo nel mondo», il suo. Non un mondo già raccontato, ma un mondo sempre da raccontare. Un'idea che, come vedremo, permette di affiancare il *Bauspiel* all'idea di *mimesis* e gioco elaborata da Benjamin in quegli stessi anni<sup>4</sup>.

Il *Bauspiel* (Boyaki [2010]: 128-132) fu realizzato in due versioni: una grande (39 pezzi) e una più piccola (22 pezzi). I pezzi componibili furono colorati in cinque colori: ai colori primari (il rosso, il blu, il giallo) furono aggiunti il verde e il bianco. Le forme proposte da Siedhoff-Buscher avevano infinite opzioni di costruzione. Tuttavia nel momento della commercializzazione del giocattolo fu chiesto alla progettista di inserire delle istruzioni, anche sommarie, per l'acquirente. Le indicazioni furono apposte direttamente sulla confezione di legno con delle illustrazioni: «Una nave che può anche essere una montagna russa, una porta, un animale e tante altre cose». La nave quindi era solo una possibilità del gioco che negava l'idea di «giocattolo finito» e si apriva alla

<sup>4</sup> Di questa vicinanza tra Siedhoff-Buscher e Benjamin dà conto velocemente Christine Mehring (2009).

dimensione del «libero gioco» in cui a dar forma al giocattolo era l'idea momentanea del gioco scelto dal bambino. Il *Bauspiel* diventa in questo senso la perfetta traduzione dell'immaginazione, la costruzione del possibile, *Einbildungskraft*. Se infatti un giocattolo che rappresenta una nave rimane sempre una nave (il giocattolo mimetico o «finito» nella terminologia di Siedhoff-Buscher) e può essere altro se non a costo di un enorme sforzo immaginativo da parte del bambino, il *Bauspiel* è una nave ma, contemporaneamente, anche «tante altre cose». Si rivela in questa *mimesis* del possibile ciò che fino ad allora era stato assegnato solo all'arte: la capacità di esprimere l'infinito nel finito. Ed anche in questo rifiuto dell'esclusività dell'arte – si pensi soltanto alla definizione schellingiana di bellezza (l'infinito che entra nel finito, ossia l'Assoluto che si esprime nell'opera d'arte)<sup>5</sup> – che Siedhoff-Buscher si conferma estranea alla tradizione romantico-idealistica. Il possibile di cui il bambino fa esperienza nel *Bauspiel* appare più prossimo a quanto annotò Baudelaire: «l'infinito nel finito» null'altro è che «l'aspetto stupefacente delle cose» (Baudelaire [1859]: 1218). Una frase che, sebbene letteralmente prossima a quella di Schelling, appare, però, già aprirsi a quella dimensione fantasmagorica del quotidiano che non solo l'arte ormai può più registrare o esprimere. Il giocattolo rappresenta questa possibilità dell'infinito di modularsi nell'immaginazione del bambino. Sembra in questa prospettiva che Siedhoff-Buscher tenda ad assegnare al giocattolo (*Spielzeug*) stesso quella capacità immaginativa che di solito è invece attribuita solo al gioco (*Spiel*) in senso lato.

*Giocattolo: non si dovrebbe venire incontro al bambino? Non è possibile che nel giocattolo – strumento del bambino – ci sia già un elemento serio? Non un giocattolo finito – come lo offrono i negozi di lusso – il bambino sviluppa, anzi ricerca – tenta. Un giocattolo apparentemente finito, in questa ricerca piena di ten-*

*tativi, può diventare soltanto un giocattolo distrutto* (Siedhoff-Buscher [1926]: 157).

Questa definizione di giocattolo, formulata in modo un po' involuto a dire il vero, mostra, oltre all'esplicito rifiuto del giocattolo commerciale, un'ambiguità che va chiarita. L'insistenza sullo sforzo, la ricerca, i tentativi che il bambino esperisce nel giocattolo non sono da leggere negativamente. La ricerca del bambino si esprime nel piacere. Non vi è alcuna imposizione didattica. I tentativi del bambini sono espressione del piacere e non percorsi didattici. È in questa differenza che l'ovvio parallelismo tra il *Bauspiel* e le *Aufgaben*, i «doni», di Fröbel rivela i suoi limiti. I doni di Fröbel erano eterodiretti: definivano dei percorsi già tracciati che il bambino doveva seguire attestando uno sviluppo cognitivo. Il gioco era in realtà un processo d'apprendimento delle forme, dei colori e dei corpi. Descritta dalla stessa progettista come filiazione del tutto casuale – «Il fatto che ci siano dei parallelismi tra alcuni dei miei giochi e quelli di Fröbel è una coincidenza» (Siedhoff-Buscher [1927]: 464) – l'eredità di Fröbel è piuttosto accolta come polo oppositivo alla propria concezione ludica. L'educazione morale è il fine dei giochi di Fröbel, che hanno pertanto un impianto dichiaratamente pedagogico, al contrario il piacere è il fine dei giochi di Siedhoff-Buscher che trovano il loro motivo di essere quasi esclusivamente nell'esercizio immaginativo. Sono giochi nati «dalla gioia di creare in generale, dalle belle forme colorate e dalla conoscenza dei desideri che ho notato e sentito nei bambini» (*ibidem*). Inoltre l'ascendenza schellingiana della pedagogia di Fröbel (1826) – ad esempio il nesso infanzia-natura e la complementarità tra spiritualità e teleologia che il processo educativo esprime – doveva rimanere qualcosa di completamente estraneo a Siedhoff-Buscher per la quale il gioco, e conseguentemente il giocattolo, non è mai una dimensione che trascende l'universo del bambino. Il rapporto con Fröbel è, tuttavia, più complesso e problematico di quanto dica l'opposizione, forse un po' troppo schematica, tra «gioco libero» e «gioco didattico». Il *Bauspiel*, infatti, fu distribuito dal 1926 fino ai primi anni Trenta proprio dal-

<sup>5</sup> «L'infinito sarà espresso in modo finito. Ma l'infinito espresso in modo finito è la bellezza. Il carattere fondamentale di ogni opera d'arte, che in sé comprende i due precedenti, è dunque la bellezza, e senza la bellezza non vi è opera d'arte» (Schelling [1800]: 294).



la Pestalozzi-Fröbel Verlag. E addirittura nel 1924, l'anno successivo alla realizzazione del giocattolo, a Jena lo Zeiss-Kindergarten fu allestito con i mobili progettati da Siedhoff-Buscher e la sua produzione fu esposta alla conferenza degli educatori e degli insegnanti durante i Fröbeltage, sempre a Jena.

Un ulteriore parallelismo che è consentito indicare, in questa prospettiva, è quello tra il *Bauspiel* e il materiale didattico montessoriano. Non tanto nelle modalità formali, dove probabilmente rimane più forte il legame con i doni di Fröbel, quanto nella concezione di «astrazione materializzata» che Montessori mette a punto nelle varie edizioni de *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* fino a quella finale col titolo *La scoperta del bambino* (1950): la modalità di rendere accessibile all'esperienza del bambino i primi processi d'astrazione attraverso degli oggetti concreti. Gli oggetti montessoriani, però, rivelavano una doppia natura che il *Bauspiel* parzialmente poteva condividere. L'oggetto si presentava come giocattolo, abbracciando l'interesse cognitivo del bambino, ma nella sua essenza era pur sempre materiale didattico con una finalità esplicita: tradurre un concetto astratto (ad esempio la qualità o la quantità) in un *medium* concreto adeguato al bambino. Questa bipolarità tra forma e contenuto, giocattolo e materiale didattico, gioco e apprendimento era proprio ciò che il *Bauspiel* rifiutava a favore di un'esperienza integralmente ludica.

Questa esperienza ludica del *Bauspiel* si concretizza essenzialmente nella percezione dei colori e nella fruizione tattile, mentre quella più astratta, che struttura l'intera filosofia del gioco, nella libertà immaginativa. Ed è proprio in questa fattualità che l'oggetto di Siedhoff-Buscher sconfessa quel carattere periferico rispetto al Bauhaus che Gropius avrebbe additato all'intera produzione della *designer*. Il *Bauspiel* accoglie in sé i principi formali del Bauhaus divenendone quasi un modello concreto in miniatura. Se si presta attenzione a quanto lo stesso Gropius scrisse in suo testo del 1925, *Principi della produzione del Bauhaus*, non è difficile intravedere le linee guida progettuali dell'oggetto di Siedhoff-Buscher: «Configura-

zione organica degli oggetti sulla base della loro legge presente, senza mistificazioni e divagazioni romantiche. Limitazione ad alcune forme e colori fondamentali di carattere tipico e comprensibili a tutti» (Gropius [1925]: 270). E ancora sempre Gropius dieci anni dopo, nel 1935 nel suo esilio londinese, in quel breve *memorandum* del modernismo che fu *La Nuova Architettura e il Bauhaus* sembra quasi commentare il *Bauspiel* quando afferma «abbiamo imparato a cercare l'espressione concreta della vita della nostra epoca attraverso forme chiare, limpide ed essenziali» (Gropius [1935]: 27). La chiarezza, la limpidezza e l'essenzialità, le tre caratteristiche formali evocate, fungono da matrici quasi platoniche: sono condizione preliminare e esito finale di un processo che partendo da questa idealità formale deve tradursi in un'estetica della sottrazione in cui l'uso (la funzione) non è mai tradita. Il *Bauspiel* ha nel piacere il proprio scopo e questa finalità dell'oggetto si concretizza nella componibilità delle sue forme e dei suoi cromatismi: «semplicità e chiarezza» erano del resto i due principi che la stessa Siedhoff-Buscher aveva indicato come centrali nella configurazione del giocattolo.

Un altro elemento progettuale decisivo è il legno, il materiale per eccellenza del giocattolo prima che la plastica ne minacciasse, e ne destituisse, il primato. L'esperienza tattile del legno che segna il *Bauspiel* si rispecchia perfettamente nell'osservazione di Benjamin per cui tra tutti i materiali «nessuno si adatta al giocattolo meglio del legno, per la sua resistenza e la facilità con cui può essere colorato» (Benjamin [1928b]: 51) e ancor di più, quasi profetizzandole, quelle che ritroviamo alla voce «Giocattoli» in *Miti di oggi* di Barthes. Il legno, nella analisi di Barthes, è il materiale che attraverso la tattilità collega il bambino in un processo immaginativo (ma non fiabesco osserverebbe Siedhoff-Buscher) alla realtà. Una «sostanza familiare e poetica» che immette il bambino in una dimensione di continuità «con l'albero, il tavolo, l'impiantito». Il legno restituisce al giocattolo un'essenzialità che al giocattolo meccanico o al giocattolo chimico, quello di plastica, rimane solo apparente. Se il giocattolo di legno si

consuma, quello meccanico si rompe. Se il giocattolo di legno apre all'esperienza del piacere – e qui l'idea del fine del giocattolo avanzata da Barthes è identica a quella di Siedhoff-Buscher –, quello chimico si consegna a una frenetica «cinestesia dell'uso». Il legno cresce col bambino, ne modula i rapporti con il reale attraverso l'interazione sempre nuova, immaginativa si potrebbe aggiungere, tra oggetto e mano: in questo senso «il legno fa oggetti essenziali, oggetti di sempre» (Barthes [1957]: 52). In questo scenario progettuale risulta evidente come il *Bauspiel* rappresenti un'occasione quasi esemplare per comprendere i nessi che hanno sempre definito ogni ontologia del gioco: il rapporto gioco-giocattolo e il suo eventuale statuto mimetico, la relazione immaginazione-piacere, la dialettica tra mondo dell'infanzia e mondo adulto.

## 2. MIMESIS, IMMAGINAZIONE, PIACERE

La storia filosofica del giocattolo, sebbene ancora da scrivere nella sua interezza, è stata sempre adombrata da un'altra storia, quella del gioco. Il giocattolo in questo secondo percorso, quello vincente, si muta in strumento, nella dimensione che concretizza operativamente un senso che lo trascende. Portatore di un significato a lui estraneo, il giocattolo diventa essenzialmente un mediatore tra il gioco e la realtà, tra il presente ludico del bambino e l'anticipazione mimetica del mondo adulto, tra l'esperienza del piacere e ciò che appare il suo vero fine, una pedagogia applicata. In questa ambiguità è del tutto comprensibile l'interlocutoria messa a fuoco di Eugen Fink che, seppur impegnato nell'elaborazione di una propria ontologia del gioco, non può che registrare la natura sfuggente del giocattolo: «Ogni gioco ha anche il suo giocattolo. Ciascuno di noi conosce i giocattoli. Ma è difficile dire cosa sia un giocattolo» (Fink [1957]: 24), infatti «ogni giocattolo è il rappresentante di tutte le cose in generale: il giocare è sempre un dialogo con ciò che è. Nel giocattolo il tutto si concentra in una singola cosa. Ogni gioco è un tentativo di vita, un esperimento vitale, che esperisce in generale nel giocattolo

la quintessenza di tutto l'ente che gli sta di fronte» (26-27). Il giocattolo è nell'opzione di Fink una sorta di versione sintetica dell'intero possibile che la realtà prospetta e in questa prospettiva l'indicazione che Siedhoff-Buscher aveva posto nella confezione del *Bauspiel* sembra confermarlo: una nave, certo, ma anche «tante altre cose». Questa identità plurale del giocattolo è di fatto la sua ontologia prima: unico frammento di realtà che è contemporaneamente natura (un pezzo di legno o una pietra con cui il bambino gioca) e *techne* (il giocattolo prodotto artificialmente). Il *Bauspiel* cerca questa duplicità nell'immaginazione del bambino, unico spazio dell'umano in cui la natura non è ancora incanalata nel «mondo simmetrico», come direbbe Hölderlin, di quella *techne* specifica dell'uomo adulto che è la *paideia*. Il piacere e null'altro dovrebbe documentare, e l'intera filosofia ludica di Siedhoff-Buscher va in tale direzione, questa dimensione esclusiva dell'infanzia. Ed è qui, in modo più profondo, che il legame tra Siedhoff-Buscher e i giochi didattici di Fröbel e Montessori decade definitivamente.

Probabilmente uno dei luoghi iniziali di un'ontologia del giocattolo, utile a comprendere la centralità del *Bauspiel* nel design novecentesco nel suo complesso, è il passo delle *Leggi* (634b-d)<sup>6</sup> in cui Platone si pone se il problema della reale finalità del gioco, e quindi l'idea che struttura ogni oggetto che viene impiegato in un gioco, sia l'avviare il bambino al suo futuro da adulto. Se così fosse i bambini allora utilizzerebbero nei loro giochi «attrezzi in scala ridotta a imitazione di quelli veri» (643c1-2) per abituarsi al lavoro futuro. Questi *mimemata* sono strumenti educativi che, però, spostano immediatamente il problema su un altro piano: se infatti il gioco è stadio propedeutico al mondo adulto, e per Platone lo è, appare evidente che la forza che il mimetico ha verso il bambino non è tanto nel suo legame col processo formativo, ma con il piacere<sup>7</sup>. Seguendo un esempio platonico

<sup>6</sup> Per le citazioni dalle *Leggi* cfr. Platone (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Kidd ha analizzato il passo platonico mostrando come il nesso *mimesis*-piacere sia da leggere nel primato del secondo termine che determina quindi l'ontolo-



co (il bambino futuro cavaliere che è impegnato «a montare a cavallo per gioco»), occorre allora chiedersi se il gioco troverà la propria essenza nel piacere o nella *mimesis*: è il piacere che mi permette di trasformare un pezzo di legno in un cavallo o mi dà piacere proprio il fatto di vedere un cavallo in un pezzo di legno? In altre parole: il gioco procede dal piacere alla *mimesis* o dalla *mimesis* al piacere? Platone sembra indicare la prima opzione abbinando gioco e piacere nella stessa formula in vari luoghi della sua opera (Kidd [2017]: 100) e, addirittura, come evidenza un passo del *Politico* (288c) raggruppando tutte le forme d'arte (mimetiche e non) nel segno del divertimento e del gioco: «imitazioni operate in funzione del nostro piacere. [...] Tutto ciò si chiama divertimento. Questo solo nome dunque converrà applicare a tutte queste cose; nessuna viene infatti operata in vista di alcun scopo serio, ma tutte invece per il gioco» (*Politico* 288 c-d)<sup>8</sup>. Il nesso gioco-piacere non configura o non si configura eventualmente nel mimetico, ma definisce anche il processo educativo in sé: infatti «sono state inventate in relazione ai calcoli per quelli assolutamente bambini [ossia i bambini più piccoli] nozioni da apprendere con gioco e con piacere» (*Leggi* 819b7).

Il primato del piacere sembrerebbe accreditato anche, e in modo inaspettato, da un passo aristotelico (Aristotele [1993]) in cui il piacere del riconoscimento mimetico indietreggia davanti al piacere estetico in sé. Se il piacere mimetico è un piacere intellettuale, (ri)vedere una cosa significa sempre avviare un processo di apprendimento, discernimento e confronto, e il piacere dipende essenzialmente dalla connessione tra la rappresentazione e l'oggetto rappresentato, cosa accade quando si prova piacere davanti a un oggetto mai visto prima? L'oggetto «non procurerà piacere in quanto imitazione, ma per la sua fattura, il colore o un'altra ragione simile» (*Poetica* 1448b

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gia del giocattolo: non più oggetto mimetico e per questo di piacere, ma oggetto di piacere e solo per questo eventualmente riconducibile all'universo adulto tramite la *mimesis* (S. Kidd [2017]: 97-105).

<sup>8</sup> Per la citazione dal *Politico* cfr. Platone (1974).



Schizzo progettuale, Bauhaus-Museum, Weimar



Modello progettuale, proprietà di Joost Siedhoff, foto di Julia Zimmermann

15-17). Ciò che qui interessa sottolineare, al di là del problematico nesso piacere-*mimesis* (Halliwell [1992]; Wolff [2007]), è come Aristotele indichi in caratteristiche oggettive la fonte di un piacere eminentemente percettivo: un oggetto è apprezzato per «come è fatto» (*apergasia*), per il colore e proprietà simili. È la stessa spiegazione fornita da Siedhoff-Buscher rispetto al suo *Bauspiel* per emanciparsi dall'eredità della pedagogia fröbeliana. Il piacere appare in questo caso come quella connessione tra *aisthesis* e *techne*, tra il gioco e il giocattolo, che sembra scartare l'idea che il mimetico appaia come l'ontologia del giocattolo. Un esempio può essere rappresentato dalla scena iniziale de *L'enigma di Kaspar Hauser* di Herzog. Kaspar, reclu-

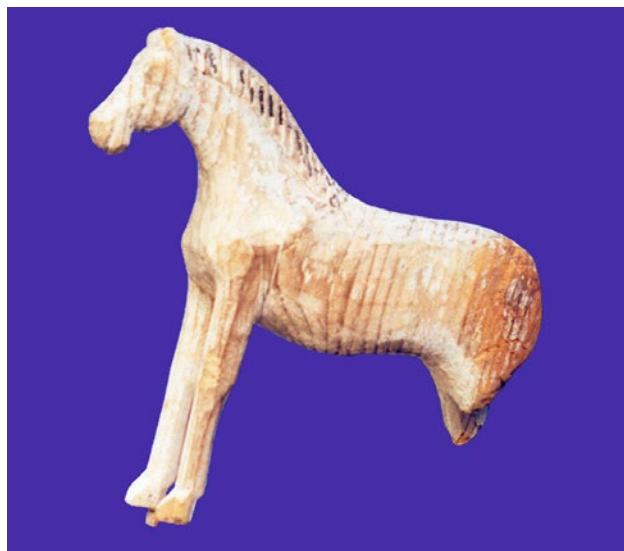


*L'Enigma di Kaspar Hauser*, Werner Herzog, 1974

so in una cantina (la caverna di Platone?) gioca con un giocattolo: un cavallo di legno. Non sappiamo da quanto Kaspar sia prigioniero, ma Herzog sembra suggerirci che nulla sappia del mondo esterno, quindi verosimilmente non ha mai visto un cavallo vero. Kaspar gioca quindi non perché ha il piacere di riconoscere in miniatura un cavallo né perché in futuro sarà un cavaliere (sebbene questa possa essere un'ipotesi futura, eventuale seppur improbabile) come sembrerebbe indicare la motivazione mimetica addotta, ma poi stemperata, da Platone nelle *Leggi*: gioca perché gli piace toccare quell'oggetto di legno e sentire il suono che produce. L'unico momento mimetico, prima tappa della *Bildung*, semmai è quando il carceriere di Kaspar («lo sconosciuto») gli insegna a nominare quell'oggetto con la parola «cavallo», che Kaspar inizia a ripetere meccanicamente quasi per rafforzare il piacere della sua esperienza ludica<sup>9</sup>.

Inoltre, per ritornare a Platone, in un altro luogo delle *Leggi* la pulsione del mimetico come origine del gioco, e quindi del piacere, è margina-

<sup>9</sup> Sul valore simbolico di questo cavallo di legno, che è impossibile analizzare in questa sede, ma che sarà oggetto di un nostro futuro studio cfr. almeno MacKenzie (1993).



Cavallo di legno di Kaspar Hauser, Kulturzentrum am Karlsplatz, Ansbach

lizzata a favore di un'altra opzione. Sempre trattando dell'educazione, Platone (*Leggi* 653c8-654d) analizza la nascita della danza come tappa intermedia di un processo che partendo dalla strutturazione dei rituali religiosi sfocia, tramite il ritmo e l'armonia, nell'arte musicale. Nelle prime forme di danza i giovani si muovono liberi, senza sosta, senza essere guidati da alcun desiderio mimetico, e non riuscendo mai «a stare in quiete con il corpo e la voce, cercano continuamente di muoversi e di esprimersi alcuni con balzi e salti come se danzassero e giocassero esultanti, altri emettendo ogni sorta di suoni» (653e). Il piacere in sé di muoversi col corpo e di emettere suoni con la voce ci riporta a quel luogo esclusivo del bambino che è la cameretta della *Haus am Horn*, in cui il bambino trova una stanza tutta per sé nella quale il piacere dei propri movimenti, assecondato dai cubi modulari, si attiva senza alcun rimando al mondo degli adulti. Questa gioia senza mediazioni dell'infanzia è confrontata da Platone con la nostalgia dell'adulto verso quel piacere che non conosce ancora i filtri della *Bildung*, che Platone stesso mistifica dietro la maschera di un corpo ormai invecchiato. Si tratta di un passo – inserito in una lunga discussione dedicata al problema sulla scorrettezza di lodare le arti che suscitano unicamente una grati-

cazione estetica e non morale – che di fatto probabilmente per la prima volta nel pensiero occidentale trova le radici psicologiche del fascino che il giocattolo esercita sull'adulto. Il gioco atletico che Platone evoca confluisce in quell'eterna ricerca del tempo perduto che il giocattolo nella sua oggettività reclama a ogni istante:

*E non è vero che i nostri giovani sono disposti a danzare ma che noi vecchi consideriamo più conveniente assistere allo spettacolo dei loro movimenti rallegrandoci della loro propensione al gioco e alla festa ora che ci ha abbandonato quell'agilità nella cui intensa nostalgia, prendendo da essa congedo istituivamo gare per chi meglio sia in grado di ridestarci, almeno nel ricordo, alla giovinezza? (657d)*

L'inquietudine infantile (o giovanile nell'ottica di Platone) che si esplica nell'immaginazione liberata nel corpo riporta a un'altra immagine, stavolta moderna, che consegna il bambino non a uno scenario che ne smussa le asprezze, coinvolto in un processo educativo eterodiretto (la fiaba per Siedhoff-Buscher ha sostanzialmente questa funzione), ma che quasi ne esaspera l'incontrollabilità psichica e autonoma. È il ritratto che Baudelaire fa del bambino ne *Il pittore della vita moderna* quando tematizza la sua nozione di «infanzia ritrovata» per indicare le caratteristiche del genio moderno. Il genio è un convalescente che ritornando al mondo lo percepisce nuovo, come se fosse la prima volta: l'arte è catturare questa «prima volta». Il genio pertanto riattiva nella sua maturità la capacità infantile di assorbire il nuovo, «la facoltà di interessarsi vivamente alle cose, anche a quelle in apparenza più banali», infatti «il bambino vede tutto in una forma di *novità*; è sempre ebbro. Nulla assomiglia a quella che chiamiamo ispirazione, quanto la gioia con cui il bambino assorbe la forma e il colore» (Baudelaire [1863]: 1280). Forma e colore, *apergasia* e *chroma* come aveva indicato Aristotele e come Siedhoff-Buscher aveva dichiarato parlando del *Bauspiel*. Questa inquietudine del bambino è una «scossa nervosa» che, se nell'uomo di genio si ristrutturava mimeticamente nel processo della creazione artistica, nel bambino rimane inespresa se non nell'attività quasi anarchica del gioco. Un

impulso<sup>10</sup> che Baudelaire vede attivarsi nell'immaginazione, cardine non solo della prassi artistica, ma anche del gioco. Ritroviamo così la stessa dicotomia che caratterizzerà anche la concezione del gioco di Siedhoff-Buscher: immaginazione-imitazione. Baudelaire la tematizza in uno scritto pubblicato nel 1853: *Morale del giocattolo*. Il giocattolo diventa l'oggetto in cui i bambini si confrontano col «grande dramma della vita». Un oggetto quindi che esemplifica «la loro grande facoltà di astrazione e la loro elevata potenza immaginativa. Essi giocano senza giocattoli» (Baudelaire [1853]: 1371). Al contrario il giocattolo imitativo e l'oggetto che instrada nel mondo adulto: le bambine che fanno le mamme con le bambole, i bambini che giocano alla guerra con spade e fucili. Il giocattolo baudelairiano immaginativo è quello del «bambino solitario» che vede un'intera armata in «tappi, pezzi di domino, pedine, aliossi» e le fortificazioni in «assi, libri». Che vede in un'unica cosa, come direbbe Siedhoff-Buscher, tante altre cose. Oggetto del possibile per eccellenza, il giocattolo di Baudelaire è l'embrione stesso della capacità poetica, «la prima iniziazione del bambino all'arte» (1372). La scossa dei nervi che il poeta irrigimenta nell'esercizio della ragione e che produce lo spazio poetico, nel bambino si scioglie in un'ansia distruttiva, in una foga ontologica, una «prima tendenza metafisica» che vuole «vedere l'anima» del giocattolo e per questo lo rompe, lo gratta, lo sbatte a terra o sulle pareti. Assedia il giocattolo come «il popolo assedia le Tuilleries», ma l'ardore rivoluzionario finisce ben presto. Una volta distrutto, il giocattolo non rivela più nulla: «*dov'è l'anima?* È qui che cominciano l'inebitimento e la tristezza» (1376). È qui che inizia la vita adulta.

<sup>10</sup> Si potrebbe leggere questa concezione di Baudelaire anche alla luce di quell'«impulso al gioco» di Schiller, nel quale, riconfluendo anche gli studi giovanili di fisiologia dello stesso Schiller, viene a costituirsi lo spazio estetico «quasi come un riverbero della vita della sensazione da cui tutto comincia e, dunque, come una virtù riflessiva del percepire stesso: del respiro dell'*aisthesis* (nel quale vi è senz'altro memoria della forza mediana e attivamente mediante dei nervi di cui aveva parlato il giovane Schiller)» (Desideri [2013]: 196).

L'unidimensionalità implicita nel giocattolo imitativo, condannata da Baudelaire, è la sua significazione socializzata come suggerisce Barthes in *Miti d'oggi*. Il giocattolo rimanda sempre al mondo adulto miniaturizzando, attraverso quell'alibi scaltro rappresentato dal giocattolo imitativo, quelle che sono le funzioni adulte, i ruoli sociali, insegna ad accettare in un processo di straniante piacere ludico, che in realtà è una silenziosa introiezione, le diseguaglianze future. Il giocattolo in questa prospettiva ribalta l'utopia bauhausiana del *Bauspiel* rendendo il bambino un piccolo capitalista del proprio universo: possiede oggetti già «finiti», esplica il suo ruolo di «utente, mai di creatore; non inventa il mondo, lo utilizza, gli si preparano gesti senza avventura, senza sorpresa, senza gioia» (Barthes [1957]: 52). Anche il gesto estremo di distruggere il giocattolo, la ribellione infantile equiparata a Baudelaire all'assedio delle Tuilleries, si rivela il primo esercizio della frustrazione del mondo adulto. Lebbrezza del distruggere non è altro che la promessa non mantenuta della creatività sconfessata. Piccolo burocrate della propria cameretta, il bambino utente è immesso in un processo in cui naturalizza, feticizzandoli, i valori sociali a cui si piegherà in futuro: un mondo di uomini soldati e di donne mamme. La stanza del bambino, colma di quell'intrusione del mondo adulto che si maschera nelle fattezze dell'oggetto imitativo, opta per la soluzione opposta a quella indicata da Siedhoff-Buscher per la *Haus am Horn* e a quel monito che la progettista avrebbe voluto fosse rivolto a ogni adulto davanti alla stanza del proprio figlio: «Lascialo stare».

Per Barthes il giocattolo che trasgredisce questo processo di omologazione ideologica («l'imborghesimento del giocattolo») è il gioco di costruzioni. La descrizione che ne viene data sembra quasi offrire un identikit definitivo del *Bauspiel*: «Il più piccolo gioco di costruzioni, purché non sia troppo ricercato, implica un apprendistato del mondo molto diverso: il bambino non vi crea affatto oggetti significativi, non gli importa che abbiano un nome adulto: non esercita un uso, ma una demiurgia: crea forme che camminano, che rotolano, crea una vita, non una proprietà» (52).

Ed è proprio in questa prospettiva che il *Bauspiel* trova la sua lettura più stringente nelle riflessioni che Benjamin dedica al giocattolo, una serie di contributi pubblicati tra il 1928 e il 1930 (*Antichi giocattoli, Storia culturale del giocattolo, Giocattolo e gioco, Giocattoli russi, Elogio della bambola, Passeggiata berlinese tra i giocattoli*)<sup>11</sup> che, probabilmente in modo inavvertito, illustrano alla perfezione la filosofia del *Bauspiel*.

Nella dialettica gioco-giocattolo Benjamin reinterpretava il problema della *mimesis* sgancandola da ogni fine didattico e la reinserisce in una più complessa riformulazione dello spazio immaginativo che si esplicita nel gioco. Il gioco è la traduzione ontogenetica di ciò che in una prospettiva filogenetica si offre nella stessa storia della facoltà mimetica. Se per Baudelaire il gioco e il giocattolo immaginativo rappresentano l'iniziazione al poetico, per Benjamin il gioco è una pedagogia tutta interna allo sviluppo della facoltà mimetica: «il bambino non gioca solo "a fare" il commerciante e il maestro, ma anche il mulino a vento e la ferrovia» (Benjamin [1933]: 68). In questa accezione della facoltà mimetica come attivazione del processo immaginativo è possibile scorgere il nucleo profondo del *Bauspiel*. Nel suo saggio del 1928 *Storia culturale del giocattolo* Benjamin, dopo aver tangenzialmente, ma non casualmente, rilevato la maggiore idoneità del legno come materiale del giocattolo (per la resistenza e per la sua colorabilità), sottolinea la dimensione di costruibilità mimetica che il bambino «montatore» attiva nel proprio gioco. Il *Bauspiel* espone, in un progetto compiuto, ma non «finito», esattamente l'idea di questa procedura immaginativa:

<sup>11</sup> Marina Montanelli ha contestualizzato questa riflessione benjaminiana sul giocattolo legandola ai concetti di gioco e *mimesis* nel segno della nozione di ripetizione: «dal punto di vista ontogenetico, nel bambino opera quel principio del montaggio che, storicamente, si è mostrato per la prima volta con la riproduzione tecnica e il cinema. Il bambino è il primo montatore, tra le cui mani salta ogni rigida dicotomia tra natura e tecnica, tra ambito biologico e ambito storico, sociale» (Montanelli [2017]: 10; cfr. sul giocattolo pp. 61-70).

*Da un lato non c'è niente che il bambino faccia più volentieri che unire fraternamente, nelle sue costruzioni, le materie più eterogenee – pietre, plastilina, legno, carta. D'altro lato nessuno è più pudico del bambino, nei confronti delle materie: un semplice pezzetto di legno, una pigna, un sassolino, nella purezza, nell'univocità della sua materia, possono rappresentare nondimeno tutta una varietà di figure diversissime tra loro.* (Benjamin [1928]: 51)

Il principio del montaggio, che di fatto è il principio che fonda l'ontologia del *Bauspiel*, è ciò che sposta il focus dal giocattolo al gioco. Solo il giocattolo imitativo («finito» nel lessico di Siedhoff-Buscher) consente di indugiare in quell'errore che concepisce il giocattolo come fattore determinante per il gioco e da qui, come noterà Barthes, scaturisce la sua funzione significativa, e ideologica, rispetto al mondo adulto. Al contrario la *mimesis* «ha la propria sede naturale nel gioco, non nel giocattolo» (52). Ciò comporta, ad esempio, come lo stesso Benjamin indica in un saggio dello stesso anno, il 1928, *Antichi giocattoli*, la quasi esclusiva capacità dei bambini di trasformare il giocattolo mentre giocano, una facoltà sostanzialmente preclusa all'adulto che, invece, modula il gioco non su questo registro metamorfico, ma all'interno, tutt'al più, di una logica pedagogica. Questa impostazione tendeva a considerare la dialettica gioco-giocattolo, una volta trasgrediti il fine didattico o la prospettiva adulta, come un binomio da emendare nel segno della dipendenza imitativa del giocattolo. Una monodimensionalità che già *in nuce* espone la condanna benjaminiana per la «bella apparenza», la fetizzazione dell'opera d'arte in un'esperienza estetica che smarrisce le proprie istanze critiche. Il gioco infantile diviene quindi l'ontogenesi di quella dialettica più complessiva che comprende la riconfigurazione dell'arte novecentesca, ormai tecnologica, nelle polarizzazioni di «apparenza» e «gioco». Una dialettica in cui la *mimesis* si riformula in uno «spazio-di-gioco» (*Spielraum*), come Benjamin indica in una lunga nota al paragrafo XI della terza versione dell'*Opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica* (Benjamin [1935-36]: 91-92), ed è soltanto assumendo questa interpolarità che

il gioco mimetico di fatto configura «la storica e drammatica partita tra estetizzazione della politica e politicizzazione dell'arte» in cui quest'ultima «non può che decidersi nell'incrocio problematico che connette la percezione alla mimesis e l'apparenza al gioco» (Desideri [2018]: 72-73).

Proprio nella nota sulla *mimesis* della terza versione Benjamin riconduce il mimetico alla sua forma primordiale, laddove si offre nell'espressione corporea: «colui che imita rende apparente il proprio oggetto. Detto altrimenti: gioca a essere quell'oggetto» (Benjamin [1935-36]: 92). Questo «colui» è ontogeneticamente il bambino. Benjamin aveva chiarito questo punto proprio nei suoi saggi dedicati all'infanzia. In *Storia culturale del giocattolo* per ribadire il primato del gioco sul giocattolo lo spazio-di-gioco era identificato con la capacità del bambino di reinventare il proprio sé divenendo il giocattolo di se stesso, giocando a essere l'oggetto del proprio gioco: il bambino infatti «vuole trainare qualcosa e diventa cavallo, vuole giocare con la sabbia e diventa fornaio, vuole nascondersi e diventa ladro o gendarme» (Benjamin [1928b]: 51-52)<sup>12</sup>. Questo mimetismo immaginativo è alla base dei fallimenti della pedagogia moderna (Benjamin [1928]: 415) che cerca affannosamente di circoscrivere lo spazio-di-gioco, materialmente, nel giocattolo finito e, ideologicamente, nel processo didattico. La «legge della ripetizione» (Montanelli [2017]: 90-96) esemplifica, al contrario, la capacità del bambino di creare *ex novo* il proprio gioco, di iniziare ancora una volta dal suo grado zero il proprio mondo (Benjamin [1928c]: 91-92). Un principio che, al contempo distruttivo e costruttivo, configura anche lo spazio reale del bambino come Siedhoff-Buscher aveva cercato di indicare in quel doppio progetto che è la stanza dei bambini della *Haus am Horn* e il *Bauspiel*. La convergenza assoluta Benjamin e Siedhoff-Buscher risiede proprio nel tentativo di garantire al bambino questo spazio autonomo, quasi alieno, si

<sup>12</sup> Con accenti simili anche una descrizione contenuta nel paragrafo «Ingrandimenti» in *Strada a senso unico*: «il bambino che sta dietro la tenda diviene qualcosa di bianco e svolazzante, un fantasma» (Benjamin [1928b]: 434).





Poster, Bauhaus-Shop

potrebbe affermare, alla strumentalità del mondo adulto. La stanza dei bambini di Siedhoff-Buscher attraverso la modularità dei suoi elementi esibisce la convizione benjaminiana, che già attesta un preciso indirizzo critico-politico, per la quale la *mimesis* (Benjamin) converge nella «fantasia» (Siedhoff-Buscher): in questo modo modo i bambini «non riproducono tanto le opere degli adulti quanto piuttosto pongono i più svariati materiali, mediante ciò che giocando ne ricavano, in un rapporto reciproco nuovo, discontinuo. I bambini in tal modo si costruiscono il proprio mondo oggettuale, un piccolo mondo dentro il grande, da sé» (Benjamin [1928]: 416)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Una formula che, echeggiando quella di Hölderlin, «un mondo nel mondo», a testimonianza della sua centralità, ritroviamo anche in altri scritti benjaminiani quali *Vecchi libri per l'infanzia* e *Antichi giocattoli*.

La nave, e «tante altre cose», di Siedhoff-Buscher ha attraversato il Novecento testimoniando l'utopia del possibile e, senza volerlo, anche l'orrore del reale. Quello del *Bauspiel* è stato un lungo viaggio che, iniziato in un laboratorio a Weimar nel 1923, sembra ancora non terminato. E il senso profondo di quel giocattolo ci sembra quasi svelato nelle ultime parole di Siedhoff-Buscher che ci sono date conoscere. In una intervista rilasciata a *Magazin*, l'inserto mensile della *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Locke [2015]: 65), il figlio della *designer*, l'attore Joost Siedhoff, ha rivelato il contenuto dell'ultima lettera che le madre gli scrisse quando, diciottenne, era soldato sul fronte orientale. Felice per una gita a Kronberg im Taunus dove era andata a trovare l'amico pittore Karl Peter Röhl, anche lui per un periodo membro del Bauhaus, la progettista scrive, ignara della sua morte imminente, al figlio: «Prendi fiato dalla guerra. Ti ho scritto così tanto su Kronberg, in modo che tu possa vedere che anche in tempi di sconforto ci sono delle ore felici e che dovresti portarle con te. Questo dà nuova forza. Peter Röhl continuava a dipingere tramonti. Da ora in poi vuole dipingere solo albe!».

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**Citation:** R. Latva-Somppi, M. Mäkelä (2020) Exploring Ecological and Material Sensitivity through Craft Practice in the Context of the Venice Lagoon. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 31-46. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-10916

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Exploring Ecological and Material Sensitivity through Craft Practice in the Context of the Venice Lagoon

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**Abstract.** This article discusses multisensorial aesthetic experience of environmental materiality via a craft process. The locally situated study investigates the interrelations of humans and environment through soil. In focus is how craft practitioners use their material sensitivity to reflect the idea of interdependency in the context of the contemporary environmental discourse. This is done through presenting an artistic research project in which craft is used to explore the human imprint in a particular geological environment, the Venice Lagoon. The case study *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil* combines environmental research methods of contaminated soil and artistic research in the field of ceramic art. Craft making provides an embodied way to engage with the local environment. The cultural value and environmental disruption of the lagoon area forms a context for reflecting the aesthetic experience to better understand how we are active participants, in continuous flux with our material environment.

**Keywords.** Craft, contaminated soil, environment, ecological aesthetics, sensitivity.

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### INTRODUCTION

Ecology is a holistic principle that regards the environment and its organisms as interdependent systems. This article discusses the multisensorial aesthetic experience of environmental materiality via a craft process. In focus is how craft practitioners use their material sensitivity to reflect the idea of interdependency in the context of the contemporary environmental discourse. This is done through presenting an artistic research project in which craft is used to explore the human imprint in a particular geological environment, the Venice Lagoon. The case study *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil* combines environmental research methods of contaminated soil and artistic research in the field of ceramic art (see also Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]). The research was conducted by a group of artist-researchers from Aalto University,



Helsinki, who work in the realm of craft research. The project involved collaboration with experts on contaminated soil from the Finnish Environment Institute. The study was realized in the form of a research laboratory in the Research Pavilion<sup>1</sup> that took place in the context of the Venice Biennale in the summer of 2019.

Science offers statements that present the nature of facts. In a study done on interdisciplinary research across art and science Groth et al. (2019: 4) explain that, unlike in science, in the realm of arts and artistic research alternative thinking, politics and societal issues can be raised through subjective positioning. They explicate that in art, the immediate connection between experience and conceptualization can be presented through linguistic, material or conceptual metaphors. In this research, the sensitivity of the craft practitioners is used to closely perceive the materials in nature, using their physical, temporal and symbolic qualities to weave together an understanding of cultural and natural materialities.

Environmental concerns have brought a growing interest in the aesthetics of nature in relation to the built environment in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Toadvine [2010]: 85). Environmental aesthetics (Berleant [1998]; Brady [2003]; Carlson, Lintott [2008]) are considered to include not only natural environments but also human environments and human-influenced environments (Carlson [2019]). The field of ecological aesthetics or ecoaesthetics (Cheng [2013]; Hosey [2012]; Nassauer [1997]; Prigann, Strelow, David [2004]; Toadvine [2010]), as it is sometimes called, has risen to extend to the areas of aesthetics of nature (Hepburn [1966]) including natural objects, ecosystems, gardens and landscape architecture, environmental and earth art, architecture and urban planning (Toadvine [2010]: 85). There are several



**Figure 1.** Examining the soil in Sacca San Mattia, Murano in February 2019. Photo: Maarit Mäkelä.

distinct views in the area of environmental, ecological and ecoaesthetics, such as the natural environmental model (Carlson, [2000]), the aesthetics of engagement (Berleant [1992, 2013]) and the emotional arousal model (Carrol [2003]). Currently, there is an ongoing discussion on the relations of ethics and aesthetics (Carlson [2018]; Cooper et al. [2016]; Hettinger [2007]). Likewise, concepts such as green aesthetics (Saito [2007]; Salwa [2019]), aesthetic preservationism (Fischer [2003]) and aesthetic footprint (Naukkarinen [2011]) have been developed to understand how aesthetic awareness can help us understand and even take action towards positive environmental influence. We can aesthetically benefit from nature, but it is more essential that aesthetic understanding of the value of nature may cultivate moral responsibilities and thus have an environmental impact (Cooper et al. [2016]). In this article, we do not argue for any of these models but rather seek to evaluate the aesthetic experience we encountered during our study.

The underlying idea of the artistic research that this article discusses is that humans are in continuous flux with the environment and it is becoming difficult to separate pristine nature from environments that have experienced human impact. Aesthetician Arnold Berleant, a leading figure in the development of ecological aesthet-

<sup>1</sup> The Research Pavilion is an ongoing artistic research project created and hosted by The University of the Arts, Helsinki. Research Pavilion #3 was created in cooperation with following international partner institutions: Aalto University, Valand Academy of Arts at the University of Gothenburg, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and Interlab Hongik University Seoul in Venice in 2019.

ics, understands the human perceiver as an active participant embedded in the environment in an engaged and multisensory way (Toadvine [2010]: 85-86). He remarks that humans have not only affected nature pervasively, but that the very concept of nature is bound to historical and cultural traditions (Berleant [1992]: 167).

Artist and writer Nathaniel Stern (2018: 4) proposes ecological aesthetics as encompassing “thought-felt encounters with relations between all of matter and its ideas”. He does not limit “ecology” to the definitions around environmentalism or biological organisms. In his view, “[a]esthetics, both the term, and its practice, conjure experiment and experience, internal and external” (ibid.). He proposes that aesthetics and art practises are a way to explore the idea of togetherness to generate thinking on how to do things differently.

Berleant (2012: 55) explains that aesthetic sensibility and multisensory bodily engagement occupy key roles in the aesthetic experience of the environment. He understands sensibility as a perceptual awareness that is developed, focused and informed – being not objective nor purely subjective, but bound to natural, cultural and social contexts. Also, Icelandic environmental philosopher Guðbjörg Rannveig Jóhannesdóttir (2015: 141) calls for cultivating our sensibility to different kinds of environments, “be it glaciers or stinking dump sites”, to allow nature to affect us.

Contemporary craft processes require skill, knowledge and judgement, the same elements that have traditionally been regarded as elemental to the craft practice (Dormer [1994], Adamson [2007], Sennet [2008]). In this respect, craft can be understood as multisensorial meaning-making by hand. A craft person obtains a cultivated material sensitivity through her practice. Her sensibility is educated by experiential and emotional knowledge or tacit knowledge (Niedderer, Townsend [2014]: 637). The concept of tacit knowledge, as explained by philosopher Michael Polanyi (2009: 4, 7), is founded on the idea, that we “know more than we can tell”. Polanyi states that tacit knowledge forms a bridge between creativity and bodily processes of perception. A craft person’s aesthetic sensibility

related to her practice draws from tacit knowledge that is obtained through patient, time-consuming labour together with scientific knowledge, such as in our case ceramic material chemistry. It can thus be expected that, when confronting the materials in nature that the craft person is familiar with through her professional practice, she is both cognitively and perceptually aware of their presence and potential. This means that she understands how she might be able to use the found materials as part of her professional practice. For example, when encountering soil or stones that contain large quantities of iron, this can be perceived via the matt surface and deep brown or red colour. The ceramist knows that when fired, the colour will turn into a diverse range of browns.

This article presents the views of two practising craft persons and researchers in the field of ceramic art, both living in Finland and willing to situate and understand the meaning of their work in a context of research. For Riikka Latva-Somppi, the specific skills and knowledge related to the craft field are based on studies in ceramics, and through her professional practice in the field of glass art, she has also gained a solid understanding of glass materials. Maarit Mäkelä, on the other hand, has achieved her skills by working with clay for more than twenty years and has used soil direct from the natural environment in her previous artistic practice, one which has merged walking as an artistic practice with ceramics (Mäkelä [2019]).

As art historian, painter and critic Jale Erzen (2004: 22) writes, “a need to approach the earth with feeling and care can be seen in ...ecological aesthetics”. In the project *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil*, craft was used as a method for gaining knowledge of the way humans are in flux with environment. Combining the soil contamination research methods with craft practice enables us to think slowly and immersively (see e.g. Ings [2014]). The locally situated study investigates the interrelations between humans and the environment through soil. That is, we use our professional craft practice to understand the interrelated connections between materials, mak-

ers, and environment. The interrelations are aesthetic as they are mediated through perception. They are ecological as all beings are dependent on each other and sensitive of the smallest changes, and temporal as they are not static, but evolve over time (Erzen [2004]: 22). This project utilized the scientific environmental study that has been carried out in the Venice lagoon area, the immersive perceptual experience of the environment, and the educated material sensitivity of craft practitioners that helped us to understand the materiality in the chosen context. Craft making provided an embodied way to engage with the local environment (Mäkelä [2019]: 178). Our role is that of reflective craft practitioners, studying our praxis from the inside, as makers and researchers of our own artistic processes (Mäkelä, Latva-Somppi [2011]; Mäkelä [2016]; Nimkulrat [2012]; Groth, Mäkelä, Seitamaa-Hakkarainen [2015]).

Next, we will introduce the project *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil* by briefly outlining the anthropogenic contamination of the Venice lagoon, and by presenting the stages of the study.

#### CERAMISTS' VIEW CONCERNING THE VENICE LAGOON

Ceramists traditionally work with local soil. The context of the research is defined by the placement of the Research Pavilion in Venice. The Venice lagoon is a shallow water basin of about 550 km<sup>2</sup> separated from the open sea by barrier islands. The lagoon has been affected by human presence since around 160 A.D. The Management Plan of Venice and its Lagoon as a Unesco World Heritage Site (Zaccariotto, Dalla Tor [2012]: VIII) describes the area as a “symbol of coexistence between man and nature, between land and water, between culture and landscape”. The city and the lagoon landscape are a result of a unique interaction of humans and the ecosystem of their environment over time (Basili, Paulin [2012]: 22-23). Venice is built on 118 small islands forming natural canals surrounded by marshland. Philosopher

Max Ryyänen (2009: 10) presents the lagoon as a frame for the city supporting its “sense of harmony and experience of wholeness”. The map of the historical city has remained the same for centuries, and there are no suburbs surrounding city disturbing the balance between the cultural landmark and surrounding nature (ibid.). The city is admired for its architectural beauty enhanced by the particularity of its infrastructure that is defined by the situation in the lagoon.

For us, the area was familiar through tourism and short art-related visits to the city prior to the research. As aesthetician Arto Haapala (2005: 42-43) writes, the *genius loci*, spirit of the place of a city, is often defined by its history and atmosphere as a cultural milieu where a certain nature is specified by its geology and ecology. Venice’s distinctiveness is defined by the mélange of its overwhelming art treasures and historical architecture in its particular lagoon environment. The environmental research we read and conducted during the study opened up a different view on the area to that of an occasional tourist. Our senses were alert in a strange milieu as we adopted the “outsider’s gaze” (ibid.: 44). The “visitor’s curiosity” (ibid.) was multiplied when the cultural beauty of Venice was contrasted to the environmental data. Our daily life in Venice during the project was also influenced by the processes that we were involved in. We paid more attention to the colours and textures that derive from the local soil: the brick walls, the plastering of the houses, any earth that was visible in the paved city, the overall colours of the landscape, the pavement stones and the water.

Our project is founded in ceramic practices, in which it is traditionally elementary to work with local soil. As the context of our research was an urban-industrial area, working with the soil lead us to the traces of human actions. During our study, it became evident that the local soil is contaminated in various ways. The area of the lagoon is not affected by one disastrous environmental accident, but it presented itself as a continuous and accumulating environmental crisis. We understand that this is not just a local prob-



**Figure 2.** Gathering soil samples in Murano in February 2019. Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi.

lem, but relevant at various levels and in multiple ways in all waters and land where humans are or have been. The lagoon can also be seen as a cousin to our native Baltic sea: both are large basins of water with particular biotopes affected by industry, ports, urban runoff and fertilizers.

The study *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil* proceeded in three phases. First, a pre-study was done to understand the level of contamination in the lagoon area. Secondly, the artist-researchers, namely the authors of this article, proceeded with fieldwork, taking soil and sediment samples. The samples were chemically analysed using the methods of soil contamination analyses. The soil was also examined by testing methods familiar to craft practice and ceramic material research. These methods include working with the raw material by hand to see and feel how it behaves, as well as milling and firing the soil to discover what colours and textures result from the soil. Thirdly, a research laboratory called *Earth Laboratory* was built in the Research Pavilion. Local brick clay was used to coil large ceramic forms, and finally the analysed soil and sediment samples were used to paint the ceramic vessels. The focus was not on making a comparative study of the “clean” and “contaminated” soil as a ceramic material per se, but to investigate how craft practice may reveal embodied relations of humans and

environment. In this article, we will focus on the aesthetic aspects of the entire study instead of discussing the artefacts that resulted from the processes.

Based on our ceramic practises, the geological research conducted was centred upon finding traces of heavy metals in the soils and sediments of our field work site, the Venice lagoon area. Heavy metals, naturally occurring in the Earth’s crust, are considered raw materials for industry. In ceramic practices, metals are used as ingredients in glazes and engobes, giving colours and textures to ceramic surfaces. Any metal is considered a contaminant if it occurs where it is unwanted, or in a form or concentration that is detrimental to the environment or human health (Panagos et al. [2013]: 2; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 23). We adopted methods from the field of soil contamination research with the help of the scientists from The Finnish Environment Institute. Two field trips were made to gather local soil samples in the Venice area. The gathering and processing of the soil samples was an elemental part in understanding the soil, land and contamination.

The samples gathered were processed further in Finland, where we studied them in Aalto University’s Laboratory of Chemical and Metallurgical Engineering as well as in the Ceramic Studio. First, the samples were dried and sieved, as the finer soil often carries a higher load of contaminants (Giusti, Zhang [2002]: 53-57; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 11). Inductive coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry-analyses (ICP-OES), a method common in analysing contaminated soil, was used to detect the level of heavy metals and arsenic in the soil. The samples were further processed in the Ceramic Studio’s laboratory, where the soil was milled into slips that can be used to paint on ceramics. Ceramic material samples were made to discover the colours and textures they produce. We did not search for a specific outcome for the surfaces as we gathered the soil samples. The effects we got depended upon the local characteristics of the soil, including the contaminants that the soil entails.





**Figure 3.** Preparing the ceramic test pieces for firing in the ceramic studio laboratory. Photo: Hanna-Kaisa Korolainen.

Based on the laboratory analyses, we continued our site-specific work in Venice. A research studio entitled *Earth Laboratory* was built in the Research Pavilion for the months of July and August. As Venice was one of the first pottery centres in Italy, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., we resorted to the most primitive pottery technique, coiling, to make large vessels that cite the form language of ancient pottery. Local Italian brick clay from the Veneto area was used to coil the forms. Through the traditional techniques and materials, we placed the work in a historical context (Mäkelä, Latva-Somppi [2011]: 57; Mäkelä [2016]). The surfaces of the forms were then painted with the collected soil and sediments that had been processed into slips.



**Figure 4.** Ceramic test pieces made from local brick clay which display the colours and textures of the gathered soil samples processed into ceramic slips. Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi.

#### THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS CONTAMINATION

The Venetian lagoon is one of the most heavily researched coastal basins in the world due to its exceptional biotope (Sfriso et al. [2009]: 18). The environment is directly affected by various urban, industrial and agricultural emissions, making it an interesting macrocosm for environmental research (Vecchiato et al. [2016]). All human activity leaves traces on the environment. The major sources of anthropogenic pollutants in the Venice lagoon are agriculture, the industries of Porto Marghera, the sewage and urban runoff from the historical Venice and the glass works of Murano (Giusti, Zhang [2002]: 47; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 8). Even the use of fragrances in personal care products escalated by the overtourism have been shown to affect the waters of Venice (Vecchiato et al. [2016]). For the environmental research of the area, we mapped three places of interest at the beginning of our study: the artificial canals of the historical centre, the industrial Porto Marghera area and the Murano islands. The places were selected as they represent different kinds of anthropogenic contaminants.

The first selected area was historical Venice. The sediment in the canals of the historical city is heavily affected by the urban runoff. The



**Figure 5.** Aerial image showing the three places of interest in Venice Lagoon area. Image: NASA [Public domain].

ancient sewage system is still partly discharging into the canals (Vecchiato et al. [2016]: 1363). This contributes to the sedimentation and the canals therefore need to be dredged regularly. Sediments dredged from the canals have formerly been dumped into the sea together with industrial waste (Giusti, Zhang [2002]: 47). All potentially dangerous and polluting industry has been moved away from the main islands of Venice over the centuries (Basili, Paulin [2012]: 27).

A vast industry has been present in the second area of interest, Porto Marghera, since the 1920s. The petro-chemical industry has dumped an enormous amount of chemicals in the sea before regulation began in the 1980s. Heavy metals such as mercury, nickel, cadmium, chromium, and lead are present in the sediments (Wenning et al. [2000]: 132; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 25).

The third place of interest was the islands of Murano, with their history of glass-making since the end of the thirteenth century. Compared to the other industrial areas, the contaminants in its sediments are small, yet there is evidence of augmented levels of Fe, Mn, Zn, Cu, Cr, Pb, Ni, Ag and As (Giusti, Zhang [2002]: 47; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 25). Artistic glass processes involve the use of various pollutants, including metals (Rossini et al. [2010]). It has been detected that atmospheric emissions from

the glass industries also heavily affect the air quality of Venice and its vicinity (ibid.). Choosing Murano as one of the places of interest also allowed us to focus on the traces of activities related to our own craft practice.

#### THE INTERPLAY OF SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC METHODS

An essential part of the study was engaging in the practical transdisciplinary research processes in the local environment of the research, that is Venice. After reading the related environmental research and mapping places of interest, we proceeded to collect the soil and sediment samples, adapting methods of soil contamination studies. Multisensory engagement including vision, sound, touch and smell was prominent as we gathered and processed the soil. With the support of the environmental experts, we learned how to collect and handle the soil and sediments. Facing research methods that were unfamiliar to us, we were confronted with strangeness that made our senses more alert. Alongside the chemical analyses, we relied on the sensory analyses of the material as ceramic practitioners. There, our perception was informed by our knowledge of ceramic material chemistry.

One of the places we had decided to gather sediment samples, the Porto Marghera industrial area, was built in 1917 as an extension to the Port of Venice. The marshland was filled with sediment dredged from the Venetian canals. Over the years, the landfill was completed with industrial waste. Adding to the fact that the port area is founded on contaminated land, numerous studies indicate that industrial activity has since heavily polluted the air, soil, ground waters and the inner tidal canals (Zonta et al. [2007]: 529). In the course of our research, we learned that the contaminants in the Porto Marghera industrial area include not only heavy metals, but also organic chemistry, PAH, PCBs and dioxins (ibid.; Campaci [2019]). In fact, it is considered that this site neighbouring historical Venice, Porto Marghera, is now the second

most contaminated area in Italy (Campaci [2019]; Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]: 10).

We were informed that safety issues were of concern in collecting the samples and exposing the soil or sediment of Porto Marghera to the public in The Research Pavilion. Also, the reuse of dangerous waste could be done only by authorized enterprises and obtaining permits would be very difficult (Fuin [2019]). Understanding the gravity of the situation affected our perceptual experience of the environment, as will be explained further in the next chapters.

#### EXPERIENCING IN THE ENVIRONMENT IN MURANO

The problems involved in the aesthetic appreciation of damaged nature has been addressed by many aestheticians (Alcaraz Leon [2011, 2013]; Carlson [1976]; Leddy [2008]; Saito [2007]). As philosopher Maria José Alcaraz Leon (2011: 48) explains, a history of exploitation and degradation may frame a perceptual experience of damaged nature, but it does not determine whether it is positive or negative. Our observation was that the scientific data and the history regarding the contamination were important constituents of our experiences on the sites where we collected soil and sediment samples. One of our places of interest was Murano Island.

Via our professional networks in the context of glass-making, we had heard of beaches full of glass rubble and by following aerial pictures we found our way to Sacca San Mattia in Murano. By listening carefully to the locals, we learned that the island, like all islands named Sacca in the lagoon, is one of the many artificial islands of Venice. The shallow lagoon has been an ideal place to build islands from solid materials. Throughout history, officials have pointed out locations in the lagoon where residents and industries have been able to deposit their solid waste. The waste islands, complete with dredged sediments, have sometimes taken decades to form. Sacca San Mattia is built from solid waste from

the glass industry, domestic waste and dredged sediments from the sea and canals. However, depositing waste on the island has now been prohibited for decades, though in 2015, an entrepreneur was accused of dumping harmful waste on the location over nearly ten years since 2006 (Cecchetti [2015]).

In our working diaries, we have documented our experiences during the field trips. The visit to Murano was part of our first field trip to Venice, and it provoked the following thoughts:

*Google maps leads us to the uninhabited island behind the glass factories. We collect our first samples in a public area by the pavement by the dock. A path takes us to the barren land in the centre of the island past the vietato (forbidden) signs. As we walk, we can feel glass crunching under our soles. There are denser areas of glass and construction waste, broken tiles and small bits of concrete covered with soil and rough vegetation in its wintry state. Grasses, bushes, small trees and rabbits inhabit the island. The shoreline is a colourful combination of tile, glass, concrete, driftwood and plastic. Sand and stones are in the minority there. The shoreline reveals the cross section of the island [where the sea had eroded parts of it away and the various layers of material that made up the island were revealed]. We leave the land quiet. With small plastic bags filled with soil samples in our backpack, we find our way to the vaporetto discussing ... the ugly trash of the wasteland and the chemically harmful industrial waste that has leaked into the lagoon. (Riikka Latva-Somppi's working diary: February 9th 2019)<sup>2</sup>*

Aesthetician Yuriko Saito (2007: 57-58) states that aesthetic tastes and values of landscape place scenic wonders over marshes and wetlands. She also extends this idea to natural creatures, explaining that the commonly held aesthetic tastes raise visible, awesome and colourful creatures over those more nondescript and slimy. Furthermore, she applies the idea also to built environments and objects. The former statement can also be adopted when environmental damage is in question. We

<sup>2</sup> The diary excerpt was drafted in English but has been edited slightly for clarity.





**Figure 6.** The exposed layers in the shoreline of the island Sacca San Mattia, Murano. Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi.



**Figure 7.** Glass waste in Sacca San Mattia, Murano. Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi.

tend to react to visible or olfactory damage with more attention and emotion than to the harmful but unseen or not detected by smell. Unsightly litter easily creates more attention than invisible contamination. In Sacca San Mattia, the shoreline exposed layers of construction waste, plastic, soil and glass. The glass and the construction waste we encountered on the Muranese island is an environmental eyesore (ibid.: 214) and evoked strong feelings in us, although it is expected that the levels of contamination are small compared to those of Porto Marghera – the petro-chemical industrial area we have already discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter.

In the case of Murano, the sight was simultaneously alluring and repulsive. We were looking at a giant dump that had taken the form of an island. Broken glass pieces sparkled in the sun forming colourful blankets on the ground. Aesthetician Thomas Leddy discusses the aesthetic appreciation of waste in his essay *The Aesthetics of Junkyards and Roadside Clutter* (2008) utilizing Allen Carlson's (1976) concept of the thin and thick senses of the aesthetically pleasing. This could be one way to approach the controversial emotions that the aesthetic experience awoke in us. In the thin sense, we could experience the physical qualities of Sacca San Mattia, enjoying the island atmosphere, albeit a peculiar setting of “wild” nature

uncovering treasures from the history of the mecca of glass making. The thick sense would have to include also the scientific and ethical qualities and values that the environment expressed to us (Leddy [2008]: 3). Perceived this way, the appreciation of the island would have to be negative.

Leddy (2008: 4) explains further that we nearly never see things aesthetically as purely physical and without cultural associations. As naturally imaginative humans, we tend to always “see as”, that is, look at the world with an imaginative projection that builds on our previous knowledge and experiences mixed with our sensory perception (ibid.). Thus, it was impossible for us to meet the island only as an experience of nature. Our sensory experiences were informed by our knowledge as material makers, the historical and social background and the scientific knowledge we had gained during the process. We saw it as a kind of sad beauty (ibid.: 7) that involved disgust and shame regarding human behaviour yet simultaneously an appreciation of the handicraft tradition of glass making.

Also, the history of island-making as an intriguing example of human intertwinement with materiality added to the puzzle of our experience. Mäkelä's experience was not informed by glass practice. She was so emotionally disturbed by the waste that she was unable to walk on the beach that was filled with





**Figure 8.** The soil on the beach of Sacca San Mattia, Murano. Photo: Maarit Mäkelä.

glass and construction rubble. Latva-Somppi possessed knowledge of glass-making, including glass chemistry and glass history, and therefore knew that glass is like artificial stone – once melted, the metals do not dissolve. She found the scenery disturbing yet a captivating mixture of cultural and natural materiality. Simultaneously, we both felt an appreciation of nature taking over the wasteland. Rabbits and seagulls inhabited the island, which is the largest piece of unbuilt land in the Venice area. In July, when we returned, hardy tall Aaron's Rods (*Verbascum thapsus*) had taken over and were growing straight out of the glass-covered soil.

Contamination analysis was performed on the soil and sediment samples we gathered in Sacca San Mattia. Although the heavy metals in glass are practically non-solvent, the chemical analysis of the soil revealed that traces of the glass industry were clearly present in the soil of the island. Levels substantially higher than background values of lead, silver and arsenic, all common in the glass chemistry, could be detected. The concentrations were not regarded as extremely harmful for human health, but even lower concentrations affect other lifeforms. The shells of many marine organisms accumulate high heavy metal concentrations. In a study done around the Murano Islands (Giusti, Zhang [2002]), the levels of arsenic, silver and chromium exceeded the guideline



**Figure 9.** Collecting sediment samples near Porto Marghera in May 2019. Photo: Pauliina Purhonen.

values. Thus, our findings are in line with the earlier geological data gathered in the same area (see also Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä, Gündeşlioğlu [2020]).

#### GATHERING SEDIMENT AROUND PORTO MARGHERA

During our second fieldtrip, we were taken around the lagoon on a boat ride by a local fisherman in early May. The aim was to draw sediment samples from the bottom of the shallow lagoon in Murano, in historical Venice and at a water inlet leading to Porto Marghera.

The traditional view of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is strongly linked to the idea of landscape. The perception of landscape places the human subject in a position that distances herself from the environmental object (Carlson 2004: 66-68; Carrol [2003]: 371; Cooper et al. [2016]: 220). This visually centred view excludes textures, temperatures and smells, all of which can be said to be important components in appreciating nature (Carroll [2003]: 371). Following the idea of philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1964: 166), anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013: 72) discusses the remark “to see is to have at a distance” and comments that vision makes engaging with a thing or being possible without actually merging with it. He proposes that seeing opens a possibility to

immerse oneself sensorially whilst simultaneously distancing oneself. With hearing and touch at a close distance, the boundaries start to blur and finally dissolve all together, he writes.

The same happens with the olfactory sense. When the odour molecules enter our body, they practically and physically merge with us. Environmental philosopher and aesthetician Emily Brady (2003: 126) explains that, in the tradition of aesthetics, the mind – body dualism has resulted in the neglect of the senses, such as smell and taste, which are linked with the body. This has been backed by the claim that the experience of smelling is a sensation lacking the mental component of reflection and contemplation that are considered elemental to aesthetic appreciation (ibid.: 126, 143).

During the fieldwork in the lagoon, we identified an olfactory experience that supports Brady's view of multi-sensuous engagement. In contrast to the claims above, smells are aesthetically interesting, as they can have complexity, duration and structure as well as expressive qualities that revive memories and imagination (Brady [2003]: 126).

*We head to Porto Marghera and Fusina, taking the water highway by the railway... The waterway is first in the open sea and then it dives into a wide canal surrounded by a semi-industrial area, junk yards and abandoned buildings along the way... We turn left at the end of the canal and slowly start to enter the industrial area. Our view is blocked by a high rusty wall that looms ahead of us. Our boat seems very tiny as we look up at the tugboats with black bottoms and bumpers created to survive heavy impacts with the docks... We get to a more open area surrounded by the industrial plants and suddenly the air is filled with a thick chemical odour. It feels as though the air is full of all the furans, PCBs, PAHs that I have been reading about. The smell is really evident. It is not stinky, nor overwhelming, but a dense and heavy mixture of plastic chemistry and sea breeze. It lasts for a while – maybe five minutes – but then slowly changes to the comforting smell of the sea... (Riikka Latva-Somppi's working diary. May 6<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> The diary excerpt was drafted in English but has been edited slightly for clarity.

When studying the aesthetic dimensions of Venice, Ryyänen (2009: 118) presents water transport as one of the most aesthetically laden forms of everyday, a kind of sensual mobility where haptics and the slowly changing landscape merge with sounds and smell. Philosopher Wolfgang Iser (2003) describes his experiences with the open waters of the Pacific Ocean affording a deep connectedness with the world. Confronting vast waters beyond the human scale one feels small yet experiences a strong unity with the environment. Iser explains that in such experiences, one loses the sense of time and feels a sensory and worldly symbiosis that may help us reconsider the human condition (ibid.). Berleant (1992: 169-170), too, notes that when encountering the boundlessness of nature, we do so with awe and humility, in a perceptual unity of nature and human. We then are not looking at the environment, he continues, but being in it as participants. The participation is not only pleasant. When considering our boating experience, the feeling of connectedness in the sea environment was deeply disturbed by the particular sensory experience that made us very aware of human intertwinement with the natural environment.

#### THE ROLE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN OUR PRACTICE

Alcaraz León (2011) explains that some environmental aestheticians, such as Allen Carlson (2004) and Marcia Muelder Eaton (1997) claim that aesthetic appreciation of nature should be adequately informed by the scientific knowledge available, even insisting that aesthetic judgement cannot be correct unless we have both the perceptual experience and adequate scientific information of the natural object or environment in question. More traditionally, the Kantian view relies on disinterestedness, suggesting that aesthetic value can be seen as completely independent of other concepts. This view promotes the idea that aesthetic judgement of a damaged natural environment could be autonomous of its his-

tory of ecological interruptions (Alcaraz León [2011]: 42-43).

In our project, we wove together scientific knowledge of the environment and our creative practice. Our observation is that our aesthetic judgement was not independent of the scientific knowledge but instead tightly interwoven with it. Furthermore, the more we knew, the more complex the situation appeared. Determining what an adequate level of scientific knowledge would be to inform the aesthetic experience proved to be impossible in the light of our study. The scientific research done on the area is so vast that thoroughly understanding the complicity related to the contamination seemed an endless task. Furthermore, damaged nature may not look or smell damaged. This is often the case with contaminated soil and water. As already hinted at earlier, our perception was also informed by numerous discussions with environmental specialists, local glass and ceramic professionals, chemists and local residents. The more knowledge we gained, the more it penetrated our perception as we looked at the landscape. A prominent example was the understanding of how numerous islands around Venice have emerged. We slowly understood that this was a local practice of getting rid of waste. It was still possible to enjoy the picturesque and appreciate the cultural richness surrounded by the natural beauty; however, we became more aware of all the nuances that suggested an ecological disruption. The cognitive process did affect the way we saw, heard, touched and smelled the environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aesthetic appreciation of Venice is bound to the surrounding water (Ryynänen [2009]: 10). Venice's value as a cultural landscape was not diminished nor highlighted by the scientific data. Instead, the clarity of both the cultural value and environmental disruption provided a context in which to holistically reflect the intertwinement of the cultural and natural aspects of environment. It is bewildering and disconcerting to think of

the contamination hidden in the sediments surrounding the historical city. The common idea of environmental aesthetics is that aesthetic value is one aspect of a good environment (Naukkarinen [2011]: 90), but how does one deal with ruptures in the aesthetic experience caused by ecological disturbance? The aesthetic value of an environment is important, yet it is not autonomous of ecological and other values. Knowledge might not prevent us from experiencing damaged nature as beautiful, or change beauty into ugliness, but we believe it changes our perception. Alcaraz León (2011: 49) suggests that not only are ecological considerations connected with the aesthetic experience but that these two aspects may in fact render the overall experience more insightful. Here, it can be argued that our environmental awareness was influenced by the power of the aesthetic (Saito [2017]: 142).

Aesthetic experiences in nature are discussed in Jóhannesdóttir's thesis (2015: 137, 140) as the most primitive form of environmental consciousness. She explains that aesthetic experience can reveal our situatedness as embodied beings in "relation to nature, but it also situates us in relation to the society that we are a part of, the time and place and cultural conditions we are in". Understanding this relationality, through experience, carries a potential to evoke ethical obligations (*ibid.*). Whether the environment is natural or human influenced does not seem to be the key here. Walking on glass on an artificial island or being overwhelmed by a sudden chemical odour on a sunny boat trip expressed precisely this relationality to us. Jóhannesdóttir concludes: "standing at a vast stinking dump site ... can also be a very transformative experience that makes us aware of how all things are made from nature and yet thrown back at nature as garbage and pollutants that nature has a hard time re-integrating" (*ibid.*: 140).

In this article, we have discussed the multi-sensorial experiences we gained during the project. Design researchers Kristina Niedderer and Kathrine Townsend (2014: 625) state that craft is a discipline which is "distinct from art and design



**Figure 10.** Display of gathered and processed soil samples in the Research Pavilion. Photo: Tzuyu Chen.

through its reliance on the sensibilities of material and material understanding, on making and haptic perception as well as through its reflection on, and production of emotional values”. The power of craft lies precisely in its ability to create affect through materiality and embodied knowledge. Craft by nature is a contemplative practice. It is a time- and repetition-requiring practice in which the maker is intensely confronted with the materiality of her medium. It is also described as the ability to create one’s own materials, technique and knowledge (den Besten [2009]: 18-21). Craft resorts to the experience of the body (Mäkelä, Latva-Somppi [2011]: 57), which in this project corresponds with knowledge of the local environment and its contaminants.

In our research, craft was used as a method to gain knowledge concerning different materialisms in the current ecological state. We used scientific knowledge as a frame for our research in the Venice Lagoon area. Through field work, we gained an immersive experience in the environment. Our aesthetic experience was informed by environmental awareness and knowledge of ecological disruptions as well as the embodied and cognitive material knowledge of craft practitioners.

During our field work, we learned about the geological environment through scientific study. We went to the sites, dug and held the soil in our hands, often protected with plastic gloves, processed it in the laboratories and finally used



**Figure 11.** Maarit Mäkelä painting with slips made from gathered soil and sediment samples in the Research Pavilion in August 2019. Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi.

it as material for ceramic practice. Ingold (2013: 4) explains that when a craft practitioner works with materials, she engages with close and attentive observation and perceptual acuity. This kind of studying and learning from the inside carries a potential for change (ibid.). As Berleant (2012: 56) states, we are not outsiders but active participants and integral constituents of the environment “acting and re-acting as parts of its constant flux”. This thought was reinforced as we collected the local soil materials on site and took them into use for our craft practice, thus participating in the extracting and remaking of the geological strata.

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**Citation:** A. Alison (2020) L'artidesign: il dialogo fruttuoso. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 47-55. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11582

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## L'artidesign: il dialogo fruttuoso

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**Abstract.** In this paper, we would like to illustrate how the conception of a third genre, "artidesign", can represent: 1) The relationship between the cultural and conceptual contribution of craftsmanship and the consequent aesthetic and phenomenological implications of the size of the workforce in the three thematic areas of art, craftsmanship and design. 2) It should be a real system that is becoming concrete through the logic of design, production and consumption.

**Keywords.** Artidesign, useful arts, craft, matter, design.

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### 1. ESTETICA DELL'OGGETTO, ESTETICA DELL'ARTEFATTO

In un recente articolo, Juhani Pallasmaa (2019) descrive l'architettura come una forma d'arte e come frutto di interazioni sensibili. La sfera della visibilità, che ha dominato la teoria del progetto, cede finalmente il passo alla sfera dell'esperire. Il senso primario, spiega Pallasmaa, è alla base della nostra sfera conoscitiva, dove l'esperienza emozionale incide sulla dimensione razionale. Gli odori, i suoni identificano i luoghi e il compito dell'architetto non è più solamente quello di progettare lo spazio, ma diventa quello di progettare l'*esperienza sensibile* (Pallasmaa [2019]). È dunque lo schema interazionale che nell'epoca attuale ci suggerisce un quadro di comprensione progettuale. Questo schema potremmo ricollegarlo all'accesso dibattito<sup>1</sup> fra estetica, arte e design, che negli ultimi anni si è andato consolidando attraverso due punti fondamentali: 1) l'analisi fenomenologica dell'oggetto e 2) l'esperienza estetica del suo uso.

Loggetto moderno ha scoperto nel design la sua dimensione estetica. Ma il design, a sua volta, ha rivelato nell'oggetto moderno la dimensione culturale dell'esperienza quotidiana nel mondo (cfr. Vitta [2014:1])

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<sup>1</sup> Facciamo riferimento soprattutto agli ultimi dieci anni in cui la questione è stata spesso sollevata a partire dall'uso quotidiano-estetico dell'oggetto: Saito (2007); Brega (2012); Matteucci (2015); Di Stefano (2017); Iannilli (2019).



In quest'affermazione di Vitta, appare evidente che il rapporto vicendevole fra oggetto, dimensione estetica, design e quotidiano si avvale di una dinamica consequenziale. Attraverso l'assunto del design, l'oggetto assume una connotazione storicamente identitaria e fenomenologicamente estetica, ciò vuol dire che l'assunto teorico del progetto non è l'unico punto di partenza per interpretare il prodotto industriale. La stratificazione semantica del design, infatti, si basa sulla storia dell'utilizzo di un oggetto piuttosto che di un altro.

Storicamente tale paradigma s'innesta in Inghilterra durante la Rivoluzione industriale (1760-1830), con cui avviene l'incontro fra le arti applicate e il moderno disegno industriale, che acquista un suo statuto. Il legame col passato e ciò che è radicalmente nuovo danno vita a una vera e propria disciplina, quella del design, che si afferma fra la fine degli anni Venti e l'inizio dei Trenta. A questo proposito nascono una serie di termini come "handcraft", "Kunstgewerbe", "art décoratif", che indicano ancora un'incertezza sospesa fra passato e presente (De Fusco [2012]). Il design, in questo modo, diventa un ponte fra l'arte e la tecnica, spianando la strada a una vera e propria forma di cultura (Flusser [1993]): «[i]l design rappresenta il punto in cui convergono grandi idee che, derivando dall'arte, dalla scienza e dall'economia si sono arricchite e sovrapposte in modo creativo l'una con l'altra» (Flusser [1993]: 5).

Il passaggio a oggetto d'uso, a prodotto industriale, investe l'oggetto del ruolo di merce: l'oggetto dall'essere utile diventa finalmente funzionale (Vitta [2014]). L'oggetto acquisisce una propria aura e una connotazione estetica diventando così *oggetto di design*.

Il momento aurorale del design è stato quello in cui si è assistito per la prima volta all'emergere della questione estetica nel cuore di un processo produttivo di natura esclusivamente tecnica ed economica. I problemi sollevati dalla pura forma e dalla magia dell'*aisthesis* (la percezione, l'emozione, il gusto, la sensibilità, l'immagine, il sogno) si sono lentamente insinuati nella rigorosa logica della manifattura e del mercato, scardinandone gli antichi equilibri e rendendo problematico l'ac-

cenno kantiano a una *pulchritudo adherens* degli oggetti, «i quali stanno sotto il concetto di uno scopo particolare», distinto da quello vago dell'arte. La cosa identificata dapprima come «oggetto» e, in seguito, precisata nel suo ruolo di «oggetto d'uso», si è trasformata, alla fine, in «oggetto di design» (Vitta [2014]: 101-102).

A questo punto, il termine design abbraccia un ventaglio di possibilità, in cui il mondo della meccanica s'incontra con quello delle arti e dove l'oggetto, grazie all'utilizzo quotidiano, assume una connotazione sensibile.

Per design intendo qui il progetto formale degli oggetti d'uso quotidiano (*product design, furniture design, car design*), secondo una definizione che supera la nozione di *industrial design*, divenuta ormai troppo limitata, ma che esclude in pari tempo settori come l'architettura, la moda, l'artigianato o il *graphic design*, che richiederebbero altri strumenti di indagine. La precisione è indispensabile, giacché il termine "design" ha assunto oggi connotazioni molteplici, che hanno reso generico il suo significato e confuso il contesto nel quale esso viene impiegato (Vitta [2014]: 99).

Secondo Vitta, infatti, sarebbero necessari altri strumenti d'indagine per definire i limiti, le proprietà e i contesti di innumerevoli possibilità che non solo il disegno industriale offre, ma che si formano come corollari del rapporto fra arti applicate e meccanicizzazione. Di sicuro il rapporto che il design ha con l'arte lo pone nell'ambito di una "cultura materiale", distaccandolo dal ruolo di arte inferiore o di *gnoseologia inferior*, come provocatoriamente sostiene De Fusco (De Fusco [2016]). La nozione di arte applicata nasce alla metà del XIX secolo in relazione all'industria e rappresenta storicamente e teoricamente il rapporto che vige fra arte e industria. Il passaggio dall'*Arts & Crafts* (Morris [1883]) all'*industrial design* avviene grazie alla contestualizzazione della stessa applicazione dell'arte, dove il pratico prevale sull'estetico (De Fusco [2016]) e in cui il binomio valore-interesse prevale sull'interesse. Secondo De Fusco, nel concetto di applicazione, dunque, non è da sottolineare il demerito di un'arte minore, ma, al contrario, l'arricchimento dell'arte attraverso molti altri fattori,

proprio come nel caso dell'architettura: *Architecti est scientia pluribus disciplinis et variis eruditionibus ornata* (Vitruvio [1486-1488]: I, 1). Ciò vuole dire che, nel contesto di una "cultura materiale", s'intrecciano una serie di elementi, a partire dalle leggi della fisica, alle tecnologie dei materiali dove vige il dominio della *manualità*. Una facoltà che rappresenta la fase intermedia tra idealizzazione e realizzazione di un prototipo in cui la macchina non esiste e il "fatto a mano", dopo tanto demerito dopo l'introdursi della tecnica, riacquista finalmente valore. A questo punto, potremmo domandarci quanto ci sia dell'arte nel design e viceversa e, soprattutto, quali siano le molteplici manifestazioni di questo rapporto. Occorre, quindi, fare luce su uno degli elementi del dibattito estetico poc'anzi accennato.

Nel passaggio fra le arti applicate e il design e nell'implementazione estetica dello stesso, spesso viene lasciato in sospeso un *trait d'union* a nostro avviso fondamentale per un'analisi completa di questo processo: quello dell'*artigianato*. Esso riassume concretamente, già dai primordi, un primo approccio di esperienza sensibile con l'oggetto attraverso la semplice manualità, atto fondamentale sia nella lavorazione sia nell'utilizzo dell'oggetto stesso. Un coinvolgimento estetico egregiamente illustrato dalle teorie dell'*handcraft* o dell'*handmade*. Vedremo a questo proposito, che l'artefatto si colloca esattamente fra il prodotto diretto del fatto a mano e l'oggetto confezionato dal macchinario dell'*industrial design*.

Per approfondire ulteriormente quest'ulteriore passaggio che si frappone fra l'arte e il design è opportuno riprendere un discorso iniziato trent'anni fa da Filippo Alison e Renato De Fusco: quello dell'artidesign (Alison, De Fusco [1991]), in cui l'artigianato assume un ruolo di fondamentale importanza per la trasformazione artistica nel mondo del design. Vedremo, infatti, come la dimensione estetica dell'oggetto artistico s'inserisce nella sfera produttiva del design e come l'oggetto dell'artidesign rappresenti il risultato di un processo fenomenologico-estetico, quale la lavorazione manuale della materia.

Si tratterà, dunque, di riassumere due punti fondamentali di questa nuova dimensione: 1)

la teorizzazione parametrica capace di analizzare i rapporti che intercorrono fra arte, artigianato e design; 2) la concezione di un genere terzo: quello dell'artidesign.

## 2. ARTE, ARTIGIANATO E DESIGN

Nel momento in cui parliamo di artidesign, intendiamo come settori merceologici quelli del mobile e dell'oggetto d'arredo, che si collocano appunto fra l'artigianato e l'*industrial design*. Questa crasi, nasce dalla volontà di definire un campo che presenta una specificità progettuale, produttiva, di vendita e di consumo e che fa riferimento all'incontro fra arti figurative, artigianato e design (Alison, De Fusco [1991]).

*Per definire questo genere "terzo" riteniamo pertanto necessario rapportarlo ai concetti-base e alle trasformazioni proprie dell'arte, dell'artigianato e del design, assunti quali parametri, quali schemi teorico-pratici.*  
(Alison, De Fusco [1991]: 7)

Già un anno prima della teorizzazione dell'artidesign, nel 1990, in occasione dell'installazione organizzata dallo Studio Morra delle sculture di Bruno Munari sul lungomare di Napoli, De Fusco scrive:

*Il discorso sull'opera di Munari, classificabile forse in un genere "terzo" rispetto all'arte e al design non sembra ammettere una conclusione: tutto resta ancora aperto, moltissime idee e progetti ancora da realizzare; ogni esperienza ha il carattere di un'impresa iniziata e volutamente non portata a conclusione [...]. In ogni caso una cosa si può affermare con certezza: nella produzione di Munari c'è una tale ricchezza di invenzioni da alimentare un'intera scuola, chissà che questa, un misto d'arte, artigianato e design, un artidesign appunto, non sia quell'indefinito, mutevole, approssimato e pur tanto emblematico italian style.*  
(De Fusco [1990])

Quello dell'artidesign, è un vero e proprio manifesto che indica la stratificazione semantica (apporti culturali, storici, estetici, fenomenologici e simbolici) di una forma d'espressione e di pro-

duzione, che, pur appartenendo alla cultura materiale, assume una posizione storica in un preciso momento. In effetti, il suo sviluppo teorico partendo dall'arte figurativa e passando dall'artefatto, arriva all'oggetto d'uso quotidiano incorniciato nel campo identitario del design contemporaneo.

Volendo illustrare gli elementi teorici di questo "genere terzo", è d'uopo riprendere i parametri utilizzati da Alison e De Fusco per inserire e collocare l'artidesign nell'ambito di un'estetica dell'oggetto di consumo. Arte, artigianato e design saranno i primi tre sui quali ci soffermeremo. Ci dedicheremo poi, in un terzo e ultimo punto, al quarto parametro, quello dell'artidesign e sui suoi molteplici sviluppi.

### 2.1 Le trasformazioni dell'arte e l'approccio all'artigianato

Il divario concettuale fra *arte pura* e *arte applicata* ci riconduce all'avvento della tecnica che ribalta le condizioni dell'esperire sensibile. La condizione dell'applicazione subisce un'evoluzione e un distacco dal contesto consequenziale della produzione di oggetti d'uso in cui *l'idea del bello si connette al fare e non più al contemplare* (Argan [1965]). La scuola del *Bauhaus* è un esempio concreto di come il "fare" diventi una vera e propria didattica artistica. La pedagogia sociale suggerita dalle teorie froebeliane ed eseguita da Gropius, si avvicina sempre di più al mondo di chi manipola la materia e la trasforma in conoscenza. Il vero cambiamento, quindi, è nella nascita di un'*arte utile* che s'identifica, secondo Alison-De Fusco, con la *riproducibilità*: «[v]ale a dire con un'arte che, per esigenze tecniche e sociali, ha perduto l'aura e il valore datole dai capolavori unici e irripetibili» (Alison, De Fusco [1991]: 20). Nell'epoca della Rivoluzione industriale e subito dopo, la pittura come la scultura e tutte le altre forme artistiche, si traducono in vere e proprie esperienze che, come un filo rosso, hanno un progetto su cui costruirsi. Fortemente rappresentativa è l'opera di Rietveld, la poltroncina *Red and Blue* che attraverso una vera e propria realizzazione artigiana, non va vista unicamente come oggetto d'uso, ma come rappresentazione di un insieme di linguaggi *arti-*

*stici* tradotti nella forma di una poltrona (Alison, De Fusco [1991]). La contaminazione dell'*utilitario* rimane dunque fondamentale nell'influenza e nella formazione del genere terzo dell'artidesign in cui il design assume nuove forme come quella dell'artigianato.

### 2.2 L'artigianato: una sincronia estetica

Seguendo l'ordine dell'argomentazione di Alison-De Fusco, vorremmo mettere in rilievo nella dimensione estetica dell'artigianato una sua organizzazione teorica che può dividersi in tre fasi: 1) il progetto; 2) la produzione; 3) la socialità.

1) L'oggetto artigianale si realizza seguendo un progetto iniziale, ma che può modificarsi in corso d'opera. Ciò vuole dire che esiste una sincronia fra l'esecuzione e la lavorazione dell'oggetto stesso, come ad esempio nel mondo della lavorazione della ceramica e della soffiatura del vetro. A differenza del progetto di design che non ammette imprevisti, quello dell'artigianato, riassumendo ideazione ed esecuzione, fa sì che la dimensione estetica, non essendo pre-costituita, si auto-costituisca. La figura che rappresenta al meglio questo tipo di creazione è quella dell'artigiano-artista, che è richiamato alla messa in opera di oggetti di raro pregio e ritenuti eccezionali poiché al di fuori di ogni schema da produzione di massa (Dorfles [1963]).

A questo proposito, la dimensione estetica dell'artigianato, assume un ruolo di primaria importanza nel rapporto sensibile dell'artigiano con la materia. È dunque la materia a suggerire l'*operatività* nella creazione dello stesso artefatto.

2) Di conseguenza, la produzione artigianale avviene attraverso due passaggi principali: a) la lavorazione che sintetizza il rapporto vicendevole fra forma e materia; b) il ruolo e l'attività della mano. Questi due momenti possono ritenersi rappresentativi per un coinvolgimento sensibile delle parti, in cui quello dell'esperire diventa un punto di partenza apriori.

a) Per illustrare al meglio la questione di una materialità *sensibile* e di una propria fenomenologia estetica, all'interno del rapporto fra forma e

materia, vorremmo prendere in prestito il sistema logico-formale delle immagini, introdotto da Gaston Bachelard (Wunenburger [2003]). Bachelard, nella sua vasta teorizzazione della dimensione filosofica delle immagini, sancisce innanzitutto una netta demarcazione fra immaginazione materiale e immaginazione formale (Bachelard [1942]). Le immagini che definisce «materiali» rispondono a dinamiche di combinazione attraverso le quali gli elementi materiali si accordano. Acqua, terra, aria e fuoco rappresentano non solo gli elementi naturali, ma una corrispondenza nella realtà dell'immaginazione creativa.

*Col dar corpo e vita, coll'antropomorfizzare, direi quasi, alcune "entità" poetiche: acqua, fuoco, aria, Bachelard le ha rese analizzabili, non più come espressioni traslate di un'immaginazione letteraria, ma come protagoniste d'una vicenda reale. (Dorfles [1959]: 224)*

Bachelard, introducendo il concetto d'*imagination matérielle* come modalità attraverso la quale conoscere la realtà materiale, ci ricorda che l'immaginazione è una facoltà non di ri-produzione, ma di produzione. Vale a dire che il sistema d'immagini naturali s'incentra sulla forma di conoscenza della realtà poetica, laddove l'immaginazione è una vera e propria facoltà speculativa.

*Les forces imaginantes de notre esprit se développent sur deux axes très différents. Les unes trouvent leur essor devant la nouveauté; elles s'amuse du pittoresque, de la variété, de l'événement inattendu. L'imagination qu'elles animent a toujours un printemps à décrire. Dans la nature, loin de nous, déjà vivantes, elles produisent des fleurs. Les autres forces imaginantes creusent le fond de l'être: elles veulent trouver dans l'être, à la fois, le primitif et l'éternel. Elles dominent la saison et l'histoire. Dans la nature, en nous et hors de nous, elles produisent des germes; des germes où la forme est enfoncée dans une substance où la forme est interne. En s'exprimant tout de suite philosophiquement, on pourrait distinguer deux imaginations: une imagination qui donne vie à la cause formelle et une imagination qui donne vie à la cause matérielle, ou plus brièvement, l'imagination formelle et l'imagination matérielle. (Bachelard [1942]: 7)*

Nell'introduzione a *L'Eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière*, Bachelard elabora una netta demarcazione fra l'immaginazione formale e l'immaginazione materiale che potremmo accostare al rapporto vicendevole forma/materia. La seduzione che provoca la forma rimane in superficie, contrariamente alla materia che, caratterizzata da una determinata profondità, non è alla mercé di tutti. L'attività dell'immaginazione materiale è dunque strettamente legata a una *legge dei quattro elementi* (Bachelard [1942]), attraverso la quale si verifica la *rêverie*, ovvero l'attività che prevede la produzione d'immagini: «[i]n tal senso, le *rêveries* di Bachelard sono veri e propri "a priori materiali" dell'immaginario» (Franzini [2012]: 306).

*Pour qu'une rêverie se poursuive avec assez de constance pour donner une oeuvre écrite, pour qu'elle ne soit pas simplement la vacance d'une heure fugitive, il faut qu'elle trouve sa matière, il faut qu'un élément matériel lui donne sa propre substance, sa propre règle, sa poétique spécifique. (Bachelard [2005]: 10)*

A questo proposito, Bachelard consacra ai quattro elementi naturali cinque testi (Bachelard [1938]; Bachelard [1942]; Bachelard [1943]; Bachelard [1947]; Bachelard [1949]), attraverso i quali illustra una vera e propria *vita delle immagini* (Boccali [2017]), in cui troveremo, a un primo livello, la descrizione di una *rêverie* ordinaria e, a un secondo, quella di una *rêverie* poetica.

*L'immagine può essere pensata come una pianta «che ha bisogno di terra e cielo, di sostanza e di forma», irrigata dalla forza vegetante dell'immaginazione: l'asse immaginativo passerà precisamente per il punto d'innesto della cultura sulla natura. L'indagine deve dunque contrarsi al di sopra di tale nodo seguendo le ramificazioni dell'immaginazione materiale piuttosto che le sue radici, il cui livello di profondità richiederebbero un approccio strettamente psicoanalitico. Per farlo, Bachelard ricorre all'opera poetica che diventa sempre più essenziale per studiare la chimica onirica dell'immaginazione, la quale, attraverso un processo associativo e aggregante, riunisce sotto l'egida di una materia un grappolo di immagini». (Boccali [2017]: 92-93)*

Come precisa Boccali, Bachelard utilizza le immagini poetiche come composizione fondamentale di un sistema di *rêverie*, a partire dalla materia.

Quest'introduzione all'immaginazione materiale può far riscontrare come, nella produzione artigianale, si possa distinguere il valore dinamico della materia. L'immagine stessa dell'artigiano ispirato dalla materia, ci rimanda a un'altra figura bachelardiana, quella del *pétrisseur*, ovvero di colui che lavora la materia della *pasta* o della combinazione dei due elementi della terra e dell'acqua. Il cosiddetto *pétrissage* include la lavorazione manuale della materia attraverso un vero e proprio discernimento della realtà fino ad arrivare a un definitivo *cogito pétrisseur* (Vinti [1997]). La presa di coscienza del *pétrisseur* è propria dell'artigiano, dove il rapporto con la materia diventa non solo fondamentale, ma parte costitutiva di un'intera dinamica estetica inconscia.

*Que nous puissions ainsi séparer les joies du pétrissage et les joies du modelage, cela prouve, à nos yeux, que l'imagination matérielle correspond à une activité spécifique lente. Le pétrissage est, par certains côtés, l'antithèse du modelage. Il tend à détruire les formes.*  
(Bachelard [1949] : 93)

L'approccio materiale introduce una nuova forma di linguaggio estetico denotato anche dalla nostra esperienza sensibile attraverso l'utilizzo della forma, ovvero, degli oggetti: lo sguardo scorre sugli oggetti della nostra esperienza quotidiana. Sono forme dotate di qualità; le qualità sono prodotte dai materiali. La memoria, l'esperienza, l'intuizione cercano di estrarre da un catalogo mentale i nomi: legno, ferro, plastica... Il nostro rapporto con il reale passa attraverso questa capacità di dare dei nomi: vedere, toccare, assaggiare e, alla fine, riconoscere, cioè attribuire sulla base di questa conoscenza soggettiva e locale dei significati più ampi a loro volta sintetizzati in un nome [...]. Ogni cultura ha conosciuto simili significati del linguaggio delle cose (Manzini [1986]: 30). La materialità, quindi, influisce durante l'intero processo artigianale, includendo l'ideazione e la fruizione dell'artefatto.

b) A rendere più pregnante l'approccio sensibile della materia sono il dominio della mano e della manualità. La mano assumendo il ruolo produttivo dell'artefatto denota un'aura creativa irripetibile. In questo modo, l'unicità e la singolarità di un oggetto creato a mano, corrispondono al suo valore e alla sua qualità. A questo proposito, Bachelard soffermandosi lungamente sul rapporto fra materia e mano (Bachelard [1970]; Bachelard [1949]), definisce il rapporto fra artigiano e materia descrivendo l'operato dell'incisore.

Bachelard, grazie all'amicizia che lo legò profondamente a Albert Flocon, si avvicinò al mondo dell'incisione attraverso gli occhi del Surrealismo. Di quest'arte riuscì a descriverne gli aspetti più profondi:

*[p]er l'incisore la materia esiste, essa esiste immediatamente sotto la sua mano operante. Essa è pietra, lavagna, legno, cuoio, zinco... La carta stessa, con la sua filigrana, con la sua fibra, provoca la mano sognante attraverso una rivalità della delicatezza.*  
(Bachelard [1970]: 67)

La mano dell'artigiano è spinta ad agire contro la materia e quella del fabbro ne è l'esempio emblematico integrando i propri gesti all'oggetto prodotto (Boccali [2012]). Ciò vuol dire che la spinta creativa, quell'apriori estetico che appartiene all'opera, diviene parte integrante del processo attraverso l'emblematica combinazione di mano e materia.

3) Riprendendo la teorizzazione dell'artidesign, vorremmo, a questo punto, introdurre la terza dimensione artigianale: quella della socialità. Essa si può paragonare al binomio vendita-consumo della dimensione del design, in cui l'artigiano, così come il designer, crea una rete per proporre al pubblico il proprio artefatto. Nel caso dell'artigiano, la domanda prevale sull'offerta, poiché il richiedente, relazionandosi con l'artigiano, partecipa all'esecuzione di ciò che vorrebbe acquistare. In questo modo, la relazione con il committente diventa una vera e propria caratteristica o prerogativa della produzione artigianale.

### 2.3 Il design: un ulteriore contributo

L'*industrial design* si sviluppa attraverso quattro fasi: 1) il progetto; 2) la produzione; 3) la vendita; 4) il consumo. Questa quadrupla fenomenologia del design vuole descrivere quattro momenti di uno stesso processo che lega indissolubilmente l'uno all'altro come le quattro sezioni di un quadrifoglio (De Fusco [1985]). Nell'individuazione, però, di un genere terzo, utilizzare la classica interpretazione del design in cui gli elementi in gioco sono quelli della *quantificazione*, della *qualificazione* e del *basso prezzo*, ci aiuta a fare maggiore chiarezza (Alison, De Fusco [1991]).

Una tripartizione, dunque, dove: la quantificazione è il risultato storico dell'introdursi di nuove tecnologie, la qualificazione è la finalità funzionale-estetica del prodotto, il basso prezzo, il vantaggio dell'attività industriale. Essendoci lungamente dilungati sui primi due fra questi tre fattori, quello del basso prezzo è quello che ci sollecita maggiormente verso la concezione di un nuovo modo di intendere l'oggetto. In un contesto storico in cui il sogno dell'avanguardia era di vedere un'esteticità diffusa nel mondo degli oggetti quotidiani e la bellezza come il superfluo necessario (Alison, De Fusco [1991]: 87), quello del design è il primo caso di produzione industriale in cui il bello diventa un'"arte per tutti".

## 3. IL SISTEMA ARTIDESIGN

Come ultima tappa di questo ragionamento, vorremmo illustrare come si sviluppa l'artidesign, non solo fra le due dimensioni dell'artigianato e del design, ma anche in un contesto autonomo e autoreferenziale. Nella dimensione progettuale l'artidesign rinuncia alla sincronicità estetica dell'artigianato, in cui esecutore ed esecuzione viaggiano a pari passo. L'*autenticità* che abbiamo visto essere una delle finalità estetiche dell'*handmade*, non rimane nella dimensione dell'artidesign che interpreta il progetto come un atto preparatorio e storicizzante dell'oggetto stesso. «Il progetto dell'artidesign, oltre ad essere un elaborato tecnico, vuole anche dichiararsi un'espressione culturale, un

attestato della storicità del prodotto cui dà luogo» (Alison, De Fusco [1991]: 92). Mentre, rispetto al contesto progettuale del design, quello dell'artidesign, ammettendo delle modificazioni in corso d'opera e non affidando la produzione totalmente alla volontà sterile del macchinario, assume una posizione mediana fra artigianato e design.

Nell'artidesign, pur conservandosi valori progettuali e operativi di grande flessibilità (e qui sta il vantaggio sul design), si semplifica molta parte della gamma suddetta: il progetto è quasi totalmente definito, la tecnica quasi adattabile esclusivamente al prodotto da costruire (e qui sta il suo vantaggio sull'artigianato) (Alison, De Fusco [1991]: 94).

D'altro canto, nella costituzione di un genere terzo, l'indipendenza dell'artidesign sta nella logica propria di un "mestiere" che va al di là di un pluralismo enfatizzato. L'artidesign riesce a trovare un equilibrio rispetto alle svariate discrepanze che si evincono nell'arte, nell'artigianato e nel design.

Rispetto all'arte, infatti, esso si configura come una pratica che trasforma il piacere estetico in oggetto. Offrendo finalmente il senso estetico a ciò che si usa, l'artidesign è capace di realizzare e di tradurre gli aspetti rappresentativi, espressivi e persino contestativi dell'avanguardia artistica. Esso si avvale delle indicazioni dell'arte in generale che si traduce finalmente in oggetto.

Rispetto all'artigianato, l'artidesign non ricerca l'unicità del manufatto, ma una molteplicità commisurata, ciò significa che questo genere riesce a creare un equilibrio fra la qualità e la quantità. Stesso dicasi per la fase produttiva, in cui non si lavora più sulla commissione ma anticipando la domanda sull'offerta.

Rispetto al design, l'artidesign conserva l'interesse per il progetto, ma ne ammette la riserva in fase di esecuzione; adotta tutti i tipi di materiali, dai tradizionali a quelli più sofisticati; dichiarando la natura eterogenea delle parti, mira a un prodotto finale omogeneo.

Un articolato sistema di fattori estetici e tecnici rende l'artidesign una realtà non per forza innovativa, ma rintracciabile nella storia del design internazionale e nazionale. Nel contesto interna-

zionale, De Fusco (De Fusco [2012]) si sofferma sulla realtà della *Wiener Werkstätte* (1903), storica ditta austriaca fondata da Josef Hoffmann e che rappresenta la svolta fra arti applicate e design. Interessante è il connubio fra un'attività artigianale e la lavorazione meccanica, con il fine ultimo di prodotti di lusso che questa ditta rappresenta. A testimoniare questo rapporto, l'*Arbeitsprogramm* di Hoffmann e Moser (1905), in cui troviamo la volontà di stabilire uno stretto rapporto fra il pubblico, il progettista e l'artigiano e quella di produrre oggetti d'uso domestico e di qualità. I fattori, dunque, che si trovano alla base della loro filosofia sono: *in primis*, la funzionalità e, in seguito, l'armonia delle proporzioni e l'eccellente qualità della lavorazione.

Altri esempi da considerare nel panorama nazionale sono, secondo Alison e De Fusco, quelli appartenenti all'*italian design*, per citarne alcuni: Bruno Munari, Cleto Munari, Lino Sabattini, ma anche quelli di artisti-artigiani come nel caso di Annibale Bontadei o Riccardo Dalisi. In tutti questi casi, la formalizzazione della materia diventa l'occasione irripetibile di creare oggetti sospesi da qualsivoglia forma temporale. L'artidesign è l'esempio lampante di come le rigide regole del marketing, non sempre corrispondano alla realtà di una poetica-estetica dell'oggetto, che, invece, risulta preponderante rispetto a qualsiasi risvolto razionale o pre-collaudato.

In conclusione, l'apporto dell'artigianato nel genere terzo appare fondamentale come collante concettuale di un simbolismo estetico che nel suo apparente paradosso progettuale, dispone di un risvolto concreto come quello della creazione di un prodotto. In questo caso, l'artigianato introduce dei punti fermi rispetto allo sviluppo di una nuova forma di cultura materiale, in cui la sincronia estetica, il rapporto diretto con gli elementi e i materiali e l'interazione sensibile diventano tutti degli elementi che favoriscono il consolidamento di un vero e proprio sistema logico, formale, materiale, estetico e fenomenologico come quello dell'artidesign.

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**Citation:** A. Cazzola (2020) Art as Formative Technique: The Human Behaviour Between Art and Nature. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 57-72. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-10702

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Art as Formative Technique: The Human Behaviour Between Art and Nature

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**Abstract.** Reflections upon artistic activities as technique require an exhaustive examination in aesthetics. This paper provides an attempt to sketch out a possible connection between skills related to making art and aesthetic thinking. By means of phenomenological insight, the function of technique is pursued consistently with the considerations of technique as subordinate to a global performative skill or as its development into a general principle. This framework ends in accounting for the notion of craft and its relationship with art. Further, craft encompasses the scope of technique in all its manifestations, since the boundaries of art are broadened to reach the most comprehensive outlook of human activities. While in Formaggio this task is accomplished through the idea of artistry, Pareyson expounds the features of an art theory within the unitary notion of formativity. Finally, the function of technique accounts for an ethical implication of human doing.

**Keywords.** Artistic Technique, Dino Formaggio, Luigi Pareyson, Phenomenology, Philosophy of Technics.

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper primarily reflects upon crafts and the philosophy of technics and refers to two of the most distinguished philosophers who have reflected on this theme, i.e. Luigi Pareyson and Dino Formaggio. Their philosophy of technics chiefly involves reflections on the features of art and consider art's scope; furthermore, their philosophy considers what foregrounds the emergence of art, and finally, they reflect if art involves a special relationship with crafts. However, if we confine ourselves only to artistic inquiry, we would not be able to answer these problems without ruling out another relevant feature of art, namely aesthetics as sentience and behavioural acting. This feature introduces acts such as mimesis and creativity that concur to shape our relationship with the world, into an artistic sphere. From the different relationship between artistic and aesthetic facets, the critical stance of this paper springs up. The role of technique

allows for the analysis of these issues: Pareyson would make out *savoir-faire* as related to artistic doing<sup>1</sup>, since form is, as we shall see, an organic composition where both parts and the whole comply with each other. An artwork which stems from the artistic doing is still a lively ensemble that reveals a peculiar method of shaping within itself. However, Formaggio makes the technical side of human activities more significant without dismissing subjective facets of form-shaping in regard to the dynamic quality of creation. According to him, technique is not a demanding feature, but a lively activity whereby human beings confer new meanings on their relationship with the environment and the shape of community life.

Pareyson and Formaggio agree that the many-sided arrangement of artworks encompasses the shaping method of form: this should be found within the process of artistic shaping by taking into account, in particular, skills and habits of know-how. This logic requires that the solutions suitable for expression should originate from an opposition between the material and the method of shaping<sup>2</sup>. Artwork reveals itself as a singularity, which discloses its uniqueness in a peculiar configuration; in order to sketch out the relationship between the artworld and the shaping method involved in every human activity, Pareyson devises

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<sup>1</sup> Artistic doing is conceived as a creative action entrenched in social practices and traditional skills.

<sup>2</sup> This logic allows reckoning a unique feature merging art and human activities, since every act, for Pareyson, involves operating with forms, as they are products and tools of a human spiritual activity that shapes reality within a particular interpretation. Form is conceived as the outcome of human acts and means «product», which is created by the hermeneutical device of interpretation. Formativity encompasses all human activities: it is the pattern of every human act (from thinking to making artworks). As Pareyson stresses, moulding implied by formativity entails doing (in general terms) along with inventing the way of doing. Since every act implies forming and producing, moulding entails reflections on the way in which an activity is accomplished. As regards aesthetics, moulding is represented by the tentative shaping process of artworks (Pareyson [1954]: 22-24; Pareyson [1966]: 110-112).

a common and elementary faculty of knowledge by focusing on aesthetics as art theory (Vercellone [2018]: 95-98), whereby the first source of knowledge ensues a kind of intuition which is a figurative way to express the definiteness of impressions (Pareyson [2009]: 98-109). Since intuition is not merely reproductive but a figuration, namely transfiguration of impressions, the purport of aesthetic intuition is rigorously separated from artistic making but stands, as it were, for its setting. If transfiguration means to form and to figurate, the aspect of the expression entailed in it qualifies as a spur of interpretation. Interpretation pours onto all activities in so far as it qualifies as an intertwinement between activity and receptivity (Modica [1980]: 101-105; Pineri [1994]: 549-551; Rosso [1980]: 63-67).

Formaggio primarily charges artistic technique with the eidetic nature of a phenomenological method which subordinates to itself the aesthetic facet of experience (Formaggio [1962b]: 245-246, 307-309). The eidetic method springs from the aesthetic facet so as to blend a pre-categorical sphere that figures out a relationship with materiality and constitutes the setting of phenomenological investigation on artistic experience. Intuition borrows out of a comprehensive framework including an encompassing concern with sensibility and the genetical look over the formation of artistic practices (Pareyson [1966]: 8-11; Pareyson [2009]: 348-356). The relationship between tradition, within which artists are submerged, and the critical reshaping of it involved in every activity disclose an outstanding concern with aesthetic experience, which provides the comparison with the qualitative depth of the world and involves the relationship with morality, meant as the artists's responsibility of acting within a community (Banfi [1988]: 145-149; Scaramuzza [1981]: 354-355). Whereas for Pareyson the artistic facet of the theory of moulding overwhelms the aesthetic quality of intuition as a general means of interpretation, Formaggio's reflection revolves around a broad notion of artisticity which, though split into two different but complementary fields, entails an extended notion of body mimicking the

shaping force of nature (Franzini [1995]: 111-113; Neri [1995]: 132-133).

#### CRAFT ON THE THRESHOLD OF ART

Formaggio's and Pareyson's theories share a common feature to the extent that they expound the turn of craft in art. This turn occurs every time the mastering of the rules of a specific activity is so entrenched in artist's skills that they translate the theorizing on the formative chances immanent to the material. Art reaches its highest and purest form by coping with the material without relinquishing an active project ability (Pineri [1994]: 545-548). What Formaggio means by artistry is the attempt to sketch out the infinite gradation between handicraft and art while admitting the comprehensive facet of technique, which encompasses the totality of human activities that assign a value to their doing (Formaggio [1986]: 34-35). All meanings attributed to art concur to shape a large scope of values that pertain to human life and encompass the wide range of activities that give rise to any formation. Artistry aims properly to represent this new income by disregarding an overt aesthetization of life while salvaging the role of technique in every activity. By means of technique, every action can initiate fruitful relationship with the world things and only in this encounter, Formaggio argues, even the humblest activity can participate in the setting of values, since it actually exposes the uncertain cohesion of various elements within a successful form (Formaggio [1991]: 176-180). While Formaggio acknowledges significant gradation between the everyday craft activity and the work of art, which, nonetheless, shares with the first the basic import of technique, Pareyson, though, cannot help but reckon the deep linking between the material import of technique and the perfectibility of artworks.

The importance of *savoir faire* in making art is crucial even though the conscious handling of the material is not enough in order to originate a work of art. Therefore, the introduction of han-

dling rules in the practice, along with the ability to conceive solutions for the formative chances coalesced in the material, is the only way to pass through the distinction between craft and art (Pareyson [1954]: 160-163). If expertise makes up the core of tradition, it must be related to the formative style of artist's intentionality (Pareyson [2009]: 307-318). The same tenor may be ascertained in Formaggio's reflections on technique: while, on the one hand, technique in industry is committed to a proper need, it is, on the other hand, committed to art as making because it supports artists in the achievement of a complete and successful form (Formaggio [1962b]: 244-246; Formaggio [1953]: 188-193; Formaggio [1991]: 181-183, 192-193)<sup>3</sup>. The role of technique in art is to find and put in practice solutions suitable to the formative aim and to the material at disposal. In this regard, completion of form and completeness of form are two sides of the same coin. Whenever the work is completed, it entails the meanings conferred by the formative aim and by the style purported by the artist, which frees the technical ability in its potential, in its purest form along with intentionality – as Pareyson stresses. As a result, all aesthetic values are subordinated to an overall technical skill which turns itself into art, whereby social meanings and values command the aesthetic facet since intentionality cannot but entail the functional activities that give form to the material; the dominant intentionality is strictly related to the interplay of technique and artistic making and derives from the intertwinement between communicative effort and community life (Formaggio [1962b]: 228-232; Minazzi [2018]: 270-273; Scaramuzza [2015]: 21-25; Scaramuzza [2018]: 297-299).

Pareyson stresses the importance of materiality as physical substance that initiates the dialectics between the independence of the material and the interiority of the artist. At the same time, he acknowledges the interplay of craft and

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<sup>3</sup> Technique is strictly intertwined with project ability: cf. (Formaggio [1990]: 91-95; Franzini [2015]: 128-131; Mazzocut-Mis [2015]: 49-50).

art by sanctioning their respective autonomy: whereas the technique of craft and art entails the independence of the material within the concrete activity, the significance of materiality is ascertained in so far as the artist detects its potentialities. Inspired by the concern with technique, Pareyson aims to go beyond the sharp distinction of theory and practice by reassessing their constitutive mingling in the constraint of the material accounted by the artist's intentionality (Pareyson [2009]: 175-178). Formaggio also envisages the significance of materiality so as to make it the linchpin of artistry. He stresses that the division between technical lead and artistic making is supported by an effective technique filled by a kind of intentionality dealing with signs and gestures rather than ruling norms (Formaggio [1953]: 298-301; Formaggio [1981a]: 108-110). This practice grows along with the formation of artwork, which may be envisaged as successful as long as artist's intentionality copes with the chances entailed by the material (Mazzocut-Mis [2015]: 49-53). The work and the projectivity implied by the handicraft activity are the inner core of artistic intentionality, which begins ever anew (Formaggio [1953]: 308-311; Formaggio [1981a]: 118-121).

It is noteworthy that the turn of technical ability into artistic praxis is recorded by the supervenience of gesture intentionality over the informative one (Chiodo [2010]: 170-173). It cannot be underestimated the importance of functionality and of craft activities: they are, though, strictly related since function is understood as the way of translating the aesthetic concretion into the symbolic meaning of shared traditions; the form stands for the technical and social meanings related to the technical skills that contribute to shape the work of art. The decisive function of craft institutes the relationship between technical skills that confine themselves to work and the constitution of meanings that concur to shape a community life (Formaggio [1962b]: 217-222). Artistry is related to the idea of pure technique as an establishing act which completes and grants the successfulness of artworks while depending on a universal activ-

ity<sup>4</sup>, which is nothing but the unity of internal and external technique<sup>5</sup> overlapping with the notion of *forma formans* expounded by Pareyson, which is discussed in the next paragraph.

#### THE MOULDING ACT OF ARTISTIC MAKING

Pareyson maintains that every form of activity expressed by human spirituality<sup>6</sup> is tied to specific rules that drive the shaping-method for non-artistic activities to a channel proper for a definite and specific activity. Instead, art represents the most important human activity, since its scope encompasses human existence on the whole. Yet, the skillset that is entailed by artistic doing shapes the field proper to art. In order to comprehend these claims, we must remind ourselves that for Pareyson human spirituality implies a connexion between the individuality of a person, which is the outcome of a process, and an ontological pattern retrievable by interpretation, which human beings innately do. Pareyson's spiritualism follows the existentialist framework since art is one of the many activities of human beings, but it overcomes its involvement in the finitude of human existence. He tries, as it were, to square the pluralistic range of historicism and existentialist philosophy

<sup>4</sup> An important source for the delineation of artistry, along with *Kunstwissenschaft*, which will be considered below (see *infra*, *The Phenomenology of Technique*), is Étienne Souriau's aesthetics. Formaggio, in his consistent analysis of Souriau's thought (Formaggio [1953]: 178-195), acknowledges his attempt to define a universal method of constituting things (artworks) as unity of material and form but complains about his inadequate attention to the techniques entailed by artistic making. Cf. (Mazzocut-Mis [2015]: 47; Scaramuzza [1995]: 140-142; Touboul [2017]: 67-73; Wiame [2017]: 79-83).

<sup>5</sup> See *infra*, *The Phenomenology of Technique*.

<sup>6</sup> In Pareyson's philosophy 'spirituality' is related to the personality of human beings for in every activity humans act and create according to their unique style (Ciancio [1992]: 31-34; Corbetta [1988]: 64-65; Cuffari [1981]: 116-118; Morpurgo-Tagliabue [1993]: 9-12; Pareyson [1954]: 28-31; Pareyson [2009]: 185-188). As regards aesthetics, artists shape artistic forms thanks to an exclusive shaping mode, which is peculiar to every work of art.

with an original conception of ontological personalism, where the existentialist commitment to the historical finitude of human beings coexists with the idea of a relationship with history and nature as embodied by a correlation between truth and interpretation<sup>7</sup>. Thus, interpretation becomes the main hermeneutical device through which human beings shape their world for «the presence of Being can be configured only historically, and Being has no other way to appear or place to reside but in historical forms. Being resides there in its *inexhaustibility*, that is with a *presence* that makes these forms its only way of appearing, yet with an *ulteriority* that allows none of them to contain it exclusively» (Pareyson [1971]: 37). As Ferraris (2011: 144-145) maintains, Pareyson's connection with existentialism does not enable him to concede a unique world to artworks, since art is, like all human activities, an expression of existence.

For this reason art is not, properly speaking, an outstanding activity which everyone else must follow. However, art is construed by Pareyson as the perfect example of moulding (Ferraris [1996]: 376-378). This conception ensures the legitimacy of artistic doing by adopting the notion of τέχνη within a broad spectrum of aesthetics. Thus, actual activity influences theoretical reflections. That is to say, theory can only account for the constraints of a tangible doing. Moreover, theoretical activity shadows the actual expressive process of a specific personal project. This idea integrates the intertwinement between theory and practice (D'Angelo

[2018]: 47-49). Pareyson regards art as a pattern that is common to every activity in so far as he relates the idea of τέχνη to artistic shaping; pure moulding is the linchpin on which art relies. Nevertheless, this feature as such do not sound regarding other activities, as if it ascribed aesthetic value to a formal aestheticism that would be an overarching feature which discerns amidst art and other activities. This view preserves the overall rationality of thought and ends up in revising it while being committed to moulding.

Instead, according to Pareyson, if it is true that every human activity springs from moulding, art represents the perfect example of moulding, since art shaping implies creating within an inventive style of (artistic) doing (D'Angelo [2018]: 50-52; Pareyson [1954]: 275-276). As a result, every project in the artists' mind does not purport its significance ahead of factual inquiry. Only after a successful expression, Pareyson argues, artists "know" what they had to do (Pareyson [1954]: 60-62). If it is true that art does not exist without human spiritual activity arranging it, then moulding gains a proper significance in art making, nonetheless. As a result, notions like 'form' and 'idea' encompass anti-dogmatic meaningfulness. The distinction between forming and shaping objects is assumed by the traditional idea of creation as well as by the *a posteriori* conception of the meaningfulness of a form. The same distinction is due to the overall division between factual scrutiny and rational thought because the former is tied to the actual material and the latter to project design.

The solution for this conundrum is the notion of the cue. It is the sketch of a project, which may come up suddenly or even after a long-training exercise; its guidance leads the artist's expertise through a pathway of impulses that an experience offers to artists. Taking form implies an establishment of a form which is involved with impulses leading the shaping process. This convention finds its *raison d'être* in the action of form – even before its completeness as a result of its success – by confirming the independence of the cue from artist's intentions: form is what needs to be expressed

<sup>7</sup> Ontological personalism maintains that people can mould their spirituality – since they take up a formative process of constituting their personality, see note 4 – within an original relationship with Being (Antonelli [2017]: 91-94; Corbetta [1988]: 60-62, 74-77; Di Nino [1999]: 42-46; Garulli [1973]: 241-243; Modica [1980]: 111-119; Perniola [1997]: 178-179; Tilliette [1996]: 728-733). Therefore, they cannot help but interpret otherness, namely what overcomes human finitude. Otherness, as regards this paper, should be conceived as history (traditional habits of action) and nature (environmental scope). Each person is, as it were, a work, namely a unique and original form which revises the relationship with otherness repeatedly.

according to the tension between personal projects and cues (D'Angelo [1983]: 62-67; Rosso [1980]: 75-79). The balance between cues and an artist's aim is represented by the notion of *forma formans* (forming form), which implicates that expression is always joined to an artwork during its completion (Antonelli [2017]: 82-88; Pareyson [1954]: 75-76; Pareyson [1966]: 20-24)<sup>8</sup>.

Since an artwork is bound to a norm which is uncovered throughout the process of creation, the feature of its success and the related idea of its completeness endorse the overall constitution of art as an organism in which projects coexist with impulses prompted by the everchanging condition of making art (Pareyson [1966]: 65-68). The form does not only bind success and completeness to a peculiar shaping but accounts for the impulses of a cue, which the subject by enjoyment regards as artistic completeness. The same trend aims to convey form into a perspective focus, which cannot be regarded as formal aestheticisms like a pattern, but as the linchpin which leads the process of subjective shaping. These notions allow for assuming that the world of art is prone to choice. Further, once form has gained its finality and completeness, it can be put under scrutiny by analysing the process where the impulses and the *forma formans* have to pass through in order for the artwork to take up an expression. *Forma formans* coincides thus with the process of making art and warrants the formation of artworks.

In this regard, we could even merge the perspective of expression and personal creation since form is acquired in a teleological way, notwithstanding the everchanging condition of motifs and traces, and the personal projects that have to confront a cue. The composite nature of artworks binds the analysis of enjoyment to the appreciation of the guiding motifs that have led to final-

<sup>8</sup> The analogous to *forma formans* in Formaggio's reflection is represented by *trans-morfosi*, which qualifies artistic making as a process where the import of technique is related to the changing project. The imaginative capacity of concreting meanings within bodily shaping is subjected to a constant refiguring; cf. (Formaggio [1990]: 127-130; Mazzocut-Mis [2018]: 287-293).

ity. Therefore, artists can also view their work in retrospect, which reveals the leading paths that have directed personal projects. It is worth noting that Pareyson, despite the intertwinement between the making of an artwork and the development of expression, has engaged mostly upon the techniques of handling disposable material, where artists find many cues to start a particular project. Additionally, Pareyson is concerned with the techniques that control the configuration of artworks and balance the impulses of the cue in the process of creation. Thus, Pareyson enhances the expectation related by him to a feature of intentionality that pertains to spiritual life as moulding (Pareyson [1954]: 81-83)<sup>9</sup>.

Pareyson, then, expounds the essential features of artistic practices that introduce the creation of art and allow for sketching out a phenomenology of artistic technique. To the extent that he encompasses the value of moulding in art and its valence of purity to the field of human spiritual activity, his aesthetics accounts for activities occurring before the process of art-shaping. Since the constitution of form overlaps with art-making, it is difficult to split these phases into different practices. In fact, once artists have extracted a cue from a cluster of potential hints, these phases concur as artists make the decision to propel the guiding cue, which has caught their attention into their single focus of creation. This view for Pareyson re-enacts the qualitative features of experience: he acknowledges both unexpectedness and patience and supposes their mutuality by drafting three central practices that are involved in the phenomenology of moulding (Di Nino [1999]: 23-25; Pareyson [1954]: 84-91; Pareyson [2000]: 70-72; Pareyson [2009]: 178-182, 324-330), namely practice, the search for a formative intention of rescuing material from indifference by granting material practical availability, improvisation, inspi-

<sup>9</sup> The remark on intentionality makes sure that the sphere of art follows the existential perspective within which art is understood: on the one hand, it must spread over the aesthetic field, since the exemplarity of art encompasses the scope of moulding; on the other hand, artworks are solely committed to a norm proper to them.

ration, whose tasks (the priority of personal activities within a commanding notion of creation and the primacy of subjective spiritual activity) are envisaged and criticised by Pareyson, who blends subjective and objective features in a self-modifying act occurring throughout the artistic process. Inspiration is nothing but the subjective standpoint of the process consisting between material and a project, which is put forward by a subject, who acknowledges the productive issue of a cue whereby Pareyson mingles human spirituality and the activity of moulding forms. Through this fruitful encounter, efforts are always scrutinized by a norm and expound the successfulness of artworks by giving free rein to the organicism of the shaping process, represented by the unity between form and expression. The unitary aim of the cue, which leads the concretion of the artwork, the constitution of the form within the shaping process, the interplay between expectation and practice, and finally the tensions between inspiration and real objectivity are all facets of a unique artistic and human activity.

#### THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF TECHNIQUE

The phenomenology of artistic doing is akin to the objectivist turn of phenomenological aesthetics, as far as both are focused on the aseity of the artistic object, whose features defy blatant naturalistic views. Hence, we shall focus on the relationship between the first phenomenological aesthetics and a kind of reflection on the phenomenology of artistic doing. This effort might not only explain the relevance of the phenomenological movement in reflections on art, but also brings out the importance of the phenomenology of pure moulding which we have appreciated in Pareyson's thought. What finally will be shown is the cohesion of the theories just exposed under a coherent conception of artistic and human doing. The first step in this approach involves Dino Formaggio's works, who has deeply latched on to artistic practice.

The first and most important issue we must provide is the distinction between aesthetic and

artistic facets: this outlook can be regarded from two different perspectives, either by reckoning their relationship in the same field of artistic creation, or by attributing the former to the qualitative means of experience, especially the perception of artistic objects, and the latter to artwork creation *strictu sensu*, which does not only include artistic creation, but also the expression of enjoyment in artworks. This outcome is blatant where an aesthetic theory is laden with realistic stances: for example, Ingarden's conception of artwork is bound to subjective experience, which implies a concretization, an actual establishing of intentional meanings that must be uncovered, but his anti-historicist viewpoint, according to which the intersubjective identity of artworks is separated from concrete enjoyment, maintains that the meanings entailed by the strata that constitute each work of art would subsist even if nobody enjoyed them<sup>10</sup>. This conception establishes the difference between aesthetic perception and artistic autonomy. Scaramuzza (1976: 66-68) rightly contends this view in Ingarden's philosophy because the intentionality of meanings constituting the layers of artwork, related in an anti-historical perspective to the creative acts of the artist, compels us to consider that self-sufficiency lies only in the material substrate, whilst both the artistic and the aesthetic facets related to it dwindle (Ingarden [1975]: 260-263; Zecchi [1978b]: 87-89; Zecchi [1983]: 234-235). Rather, these features might be matched, since aesthetics may involve both artistic creation and the perception of artworks as objects.

By taking into account the artistic facet, we recognise that artistic creation implies relevant features of technique. Technique does not encompass a poor naturalistic understanding of objects and operates in connection to human activity – this state of affairs chimes in with the anti-psychological stance inherited from the phenomenological tradition up to Edmund Husserl. The

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<sup>10</sup> The distinction between the ontological concern with works of art and enjoyment of them makes sure that the intersubjective identity of works cannot encompass their meaning.



critique led by Husserl to this framework, which involves the distinction between the psychological influence on the process of thought and the logical meaning of thought content encouraged some philosophers (e. g. Moritz Geiger, Roman Ingarden) to withdrawal from analysis of impressions and feelings raised by artworks so as to focus on the objectivity of the field of aesthetics, where the artistic facet of enjoyment is related to the aesthetic structure of artworks, and basically to the aesthetic object *per se*. This dogma is the source of the objectivist turn of phenomenological aesthetics (Scaramuzza [1976]: 16-17, 40-42, 62-63, 171-179; Zecchi [1978b]: 83-85). A specific relationship with this point may be envisaged with Pareyson's claim according to which a cue affects artistic behaviour.

Dino Formaggio's thought deals with a second difficulty, i.e. the dilemma between aesthetic and artistic facets, since he relies on technique by withdrawing from the aesthetic scope of contemplation and the importance of artistic doing and human activity. Additionally, he enhances the significance of artistic facets in regard to the objectivist worry about artistic objects considered in their social relationship. The affinity with the so-called *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* ("General Science of Art"), theorised by Max Dessoir and Emil Utitz, is expounded by Formaggio, as he focuses (Formaggio [1953]: 198-216; Formaggio [1958]: 235-246; Formaggio [1981c]: 15-17) on this movement, which helps to blur the distinction between beauty and practice (Formaggio [1953]: 203-205): he expresses his reserves on the psychologist interpretation of creative acts implied by the arrangement of artwork and acknowledges the limits of Dessoir's concept of the artistic facet, which is affected by external factors (such as religious, social and moral aspects) that interrupt the practice of making art (Formaggio [1958]: 257-259; Perucchi [1981]: 307-309; Pinotti [2015]: 93-97). The concern with technique seems neglected, but Dessoir acknowledges the importance of technique for he criticises inspiration as it involves an exclusive concern with subjective feelings. Nonetheless, Dessoir states the significance of the psy-

chological analysis of feelings; Formaggio identifies the limit of Dessoir's framework, as long as it grants a psychological analysis of an intersubjective constant in the experience of particular subjects. At the same time, Dessoir explicitly acknowledges the power of the material's availability.

Furthermore, the concern with *Seinschicht* ("existence layer", which is an expression coined by Utitz) conflates the remarks on material constraint and subjective involvement in the shaping of aesthetic value and material needs: it implies a wide range of possibilities regarding the comparison between artists' efforts and objective necessity. Artistic making involves, as Utitz stresses, a certain mode of *Gestaltung*, which is the German translation of the term «formativity», which implies for Utitz a conception of the artwork as a concretion provoking an enjoying and expressive experience (Formaggio [1953]: 204-205)<sup>11</sup>. Utitz identifies a norm proper to technique, but he maintains that it is secondary to material constraint, as he turns his attention to the relationship between material and the proper means for its expression. Therefore, experience is conceived as a continuous balance between human effort and reality by also pointing out the role of handicraft, which is a constant reference for Formaggio. Instead, Utitz is concerned with emotional expression or feelings that an object provokes in the subject; as a result, he construes technique as a temporary means of granting an artwork its completeness.

The interpretation which Formaggio endows *Kunstwissenschaft* denotes the originality of his thought regarding technique, where, according to Utitz, the experience itself was restricted to a relationship between aesthetic values and objects, as a consistent process of constituting artworks. Thereby, the legitimacy of technique dismisses both systematic analyses purported by the psychological

<sup>11</sup> With respect to Pareyson's theory of formativity, it ought to be noted that it does not only account for the shaping process of the artwork and its relationship with material but also discloses an outstanding implication with ethical concern, which is considered in the conclusion of this paper.

conception of acts and the casualty to which technique is condemned in Utitz's proposal.

The constitution of technique within experience, which is indistinguishable from it, grants Formaggio the ability to configure a dialectical phenomenology of artistic creation, since technique, as a cluster of accrued norms<sup>12</sup>, is identified with the process of constituting artworks<sup>13</sup>. It is now understandable why Formaggio, under the Hegelian influence, maintains that art is a process of achievement via technique, since the aim is valued, namely the expression of value according to a particular interpretation of material (Franzini [2015]: 121-123; Scaramuzza [1986]: 189-197; Scaramuzza [1995]: 138-140). Moreover, the subject who shapes the material into a definite form encounters social influences of tradition and technique. Technique is a development of environmental processes since Formaggio considers the connection between handicraft and artistic technique. Thus, technique encompasses a wide range of activities, which reminds us of the meaning of moulding – which holds true for all human activities – established by Pareyson, who explicitly recognises the relevance of crafts, since he acknowledges the operative quality of acts entrenched in tradition (Pareyson [1954]: 64-65; Pareyson [1966]: 28-32; Pareyson [2009]: 279-288). It is clear that this doctrine, although it does not reject research done on aesthetic experience, looks mostly upon the structure of artwork, not as much into its internal cohesion, like Ingarden does, but as into the intersubjective conditions of creation. As a result, he does not subscribe to Ingarden's reflections on a phenomenological aesthetics, which considers the phenomenology of enjoyment, and chooses the creative and operative side of artistic autonomy. He also split tech-

nique into two different but complementary facets: an internal technique and an external one (Formaggio [1953]: 321-323; Formaggio [1981a]: 132-135). The first one involves mental acts that arrange artistic creations and are akin to the projects involved by practice (the first act of Pareyson's phenomenology of technique), even though he limits its field to the pure sphere of thought.

Nevertheless, external technique merits particular appreciation for Formaggio, as if it were a prefiguration of what relates to a concrete doing (Formaggio [1953]: 248, 253-254). However, this framework does not precede the empirical trial, but instead follows it in the everchanging conditions of material shaping; it resembles the relationship from the development of expression to artists' efforts reckoned by Pareyson. By salvaging a critique of inspiration similar to Pareyson's, the relevance of theoretical projects in the first technique is tied to the recurrence of specific responses to the material. Thanks to tradition the response turns into a proper habit. Finally, external technique represents the fulfilment of imagining into actual practices.

The concern with technique, as it is envisaged in social, religious, and moral developments, endorses the continuity between nature and art-shaping; if we look into the continuous arrangement of natural processes (Scaramuzza [1989]: 182-185)<sup>14</sup>, it is expected to interpret the artworld as a τέχνη handling its efforts and objects (there is a clear steadiness between these reflections and those that represent the core of Pareyson's phenomenology). Formaggio frees from phenomenological influence and takes into account technical reflections through material modification. Furthermore, he claims that natural objectivity modifies artistic doing since the artist has to extract a form from the possibilities concealed in it and bestows on the projective facet of technique and

<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that Formaggio construes, as for the conflation of experience, *savoir-faire* and self-theorizing, the essential notion of patience, and he frames a concept, as regards artistic creation, akin to hint expectation (Formaggio [1953]: 271-276). It is just what Pareyson means by 'expectation'.

<sup>13</sup> In his masterpiece Formaggio (1953: 40-43, 48-49, 270-271) deals at length with idealistic philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> Dufrenne (1953: 84-92) is the chief source for this theme in Formaggio's later works since both agree over a common phenomenological framework (Chiodo [2010]: 174; Daturi [2015]: 78-80; Formaggio [1962b]: 267-269; Morpurgo-Tagliabue [1960]: 462-465).

the creative power of art making the ability to express a world (Dufrenne [1981a]: 46-48; Zecchi [1978b]: 99-100). This conception liberates aesthetic aseity associated with the values of sensibility since the artist senses the requirements of materiality by moulding its objectivity under a final aim of expression. The artist has to follow the impulses concealed within mere sensitivity; here we can outline the affinity with Pareyson's similar remarks on the contrast between personal efforts to form a material and the impulses entailed by materiality.

The distinction between artistic and aesthetic facets is thus subsumed, according to Formaggio, within the primacy of technique: this is the first feature which inhabits the very concept of experience by including the features of aesthetic experience, since it is the conjunction of norms proper to the process of making and the constitution of technical models. Thus, technique reveals itself as *forma formans* and encompasses the aesthetic facet of shaping forms and the technical configuration which originates in the everchanging features of natural processes. Technique encompasses a reflecting activity which aims to describe the laws of making art. Thus, technique turns into an idea of making art which stems from experience and, at the same time, it reflects on practices entailed by making art. The involvement in a transcendental layer is inherited from Formaggio's master, Antonio Banfi, but while Formaggio permits reflections which Banfi has phrased about dynamism and self-regulation of a transcendental principle of experience, he aims to go beyond his master, without denying the common phenomenological background (Daturi [2015]: 73-76; Formaggio [1953]: 151-154; Formaggio [1986]: 30-33; Franzini [2013]: 135-141, 144-146; Franzini [2015]: 123-126; Zecchi [1978b]: 91-93). According to Banfi, the aesthetic principle represents the antinomy between a subject and the world it experiences, while the artistic facet is expressed by its transformation in the cultural domain. As Formaggio states, this distinction, in case the dialectics of the first and second technique were endorsed, should be overlooked.

Then, Formaggio institutes an idea of technique which oversees all other external values. Further, he reclaims a self-standing concept of art, and he ascribes an autonomous sphere to it in regard to external influences, but he does not go as far as to claim art's detachment from them: he reckons indeed that the aesthetic facet should not be neglected by the pre-eminence of technique, since expression is committed to the aesthetic facet. What Banfi represents for Formaggio's thought is the self-consciousness of rule-making development throughout experience, whose phenomenological insight is mingled by Formaggio with Hegelian influence. Neither the transcendental principle of experience nor the dialectics of technique are essentialist efforts to account for reality in a comprehensive framework. Rather, they are managed by the awareness of the composite nature of a norm which portrays the relationship between a human being and the world that is represented for the late Formaggio by artistry, which can be a brief, yet complete paraphrasal of the role of technique.

The interplay of theoretical issues, tethered to art making, and technical matters leads up to the social meaning of craftsmanship. The feature conjoining them is, as we have seen, technique insofar as it melds an organizing praxis and its shared traditional values in deploying a chief intentionality, with its symbolic meaning, grounding the correspondent successfulness of the artwork, which, for the so-called functional art, is represented by the social-led aim to gather all values encompassed by intentionality under the unitary trait of community life (Banfi [1962]: 133-136; Banfi [1988]: 103-106, 268-270, 319-323; Formaggio [1962a]: 30-32, 36-39; Formaggio [1981b]: 340-342). The integral feature of intentionality in the renewed vision of artistic praxis results in the meta-projectual side of those motivations (religious, economic, etc.) uncovering the symbolic facet of discarded minor arts, that aim at recovering them through functional focus (Formaggio [1981b]: 351-355; Zecchi [1978b]: 94-96).

In so doing the traditional distinction between form and content as to artistic concretion is

blurred – as long as the form of functional artworks puts forth the aesthetic concretion along with the enjoyment of their formal patterns – in favour of the conception of art as a modality of social work and as a sign of a unitary form of life (Banfi [1962]: 148-149, 154-155; Banfi [1988]: 114-116, 261-262; Dufrenne [1981b]: 60-62, 67-69; Scaramuzza [1981]: 358-359). Actually, the moral values entailed by the artist's personality betrays her peculiar style as she tackles the constraints put by traditional artistic conventions: given the encompassing feature of formativity, its artistic facet gathers the moral values including them under successful form. The effective expression of community values enacts the guiding path of the cue and becomes indistinguishable from it: since it cannot overwhelm the common formativity of human being, there can be no distinction between applied art and the alleged pure art. The social values are nothing but the hints, the suggestions that make one's own style unique, whereby the artist accomplishes her aim, which cannot but imply the community life (Pareyson [1954]: 293-298; Pareyson [2009]: 129-136, 206-209, 276-280). Further, the tentative shaping process of *forma formans* entailed by artistic formativity chimes in with the idea of aestheticity as the transcendental principle informing the antinomy between ego and world, whose relationship is reframed constantly according to the dialectical resolution of the normative reflections on the cultural sphere (Formaggio [1962a]: 26-28; Zecchi [1978a]: 41-43, 45-46). Indeed, whereas the first one relies on the vision of nature as the inextinguishable bottom and principle of becoming, the second one qualifies as the integral part of art sphere since its main core purports aesthetics to be an overall and encompassing feature of intuitiveness (understanding, valuing, acting, behaving), wherein special attention is devoted to the encounter of human spirituality with the variable and mutable world appearances, thus giving rise to an aesthetic transfiguring synthesis of the world, which owes its peculiarity to a conception of subjectivity as consciousness receptive to the world, as unceasing linkage with materiality (Banfi

[1962]: 433-437; Banfi [1988]: 88-91, 94-98, 134-135, 171-178; Dufrenne [1981a]: 40-45; Pareyson [1954]: 275-286; Pareyson [2009]: 173-182, 304-314; Zecchi [1981]: 92-94, 97-98; Zecchi [1983]: 139-140).

As a result, the notions of τέχνη and enjoyment are renewed: technical issues constitute the concrete and material verge wherein social values, through artist's individuality, cope with the actual richness of objective sources and issues within a tentative act of art making, thereby calling forth style questions and the enjoyment of the sensible concretion and of the formal structure of artwork (Banfi [1988]: 68-71, 99-100). Moreover, the concern with technique does not only blur the distinction between art and human activities, but also helps to pore on the intentional and qualifying acts making artworks meaningful as representation of the functional relationship between the artist and the world. Indeed, function ought to be conceived as the undefining and *in fieri* process of the reciprocal mediation between subjectivity and objectivity, whose boundaries are persistently muddled through an infinite intuitive varying of the perceptual and imaginative setting of experience.

## CONCLUSION

Formaggio recognises the relevance of pure moulding in the context of Pareyson's thought, and, by following his concern with technical issues, finds a similar involvement in Pareyson's conception of spiritual activity (Formaggio [1953]: 71-73; Formaggio [1962c]: 125-143). Pareyson indeed acknowledges the impulses that the material conveys in the aesthetic experience of objects; this results in the awareness of a constraint on expression by the factual arrangement of material. He is concerned with artistic successfulness, which involves aesthetic experience wherein the struggles, which the process of art-shaping is fraught of, meet the subjective effort to impress a peculiar mode of expression onto the material.

The difficult compliance of these two features compels Formaggio to extend this frame-

work to overall aesthetic theorising about the relationship between artistic doing and tradition. According to him, Pareyson's effort reveals that the relationship between personal research and the configuration of form in the domain of successfulness is prone to a metaphysical commitment between human spirituality and nature. As Formaggio puts it, the completion of any process in a dialectical movement does not subscribe to a search for pure moulding, but involves any activity that finds its realisation by following a complex of norms entrenched in tradition, which is the pivotal prerequisite of artistic doing and the beginning of interactions. Instead, Pareyson follows another point of view and institutes a field of pure moulding devoted to the expression of human spirituality.

However, putting the difference regarding the relevance attributed to artist's will aside, Pareyson and Formaggio share views about the relationship between nature, technique, and the meaning of making art. Pareyson envisages a considerable influence of the aesthetic feature over the artistic one, which can be seen in enjoyment that regards artwork as a completion of a form. By retrieving the meaningfulness of moulding in human spiritual activity and the affinity with form-shaping, artistic making traces its method back to a natural shaping skill, which is expressed by an aesthetic encounter with natural objects. The so-called notion of art as an imitation of nature is thus interpreted by Pareyson as mimesis of its own doing<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The tentative shaping process of the artwork, the moulding of the material as a form, chimes in with the Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of *Verwandlung ins Gebilde*, which implies the cohesion of form and material, and with his conception of mimesis, which is free from aesthetic delight and propounds the relationship between the unity of the artwork and its different interpretations (Marino [2012]: 146-147; Matteucci [2011]: 84-89). This last claim reflects the ontology of the inexhaustible in Pareyson, even though his conception of interpretation differs from Gadamer's one considerably (Modica [1980]: 119-126; Rosso [1980]: 94-97, 108-110; Vercellone [2018]: 99-100).

In compliance with the phenomenological analysis of technics, the meaning of nature is unfolded by the attempt of the spiritual reshaping of natural patterns by acknowledging a natural ability to mould forms (Pareyson [1954]: 278-281; Vattimo [1981]: 340-341). Since knowledge for Pareyson does entail neither mirroring nor an idealistic arrangement of things, then nature does not also imply mechanical processes to be discovered, but brings forth environmental patterns and knowledge, and subsequently re-enacts these patterns by recognising a formative principle within natural events (Pareyson [1971]: 91). With respect to artistic making, it is likely to assess the successfulness of artworks only after interpretation has detected the guidance of the forming form, which highlights the presence of truth. Truth is unobjectifiable and undefinable since knowledge does not define but represent the relationship between humans and Being (Ravera [1994]: 45-48; Tomatis [2003]: 45-49). The remark on representation implies that the outcome of every interpretation is a form, which links each human activity, from thinking to making art<sup>16</sup>. As a result, artworks come into the world thanks to the shaping skill that humans retrieve from the environment. By withdrawing from attributing to aesthetic experience a form of intuition related solely to delight (Vecchi [1956]: 354-355), enjoyment coheres with interpretation to the extent that «the only form of genuine knowledge is interpretation, which is in itself historical and personal and thus constitutively multiple and not definitive» (Pareyson [1971]: 50). Whenever interpretation ends or an artwork has been completed, contemplation arises, since form is acknowledged as an original singularity and corresponds to the natural power of creating new things within the environment. Contemplation and enjoyment converge and, like artistic making, enjoyment is the protean experience wherein the constitution of artworks pursues the moulding of forms implied by nature (Pareyson [1966]: 115-117; Pareyson [2009]: 52-60; Tomatis [2003]: 49-52; Vecchi [1956]: 356-361). Like natu-

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<sup>16</sup> See note 2.

ral objects, artworks change according to their explanation or reading, and are fixed in its process of expression and infinite interpretation, whereby contemplation involves the production of forms retrievable in the shaping power of nature (Pareyson [1954]: 204-206, 216-218; Pareyson [1971]: 47-60; Pareyson [1998]: 111-113; Pareyson [2000]: 55-58; Pareyson [2009]: 22-27); Riconda [1980]: 185-191). As a result, a formative skill of moulding arises: human spirituality enhances the moral perspective inside art (Ferraris [1996]: 379-381), where moulding pursues a value by accomplishing a specific cue revealed by the enjoyment of the artwork. Since art is rooted in spiritual activity, artworks are eligible to a formative aim, thereby proposing an interpretation concerning social life (Banfi [1962]: 128-131; Chiodo [2002]: 1-3, 17-18).

For Formaggio, spiritual activity is yet more critical if it is regarded as a frequent and constant quality of artistic creation, and it produces new meanings since technique implies an unceasing reshaping of rule clusters entrenched in practice (Formaggio [1973]: 157-161). Pareyson and Formaggio agree that the shaping mode of material is a form-moulding process, which imitates natural events and improves them at the highest fidelity. Finally, artwork is shaped material, namely a translation-transfiguration of an artist's behaviour within environmental restriction. In conclusion, art is a field where human beings, thanks to the shaping mode of materiality, withdrawal from a deep traditional practice and initiate an emancipating practice, characterised by a lively interpretation and an ethical perspective. However, this framework may take place in a horizon of shared interests and meanings within a community.

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**Citation:** G. Tenti (2020) Pratiche viventi. Temi di una poietica contemporanea. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 73-82. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11145

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Pratiche viventi. Temi di una poietica contemporanea

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**Abstract.** To overcome the art-craft dualism, a root and branch reform of a traditionally hegemonic view on human activities is needed. By focusing on Gilbert Simondon's fundamental claims, the article aims to display the most important consequences of a more in-depth understanding of poiesis, especially in relation to its reintegration with the sphere of praxis and collective *ethos* and to its connections with the idea of creativity. The field of production will lastly be associated with the concept of "living practice", regarded as important for the definition of a contemporary poietics.

**Keywords.** Poiesis, craft, technics, living practice, Simondon.

La separazione tra arte e *craft* costituisce uno dei motivi fondamentali della storia dell'estetica, nella misura in cui il carattere poietico di un "saper-fare" è di rado apparso dirimente per la comprensione del *quid* artistico. In Kant troviamo che l'arte è una specie del *facere*: non dello stesso genere del *Wirken*, prerogativo della natura, né però dell'*Handwerk*, in cui prevale la meccanica subordinazione al fine, ma con qualcosa di entrambi (Kant [1790]: 283-285). Per lo Hegel della *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, lo scarto tra fare artigianale e produzione artistica è segnato dal trapasso dell'oggettivazione istintiva nell'interiorità autocosciente (Hegel [1807]: 457 ss). Ma in Schleiermacher, ad esempio, non c'è più traccia di alcuna continuità: l'espressione artistica e il procedere tecnico-manuale appartengono a due regimi di funzioni differenti, e non si mescolano che accidentalmente (Schleiermacher [1984]: 50). Schelling aveva già sostenuto nel *System* del 1800 una sorta di posizione di mezzo, secondo cui «sarebbe una questione perfettamente inutile domandare quale delle due componenti sia da privilegiare rispetto all'altra» (Schelling [1800]: 561). La ragione poietica dell'espressione artistica non è mai stata di fatto riconosciuta in maniera univoca, e incontra poi una radicale esclusione in quegli autori che, in epoche successive, riformuleranno la questione nella chiave di un idealismo spiritualista.

Seguiamo a mo' d'esempio le distinzioni operate da Bergson nelle pagine de *L'Evoluzione creatrice*. L'intelligenza umana, sostiene Bergson, tende naturalmente ad adattare le proprie categorie alle leggi della causalità, sia essa efficiente (meccanica) o finale, perché necessita di muoversi innanzitutto nell'ordine pratico e conoscitivo dell'«azione». L'uomo è dunque portato a individuare delle regolarità consequenziali e ad assumerle intenzionalmente come finalità; a vedere, cioè, il mondo come insieme di costanze che possono essere sia oggettivate e manipolate come mezzi che incorporate e perseguite come fini. Al primo scopo serve una «matematica naturale» o intelligenza calcolante, al secondo una pratica produttiva. Così, scrive Bergson ([1907]: 51-52), «nasciamo geometri come nasciamo artigiani». «Ogni fabbricazione, per quanto rudimentale sia, vive di similitudini e di ripetizioni, come la geometria naturale che le serve da base» (Bergson [1907]: 51-52). In entrambi i casi, l'uomo mette in atto un'astrazione utile all'azione, ma in questo modo respinge il nuovo e l'imprevedibile. L'esercizio della *creatività*, ovvero della libera produzione, non è d'altronde che il lusso di chi non deve provvedere in prima persona ai propri bisogni. Bergson identifica così due aspetti complementari, il calcolo dei mezzi e l'azione secondo fini, entrambi appartenenti alla sfera della produzione; e due posizioni sovraordinate e tra loro contrapposte: la produzione *tout court* (ovvero l'azione codificata) e la spontaneità creativa. In tal modo è sancita una volta di più la separazione tra arte e produzione, ma secondo il criterio della creatività – laddove Kant, per esempio, restava legato al criterio del piacere (Kant [1790]: 287) e Hegel a quello speculativo del *Geist*.

Lo spostamento del *focus* sul concetto di creatività si è consumato anche all'interno del dibattito specificamente dedicato al rapporto tra arte e *craft*. Commentando le ripartizioni categoriali operate da Collingwood (1938), Martland sostiene che il *craft*, a differenza dell'arte, soddisfa abitudini percettive in base a meccanismi di riconoscimento: in altre parole «si subordina al passato [*serves the past*]» (Martland [1974]: 234). Ma la tesi che riduce il saper-fare ad agire stereotipato e

procedurale è stata ampiamente criticata già proprio all'interno di questo dibattito. Fethe (1977) mette in luce, ad esempio, come il *craft* dispieghi una connessione viva con ciò che in termini fenomenologici si definisce la sfera della *Lebenswelt*. Mounce (1991) porta numerosi esempi in cui il *craft* rappresenta un'attività non codificata e non interamente prevedibile. Più in generale, Mounce mostra che la distinzione drammatica tra arte e *craft*, concepita solo in base ai termini estremi dei due ambiti, è in fondo poco significativa: sembra molto più sensato interrogarsi, come suggerisce a sua volta Tilghman ([2006]: 179), sulle condizioni in cui è stata avvertita la necessità di tracciare quei confini teorici, piuttosto che rimarcare i confini stessi per mezzo di minimi spostamenti.

Che le pratiche raccolte sotto il concetto di *craft* siano qualcosa di *radicalmente differente* da quelle raccolte sotto il concetto di arte, suona oggi come un pensiero antiquato, sopravvissuto in qualche modo a una serie di mutamenti interni ed esterni al mondo dell'arte. In un regime di compiuta democratizzazione e diffusione dell'estetico, le pratiche espressivo-produttive fondate sul saper-fare soddisfano quotidianamente le esigenze estetiche di molti individui, tanto da indurre a parlare di «design diffuso» (Di Stefano [2012]: 66) e di «*craft consumption*» (Campbell [2005]). Chiunque oggi si proponga di rintracciare le nuove forme di un tessuto simbolico-narrativo non può che imbattersi nella mobilitazione di quei saperi *embodied* e pre-concettuali (Polanyi [1966], Ingold [2013]), di quegli *know-how* che si rivelano connessi ad un tratto antropologico, e vanno ad assumere un vero e proprio valore neo-mitologico (Dreyfus & Kelly [2011]). L'idea di un compito eroico dell'artista, che lo assurge a creatore e scaturigine unica di significato, sembra essere stata soppiantata da quella di un produttore che coltiva quotidianamente un regime di senso condiviso tramite specifiche modalità di accesso al reale, che vanno dallo sport alla ceramica. Un esercizio più «urbano» della creatività trasmette così la dimensione di partecipazione ad un'impresa collettiva dai tratti non vincolanti, di un ancoramento al contesto di vita guadagnato attraverso la libera pratica individuale.

Senza doverci necessariamente occupare di misurare la distanza che, seppur in uno spettro continuo, separa questo insieme di pratiche dall'espressione strettamente artistica (la quale ha non solo una sua legittimità teorica, ma anche una storia e delle leggi proprie), si può cominciare a riflettere sulla portata di un concetto che non fa distinzioni tra attività con o senza opera; che intende queste attività come a un tempo individuali e collettive, personali e condivise; e ancora che evade la distinzione tra procedura codificata e processo incodificabile. Tornare a domandarci se il *craftman* pende o meno dalla parte del bergsoniano «uomo d'azione» è un'operazione legittima quando si dismette il punto di vista che privilegia le categorie dell'arte, per rintracciare le potenzialità intrinseche al concetto stesso di azione produttiva. In tal senso procederà il nostro tentativo. Si arriverà a notare così che il saper-fare rimodula alcune funzioni di tradizionale appannaggio dell'arte – come la costruzione o preparazione di una forma di comunità, la ricomposizione dei rapporti con il mondo delle cose e la coltivazione del quadro di senso dell'esistenza individuale – alla luce di un compito più ampio. La nozione di *craft* verrà approfondita innanzitutto in relazione a un diverso concetto dell'agire tecnico; e, in seconda battuta, in rapporto alla sua coesione con la sfera etica e alla specifica nozione di creatività che esso veicola. Saremo infine in grado di avanzare una definizione, quella di “pratica vivente”, che possa cominciare a rendere ragione dell'importanza e della ricchezza di questo concetto.

In Bergson, come d'altronde in Collingwood, l'intento di separare il saper-fare dall'arte sembra derivare da una concezione del lavoro manuale e della tecnica in generale come attività stereotipate, che escludono la novità, e perciò subordinate. Questo inveterato pregiudizio di matrice spiritualista è ciò che occorre tornare a scardinare ogni qual volta si voglia riflettere in maniera feconda sulla distinzione tra arte e *craft*. Una riflessione radicale, tuttavia, deve aprire a una vera e propria riforma della prospettiva sul fare e sul produrre dell'uomo. Non sono molti gli autori che si sono

spinti fino a un'emendazione completa delle categorie in questo ambito. Uno di questi è Gilbert Simondon, filosofo annoverato fra i pensatori della tecnica più originali del secolo scorso. Recuperando istanze provenienti dalle scienze della natura, dalla cibernetica e dalla storia della tecnologia, Simondon promuove l'oltrepassamento di una concezione «schiavistica» della tecnica, risultata egemonica nella tradizione moderna. Egli forza con efficacia il riavvicinamento dei poli kantiani del *facere* artistico, del *Wirken* naturale e del lavoro manuale, sostenendo il carattere di auto-telia e inventività dell'azione produttiva insieme alla sua portata etico-comunitaria.

A partire da *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (1958), Simondon ha condotto una critica serrata a quella cultura che vede negli oggetti tecnici degli enti definiti da un valore strumentale univoco. Nella schiavitù Simondon scorge l'essenza stessa della strumentalità e dell'oggettualità, in quanto «dipendenza in rapporto ad un altro e ai fini di un altro» (Simondon [2014]: 37): così per i Romani lo schiavo era *instrumentum vocale* e l'utensile *instrumentum mutum*. Le odierne tecnologie dell'informazione si fondano su un paradigma, quello cibernetico, che sin dai suoi preamboli legittima valori di dominio e sottomissione del mondo delle cose<sup>1</sup>. Il problema per cui la scienza cibernetica delle origini resta niente più che una semplice curiosità storica risponde proprio al fatto che essa costruisce i propri oggetti, gli automi, come cose morte, in grado soltanto di eseguire delle procedure – ossia di compiere un lavoro –, dunque incapaci di esistenza autonoma (Simondon [2016]: 397-420).

Alla «tecnicità» sono stati attribuiti i tratti dell'esecuzione meccanica prendendo a modello gli oggetti tecnici più banali e meno significativi, come ad esempio il martello, e inferendone un'essenza strumentale. Per Simondon, al contrario, un ente tecnico dev'essere concepito in base alla capacità di veicolare, elaborare e amplificare informa-

<sup>1</sup> Si pensi anche solo al nome “cibernetica”, vera e propria “arte del governo”, e a quello dei suoi oggetti, i cosiddetti “servosistemi”. Su questo tema cfr. Bodei (2019).

zione. «*Es gibt Information*», scriverà molti anni dopo Peter Sloterdijk, è la frase che segna il distacco dallo schiavismo tecnico (Sloterdijk [2001]: 64). Cominciare a intendere gli oggetti tecnici in base al criterio dell'informazione significativa di cui essi possono farsi portatori, ovvero alla loro cifra di senso, apre a una visione del mondo secondo flussi di divenire, processi e momenti di gravidanza in cui atti e comportamenti legano attori umani e non umani in un'unica forma di esistenza. Scrive Simondon:

*L'operazione tecnica non è più soltanto, da una parte, una messa in forma secondo uno scopo prestabilito e dall'altra uno strumento, relativamente transitorio e ordinario, per ottenere uno scopo in quanto stato, che si presenta come risultato definitivo. L'operazione tecnica è un movimento, una commutazione, una transizione, che compie un percorso del reale e continua l'impulso generatore, senza tendere verso uno stato terminale che l'arresta. (Simondon [2014]: 124)*

Intesi secondo le loro operazioni, gli oggetti si identificano con i processi che li coinvolgono, sia attualmente che virtualmente. Tali processi riuniscono sempre più di una funzione in un sistema di convergenza tensiva, dotato di un «certo margine d'indeterminazione» (Simondon [1958]: 12) che ne assicura la fecondità e ne permette l'evoluzione. «La macchina, opera d'organizzazione, d'informazione, è, come la vita e con la vita, ciò che si oppone al disordine» (Simondon [1958]: 17-18). Ogni oggetto correla dei flussi di divenire a una forma aperta e sinergica, in virtù di uno stato di incompletezza tensiva; si costituisce quindi come qualcosa di più simile a un organismo che a un meccanismo, in base a un movimento cosmicizzante. Apertura, incompletezza, tensione del sistema rimandano alla componente dinamica o energetica che precede la struttura individuale. La prospettiva assunta da Simondon allinea ogni ente individuato a una dinamica morfogenetica che lo porta a «concretizzazione» (Simondon [1958]: 48) secondo specifiche forme di interazione con una zona di latenza pre-individuale. «Il sapere tecnologico è creatore, amplificante, si associa ad un'etica cognitiva della libertà e della generosità, perché opera una

genesì, come quella che ha condotto il mondo ad essere ciò che vediamo essere» (Simondon [2014]: 124). Solo in quanto frutto di vera genesì l'oggetto può affrancarsi dalla presenza del suo utilizzatore, esercitando quel potere di divergenza dall'impiego attuale a cui fa effettivamente capo la sua esistenza autonoma, costituendosi dunque come «essere d'informazione» (Simondon [2005]: 707), in un certo qual modo naturalizzandosi.

La produzione non risponde più a quell'*aitia*, quella causa personale a cui la assegnava Platone ([1979], 205 b-c): essa trova ragione in una diffusione delle cause tra piano individuale, pre-individuale e infine trans-individuale. Ciò che suscita il divenire dell'oggetto alimentando il gioco tra struttura ed energia è infatti un ordine di determinazioni di natura mista, quello delle immagini, che si tramandano a livello dei grandi gruppi umani e delle culture. È così che, secondo un'idea che risale a Tarde e Leroi-Gourhan, la tecnica «si genera essa stessa e rinasce da sé stessa» (Simondon [2014]: 124). Affronteremo più avanti il ruolo delle immagini nella morfogenesi tecnica. Per ora si torni a notare che l'azione del singolo individuo, nel processo di sviluppo degli oggetti, deve costantemente reimmettersi in un dominio di processi più ampi; la stessa idea di procedura si lega al tramandamento di una memoria formativa immediatamente individuale e collettiva, impossibile da codificare (in senso computazionale), che costruisce un modo di essere nel mondo. Il singolo non è che «assistente della creazione» (Simondon [2014]: 124). Ecco che l'essenza della tecnica risulta più vicina all'alchimia che alla fabbricazione (Simondon [2014]: 133); ed ecco saltare quello schema proairetico che da sempre informa la nozione di poiesi, a favore di un paradigma più propriamente genetico. Slegare la *poiesis* dalla *proairesis* demiurgica, ovvero dall'intenzionalità produttrice, significa infatti estrarla dall'orizzonte del progetto e della rappresentazione, orizzonte che assolve l'esistenza del mezzo nella realizzazione di un fine relativo a un intelletto separato, subordinando l'attività produttiva a quella intellettuale-contemplativa.

Allo schema demiurgico che struttura la nozione di *poiesis* corrispondono tanto un'idea

proto-creazionista, legata al passaggio deliberato dall'essere al non-essere, quanto una concezione ilomorfica di stampo aristotelico. Il *poietès*, infatti, è ricettacolo delle forme che egli stesso trascoglie e impone su una materia inerte, immaginata in perenne stato di attesa. Quello basato sul dualismo materia-forma è un paradigma talmente collaudato che può essere ancora attribuito tale e quale a un fenomeno così lontano come il design, in cui il *craftman* è facilmente un novello demiurgo, laddove invece l'artista è creatore delle forme (Flusser [1933]: 27-31). L'arte – al contrario del *craft* – «inventa il modo di fare» (Pareyson [1954]: 59), perché mette in discussione ogni tappa del percorso produttivo, ingaggiando un libero gioco con la materialità slegato da procedure (mezzi) e da aspettative (fini). Queste conclusioni si fondano, di nuovo, su una concezione povera della tecnica e del saper-fare, intese come attività interamente meccaniche a cui è implicito un portato alienante, e su un pregiudizio di matrice spiritualista. L'artigiano, il *craftman*, non agisce affatto come un demiurgo. In pagine illuminanti, Simondon ([2005]: 66-71) mostra come la figura del demiurgo sia tagliata sul ruolo sociale di colui che commissiona il lavoro, il “padrone” hegeliano che desidera vedere oggettivato ciò che ha in mente, ma non si occupa di come la produzione avviene effettivamente, e può quindi intendere la materia come un bacino di potenzialità pure che attende di essere messo in forma. L'artigiano, al contrario, opera a stretto contatto con la materia e ne riconosce le qualità attive, le proprietà specifiche, che richiedono operazioni *ad hoc* e includono la singolarità come parte fondante del processo. Egli è colui che assiste alla nascita dell'oggetto, dell'evento di genesi come incontro significativo tra processi disparati.

Lo *know-how* dell'artigiano non è concretamente guidato da rappresentazioni che fungono da fini, come la definizione o la visione mentale del prodotto finito, ma da modelli molto più generici, schematiche pre-concettuali che richiedono di essere performate in un costante confronto con la situazione produttiva. Analogamente, argomenta altrove Simondon, il bambino piccolo posto di

fronte a un'automobile durante la fase di imprinting «non *vede* soltanto o non *intende* soltanto un'automobile», ma “*fa* l'automobile”, partecipa al suo funzionamento, recependo e testando gli schemi operativi dell'oggetto in funzione (Simondon [2014]: 27). La realtà concreta dell'agire tecnico induce dunque a una ricomprensione del processo produttivo come un atto del “prender-parte”, in cui le strutture soggettive sono rimesse costantemente in gioco.

Occorre intendere tutte le pratiche produttive, ovvero tutte le pratiche tecniche, secondo la norma interna al loro fare: bisogna poter sopportare cioè che la natura dell'operazione tecnica consista nel potere di dettare a sé stessa i propri fini nel suo operare. Simondon sostiene questo punto – che nell'operazione tecnica «la norma è la derivata dell'atto e non di una virtualità precedente che occorrerebbe realizzare» (Simondon [2014]: 77) – operando un vero rovesciamento dei termini: ciò che definisce la tecnica non è più un carattere prevalentemente esecutivo, ma un'essenza inventiva. L'autonomia auto-normativa della sfera della produzione deve derivare da una rimodulazione del concetto di creatività, inventività o emergenza del nuovo. Per Simondon, è indubbiamente la tecnica l'attività umana più radicalmente progressiva. Così come ogni atto di individuazione è trasformazione delle proprie condizioni, all'interno di un processo produttivo la modificazione attiva dei vincoli avviene in un senso non prevedibile, generato dallo stato di comunicazione tra mondo dell'oggetto e mondo del soggetto per mezzo di schematiche che non hanno nulla di intenzionale. Il tessuto di risonanza che si instaura in questo «irraggiamento di valori» (Simondon [2005]: 709) è immediatamente costitutivo, come vedremo tra poco, del tessuto delle forze vive di una collettività.

In un corso tenuto alla Sorbonne tra il 1965 e il 1966 e dedicato a *Imagination et invention*, Simondon specifica la sua concezione dell'inventività, enfatizzandone il carattere operativo e pragmatico e allontanando l'eco della creatività romantica come libera espressione dello spirito. Ogni forma di azione si caratterizza come «risoluzione di una problematica», scioglimento di



uno stato di tensione attraverso il prodursi di un sistema di compatibilità che non “assomiglia” in alcun modo alle tensioni che lo hanno innescato. Così, il viaggiatore che viene bloccato dalla presenza di un masso sulla strada si troverà in una situazione insolubile fino a che un numero sufficiente di viaggiatori non si sarà riunito al cospetto del masso e non sarà in grado di organizzarsi per spostarlo. In questo caso, il problema stabilisce un’interazione tensiva (i viaggiatori si aggiungono come forze che domandano una risoluzione) e innesca una comunicazione tra ordini diversi (individuale e collettivo). Nel superamento del piano isolato subordinato e conseguente costituzione di un piano sovraordinato consiste il vero e proprio momento produttivo. «La vera invenzione supera il suo obiettivo», scrive Simondon; «l’intenzione iniziale di risolvere un problema non è che un innesco, una messa in movimento» (Simondon [2008]: 173). La soluzione suscita e mobilita forme di compatibilità, «immagini» o «schemi» che superano da ogni parte la coscienza del solutore, andando così a formare il repertorio delle sue *Lebensformen*, le zone di latenza delle disposizioni e delle condotte dell’individuo vivente.

Il carattere d’inventività corrisponde qui alla possibilità che si generi una risoluzione, che si scioglia una tensione problematica: non ha nulla a che vedere con l’applicazione o la realizzazione di una regola astratta, come sostiene ad esempio Garroni (1978). L’attività del vivente non risponde in alcun modo, per Simondon, a una sapienza applicativa, bensì ad un processo trasformativo. Nell’occasione di una deviazione dal percorso o di una risoluzione collettiva, di una qualsiasi diversione rispetto al comportamento abituale, si attivano delle zone di aggregazione sistemica di immagini indeterminate (ma non astratte) in grado di germinare tra soggetto e mondo. Le immagini esistono certamente prima del momento del loro impiego, ma solo sotto forma di eterogeneità potenziali, che non possiedono lo statuto della regola. Esse stanno alla base tanto delle condotte quanto delle azioni produttive di oggetti, costituendone l’innesco né propriamente spontaneo né propriamente intenzionale. All’insegna di que-

sto concetto di inventività sfuma la distinzione tra azione interna e auto-normativa (l’aristotelica *praxis*) e azione produttiva (*poiesis*), e si perde definitivamente l’idea della *poiesis* come attività votata all’alienazione, squalificata in quanto mero procedimento.

La coesione del saper-fare con la sfera dell’*ethos* si rende evidente nella sua tendenza a costituirsi come *habitus*, o meglio in questa propensione delle schematiche operative a determinarsi come forme di vita trans-individuali. Nella capacità delle grandi immagini artistiche di costituire una simbolica stabile era riposta la fiducia di fondare una comunità del sentire – comunità che nella tradizione romantico-idealistica si opponeva all’esteriorità della legge astratta. È soprattutto l’arte moderna ad assegnare all’eroica separazione dell’artista un valore sacrificale per il consorzio possibile di coloro che ne abitino le tracce. E tuttavia, è stato a più riprese sostenuto che il vero potere di soggettivazione collettiva spetta al saper-fare artigianale (Flusser [1993]: 120), e all’artista solo in quanto portatore di un sapere di questo tipo. Non è la separazione sacra dell’artista, ma la connessione vivente, in atto o in opera tra le parti, a riunire e insieme animare una comunità.

Per Simondon, la tecnica (intesa nel senso che è stato descritto) ha assunto in via privilegiata, a partire dall’età industriale, il compito informativo che anima le civiltà storiche: essa è in grado di alimentare comunità eterogenee, che in quanto divenienti non cadono nel gorgo della propria forma di interiorità. Per questo motivo, nelle nostre società, il tecnico è come il sacerdote dei gruppi arcaici (e si può d’altra parte parlarne come di un “artigiano” solo in senso molto ampio): egli si fa promotore di «quell’atto che possiede abbastanza realtà per procedere al di là di sé stesso e incontrare altri atti» (Simondon [2005]: 453), ovvero dell’atto realmente significativo. Il paleo-antropologo André Leroi-Gourhan aveva già enfatizzato questo aspetto in relazione alle comunità primitive, arrivando ad affermare che «la civiltà si basa sull’artigiano», «perché su di lui si basa tutta l’evoluzione tecnica» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 204). A esempio del potere di significazione veicolato dai sistemi tecnici,

Simondon descrive l'attività di ripartizione e aggregazione di un mulino a vento o di un apparato di telecomunicazione, la loro capacità di organizzare lo spazio, il tempo, le condotte di gruppi di persone, animali e altri oggetti, stabilendo dei punti di riferimento nel tessuto del reale abitato.

Questo potere di strutturazione consiste a tutti gli effetti in una forma di bellezza operante: è sia tecnico che estetico, ovvero «tecno-estetico» (Simondon [2014]: 319 ss). La vita di una comunità non ha dunque origine tecnica in senso stretto, bensì tecno-estetica, nella misura in cui l'estetico non si confina nella sfera dell'*aisthesis* o del piacere contemplativo, né ha a che fare soltanto con oggetti specificamente assurti a opere, ma si lega a principi ritmici e cosmologici. È in gioco la «forza dell'apparire che suscita la nascita simultanea del senziente e del sentito» di cui parlava altrove Mikel Dufrenne (Formaggio & Dufrenne [1981]: 46), stimato amico di Simondon. Ecco che la figura del tecnico/artigiano si propone come la più vicina ai vettori di trasformazione della realtà. Al contrario del demiurgo, egli è capace di collocarsi in una continuità essenziale con il divenire dell'oggetto. L'artigiano si pone simbolicamente come fulcro dell'esistenza di una comunità «operosa» nel senso della coltivazione delle relazioni significative e dei poteri collettivi, in cui tutti i componenti possono assumere un ruolo attivo nell'impresa di costruzione del senso. L'idea dell'assunzione del compito creativo da parte di tutti i componenti di un gruppo si basa d'altronde sulla necessità di ricondurre una «tecnica» generica e neutrale (alternativamente esaltata e demonizzata dalla tradizione moderna) ai tratti delle tecniche specifiche che strutturano le singole maniere di vivere.

Che ne è dell'arte, in questo quadro? Uno sguardo genetico sembra infatti esorbitare radicalmente i confini della teoria dell'arte (Duhem [2013]: 225), tipicamente orientata sugli oggetti piuttosto che sui processi di senso, sulla sfera del piacere contemplativo, e su un'integrità soggetto-mondo prospettata come mera utopia simbolica. Ciò che occorre rintracciare nell'opera d'arte, allora, è quel vettore morfogenetico che la porta costantemente oltre la propria oggettualità, e cer-

tamente al di là della feticizzazione operata dalle sue discipline e dalle sue istituzioni: quel movimento non dispiegato che nell'opera agisce come una faglia sotterranea (Simondon [2014]: 325). Seguendo ancora Simondon ([2014]: 93), si può rintracciare la specificità dell'estetico in una «preoccupazione di totalità e di organizzazione del reale», rivolta simultaneamente all'integrità e alla costruttività, dunque alla coesione necessaria ad ogni presa di forma: tendenza che innerva ogni tipo di pratica viva, di cui l'arte non è che una specie particolare.

Una tecnica, come ammette lo stesso Heidegger ([1967]: 205) in riferimento alla *téchne* aristotelica, è un «sapersi orientare»; purché l'idea di orientamento – dobbiamo aggiungere – sia emendata dalla sfumatura di perseguimento cosciente del fine rappresentato, in favore di una finalità che si costruisce nell'atto. Si pensi al viaggiatore che percorre la foresta per la prima volta: «appena un passo è compiuto, diventa norma per quello seguente [...]. L'atto di camminare non comporta alcuna polarità direttrice, alcuna norma esterna, alcun riferimento ad un fine percepito» (Simondon [2014]: 77). Questo carattere performativo delle pratiche si lega alla spontaneità morfogenetica propria di tutti i processi viventi, nonché all'origine stessa della nozione di condotta e al suo portato ontologico. L'idea di un orientamento non proairetico, di un fine immanente al suo atto, conduce al cuore stesso del vivente: è infatti contrassegno di ciò che vive il sorgere e lo svilupparsi spontaneamente come forma, costruendo i propri mezzi senza rappresentazione. L'auto-possedersi della forma nell'atto è il modello di ogni azione interna. In tal senso, tutto nel vivente è orientamento, dalla declinazione chimica della materia al tropismo del vegetale e la tassiologia del protozoo.

Una pratica può definirsi «vivente» quando mostra un carattere non strumentale, ma trasformativo (sia del sé che del *milieu* in cui s'irradia), dunque genetico in senso non rappresentativo. Una teoria del vivente fornisce il grande quadro, nella filosofia simondoniana, in cui le tesi sulla tecnica si innestano: proprio del vivente è, in

Simondon, l'insorgere del senso nell'atto genetico (o «informativo»). Ma ciò che il filosofo francese recepisce attraverso la tradizione dell'epistemologia storica e la doppia eredità bergsoniana-bachelardiana ha radici nella riflessione che accompagna le scienze della vita sin dalla loro prima formulazione; segnatamente, in quel concetto di *Lebendiges* attorno a cui ruota il «biocentrismo» dell'età di Goethe (Poggi [2000]). *Lebendig* è, immediatamente al di là dello stretto rimando al biologico, ciò che non potendo ridursi a *datum* richiede un legame patico, ossia una prassi capace di coglierne in presenza i vettori genetici; che evoca quindi un altro atto vivente, sensibile alle conformazioni singolari e capace di veicolare forze vive. La forma è un oggetto impossibile in quanto embricazione irriducibile di essere e divenire, *omnitudo* e *molitudo*, individuo e processo, che consiste soltanto nel suo farsi. Questa essenza costruttiva e autonormativa è *reminiscente* più che rappresentativa, perché rivolta al nuovo senza memoria psichica (Ruyer [1952]); e *ritornante* più che riflessiva, perché non compone di per sé la struttura di un soggetto (Tedesco [2008]: 56-54).

Tra le nozioni che un pensiero del vivente è portato a recuperare c'è la kantiana *technica naturalis*, non più metafora ossimorica della misteriosa perfezione del creato, né in quanto tecnica del vivente, ma come tecnica in cui il vivente consiste. La cibernetica ha certamente riportato in auge la questione, avanzando una definizione di vivente che lo svincola dai suoi attributi tradizionali (come riproduzione e sviluppo organico) e taglia trasversalmente il dualismo tra organicismo e meccanicismo (Maturana & Varela [1980]); ma senza mai distanziarsi fino in fondo dai suoi presupposti orientati alla computazione e al controllo dei sistemi. Più di recente, il biologo Stuart Kauffman ha esplorato l'ipotesi che il movimento specifico del vivente consista in uno *know-how* paragonabile ad ogni altro tipo di pratica. Qualsiasi «agente autonomo» o unità vivente estrae lavoro (l'«informazione» simondoniana) dal proprio ambiente e lo propaga, «costruendo vincoli» senza necessariamente produrre una coscienza, senza una vera e propria oggettivazione di questo lavo-

ro (Kauffman [2000]: 143). Associare la motilità essenziale del vivente, che Kauffman designa come un'«organizzazione propagante», ad una «super meccanica» (Uexküll [1926]: 121) permette di cominciare a riempire lo iato tra natura e tecnica, su cui si basa la separazione tra un'idea misticizzata di arte e una impoverita di *craft*.

Il ruolo dell'immagine/schematica è di nuovo fondamentale per non incorrere nel rischio di proiettare le categorie del *facere* sul processo morfogenetico. Se è evidente che un letto non genera un letto, per citare Heidegger ([1967]: 242) – se è chiaro cioè che l'oggetto tecnico non si “genera” nel senso dell'ente biologico, e richiede un agente che ne accompagni il processo –, si può ben affermare che una forma tecnica ne *suscita* un'altra attraverso il dominio delle schematiche transoggettive (come l'immagine o schema del letto). L'individuo non detiene la responsabilità della morfogenesi perché non “possiede” l'immagine, ma la riceve e la trasmette: si limita ad assistere al processo e ad assecondarne il compimento. È la natura stessa ad agire per “suscitazione”, stabilendo non la possibilità, né la necessità delle forme, ma la loro effettività (la *Wirklichkeit* che si lega al suo *Wirken*).

Si pensi ancora alla storia di Hermes e la lira: Hermes «vede» in una tartaruga morente «la trasposizione metamorfica del suo guscio nello strumento risonatore musicale che subito passa con le mani a costruire» (Formaggio, Dufrenne [1981]: 106). Questo vedere in anticipo è ciò che in morfologia si definisce uno «sguardo dall'interno» (Breidbach & Vercellone [2008]: 107); e non è secondario che in questo caso l'oggetto sia un essere vivente colto in una situazione affettiva parossistica (e non per esempio un oggetto inerte). Un passaggio d'immagine avviene come passaggio di vita, sia che faccia leva su una differenza violenta, sia che coinvolga una partecipazione armonica: si tratta in ogni caso di «un coglimento dell'essere che non è né *a priori* né *a posteriori*, ma contemporaneo all'esistenza dell'essere che coglie, e allo stesso livello» (Simondon [1958]: 321).

Una pratica può dirsi vivente, dunque, quando non fa leva sulla distinzione di natura tra mezzi e

fini, pianificazione ed esecuzione, prodotto e contesto, e ogni qual volta essa si innesta su un orientamento inteso come apparizione pregnante ed evento semantico. Un'intuizione morfologica completa, così, il concetto di poiesi nel senso dell'operare formativo. Ecco che il saper-fare può essere concepito come un sapere costantemente messo in gioco dalla contingenza, che si decide prima dell'applicazione intellettuale di regole astratte e comporta sempre una dinamica di partecipazione, suscitazione e accrescimento. Nella materialità viva con cui il *craftman* sa entrare in contatto, in quanto «processo già in atto di forme e di sensi» (Formaggio [1973]: 141), si stabilisce il gioco di tendenze implicite che è la fonte inesauribile e immanente di ogni atto operativo. In quest'ottica, l'arte presa nelle sue manifestazioni più proprie può essere considerata come un movimento di sospensione e di rallentamento del processo morfogenetico, in cui il passaggio d'immagine si ramifica e si arricchisce fino a una vera e propria coltivazione della *Urbild*; non in sostanziale discontinuità, comunque, con il procedere cosmicizzante di ogni altra operazione poetica.

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**Citation:** M. Friel (2020) Crafts in the Contemporary Creative Economy. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 83-90. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11599

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Crafts in the Contemporary Creative Economy

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**Abstract.** Speaking generically of crafts from an economic point of view means referring to a field that encompasses different sectors and professions, an agglomeration of very different activities in terms of economic structure, performance and needs. This paper, however, aims to analyse only some of the artisan worlds, i.e. traditional trades, art & crafts which, even if manifesting themselves today in new ways, interest us more than others because of *the genius loci* they have subsumed. This is because this is the main feature that allows us to count on their survival in a present and in a future in which even large industries are looking with great interest at limited and customized production, and where not only major companies but also local and regional entities are rediscovering activities closely related to the “sense of place”, such as crafts, and including them in their identity branding policies. After an introductory look at the role of craftsmanship today in the “creative economy”, the paper describes the problems facing this productive and cultural sector today and outlines the challenges for the near future.

**Keywords.** Crafts, creative economy, globalization, innovation.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

It seems increasingly difficult, nowadays, to say what crafts are. Difficult from many perspectives: economic, social, linguistic. Crafts are a fundamental part of the culture of a community: the form of its products and their functions are often the result of the local presence of specific raw materials, of traditional knowledge and behaviors, beliefs and convictions that the objects incorporate and bear witness to. In this sense, there is the temptation of extending the category to include any production in which an initial project is translated into a finished object, whether this comes out of the workshop of a master ceramist, the factory of a luxury multinational or the studio of a designer.

Also the use of man-held tools, which traditionally distinguished crafts from industry, along with the size of the company, now seems to have lost some of its importance. New developments in technology, on the one hand, have generated a novel species of artisans, as

in the case of the makers, on the other hand, have helped establish a new “handmade” industry (as in the case of 3D planning in artistic foundries), in what some have called to be a new industrial revolution (Anderson [2012]).

The complexity of the crafts realm is due not only to semantic and historical reasons - but also has cultural and economic motivations, as widely covered by academic literature (Pye [1968]; Bologna [1972]; Dormer [1997]; Risatti [2007]): the terms craftsman, artisan and craft are used throughout the world with different meanings and the socio-economic status of craftsmen also varies considerably.

Defining the craft sector, at least from the economic standpoint, is therefore a threefold problem as it regards the classification of crafts, craftsmen and craft enterprises. Within the crafts realm we find economic subjects that differ greatly in terms of activity and organizational structure. Therefore, to stake out the borders of this economic sector and its size it is particularly complex. Even its visibility is sometimes uncertain given that while some top professions «are integrated in large-sized productive *filière* [...], many have transformed taking forms that make them unrecognizable for those who look for them expecting their usual aspect» (Colombo [2007]: 19).

Beyond the defining difficulties, however, in the new millennium crafts seem to have become of interest once again. This interest occurred at many levels, and at a global scale. In the academia and in research, a growing literature has dealt with the status of craftsmen in contemporary society (Sennet [2008]), with the present and future role of crafts in global value chains (Micelli [2009], [2011]), with the relevance and contribution of the craft sector to the economy (Mignosa, Kotipalli [2019]) on the relation between crafts, design and industry (Maffei [2011]; De Giorgi, Germak [2008]) and also with the crafts' centrality to contemporary art (Adamson [2007]).

The renewed interest in crafts does not concern academics only but also a number of important cultural institutions that have taken on the role of calling attention to the issue: the exhibit

*Power of Making*, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum of London in 2011 is probably one of the best examples, as it is the 2018 edition of *Homo Faber* at the prestigious Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice, which attracted more than 60 thousand visitors from all over the world, as well as the strong presence of crafts in the most prominent international Design Weeks around the world.

The reasons for this new vitality are many and result from the profound transformations that have been characterizing the economic system: the transition from a monolithic culture of industrialization to a culture founded on differentiation and specificity (De Giorgi, Germak [2008]), the crisis of certain local systems of production on the one hand, and on the other hand the development of new industrial systems based on interdependent relations of production and on outsourcing, the rise of the knowledge economy and of the creative economy, the changes in the domain of design and production. Furthermore, in the face of the homologation brought about by mass production and globalization, there has been a change in the taste and demands of consumers towards products characterized by quality and uniqueness. Taste and demands to which artisans are in a better position to respond to.

Within this context, crafts are gaining increased visibility and recognition thanks to their key features (Bramanti [2012]): value of work and individual quality of know-how; «culture-tradition-innovation» triptych, that is, the capacity of the craftsman to «combine tacit and codified knowledge, action and thought, experience and abstract knowledge, production and creation»; entrepreneurship and business risk, that is the desire to face the challenges of the market.

All these elements then found in the Web Economy unprecedented for visibility and for accessing the market, just think at marketplaces such as Etsy.com; Amazon Handmade and many others.

## 2. THE ROLE OF CRAFTS IN THE “CREATIVE ECONOMY”

The complexity and variety of the craft's world made that even the measurement of its economic



importance has always been very difficult, this also hindering the possibility of good cross-country analyses.

Data on production, in terms both of quantities produced and of the labour force involved, are incomplete for many countries, and in many areas of the world a large part of the crafts' production and trade still lies in the informal economy.

The greatest boost in the sourcing of up-to-date and reliable figures on crafts unquestionably occurred with the growing interest, in recent years, in the creative economy and in what are known as the "cultural industries".

According to the definition of Britain's Department of Culture Media e Sport (2001), creative industries are «those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property». Moreover, creative industries include «advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio».

Starting from the mid-nineties, the economic value generated by the creative goods and services production industries and the potential growth of the macro-sector compared to others has turned the spotlight onto the creative economy and driven the systemisation of knowledge of this macro sector. This attention, starting from the English-speaking world, spread quickly to all the advanced economies and to the developing countries during the 2000s, with the creation of a global debate and giving life to a myriad of studies intended to delimit and quantify the creative economy: not an easy operation given the considerable dynamism and variety of the industries that characterise it. Moreover, many international organisations like UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the UNDP – the United Nations Development Programme – have

joined the debate, dedicating important surveys, publications and programmatic documents to the creative economy both in an attempt to quantify world trade in creative goods and services, and to present their own institutional viewpoints on the subject.

The problem of sourcing reliable data for crafts emerged immediately and, in an effort to bridge this knowledge gap, various projects were launched, particularly by UNESCO and the UNCTAD, both through greater sensitization of individual countries with regard to the coding of artisan products, and through ad hoc studies of particular aspects of the crafts sector, such as, for example, its relationship with the tourism sector (UNESCO/UNCTAD-WTO, 1997) and with the intellectual property rights management (WIPO, 2003).

The process has been slow and produced so far contrasting results but which, in the end, made it possible to delimit and define the crafts sector more precisely and to compile a list of the most commonly traded products at world level, the economic importance of which are recognized by UNESCO and codified in accordance with an international classification system (Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding Systems).

According to the most recent data available when this paper was written, at global level, in 2015, the international trade in art craft totalled 35 billion dollars. The global market for art craft was expanding with an annual average growth rate of 4.42% during the period 2003-2015 and art crafts continue to be among the most important creative industry for export earnings for developing countries (UNCTAD, 2018).

These data offer a picture - albeit blurred - of the international trade in crafts goods. As already mentioned, however, the interest in the sector goes beyond these numbers, and concerns more strategic aspects relating to innovation processes in the production and consumption of goods and services with high added value.

Craftsmen often have a leading role also in the success of many important companies in the high-end industries (i.e. fashion, design etc.),

which entrust to them not only the more delicate phases of production but also the promotion of their image on international markets. This type of contribution of the culture of crafts to contemporary economy is much more complex to trace and quantify.

### 3. SURVIVAL ISSUES IN THE GLOBALIZED ECONOMY

Despite these positive data and this renewed interest, many craft businesses are currently exposed to a series of threats which endanger their survival. On the one hand, globalization has given fresh impulse to the creation of a global economy of culture and to mass consumption of cultural products, promoting also particular types of traditional artisanal products and crafts. On the other hand, however, globalization has also led to fierce competition based on production costs, as well as to the development of fake products that have critically undermined the revenues of many craft businesses (Friel and Santagata, 2007).

Alongside these macro factors and global tendencies, there are also a number of other factors, some of them cyclical and some of them structural, which negatively affect the profitability and, in some cases, the survival of artisanal activities. These factors include (Friel and Saccone [2012]):

- *Access to markets.* Traditionally, crafts and artistic crafts catered to local needs. Today, instead, with the development of globalization and the integration of world markets, the local market had been joined by the opportunity of accessing global markets. These changes, on the one hand, require new approaches and, on the other hand, require adapting products to the demands and needs of a heterogeneous public, both in terms of income and of taste. Artistic craftsmanship is mostly targeted at a niche of consumers, who are affluent and willing to purchase high-level products, on a national and international level. However, a significant quota of artistic craftsmen is having difficulty with these new market challenges. Not all are able to enter this market, which,

although potentially very lucrative, requires good marketing skills. The potential for artistic crafts targeted at this developing market and these new tendencies cannot be ignored and requires new solutions for accessing markets, enhancing local reputation in the face of global competition, as well as technological innovations capable of sustaining production and distribution (Santagata and Friel [2007]). If these solutions are found, elite artistic crafts and more traditional ones will be able to capture significant market quotas. The question is therefore how to expand the market for crafts, favour access to new markets and exploit global tendencies.

There is also a third way to create innovative and modern products and gain access to markets that is currently developing, largely stimulated by the changes in the domain of design. We are talking about self-production, in which the designer becomes the director of the whole process, from invention, to production, to distribution.

Self-production is an interesting phenomenon and even though at the moment it has more to do with design than with crafts, in the future it could become a bridge between these two worlds, combining the strategic and innovative capacities of designers with the manual and constructive skills of artisans. For the time being, it is still unclear whether this is a transient phenomenon or a lasting structural transformation. According to artist Paolo Ulian, self-production and crafts will play an increasingly greater role in design in the coming years, because the number of young designers is increasing, while the number of design companies is decreasing.

- *Information and qualification of the demand.* Even when there is a sufficient number of consumers with the right income level, the artistic and highly idiosyncratic nature of craft objects can limit the demand for them, since, their value, and therefore their price, can only be recognized with an adequate cultural background and adequate information. As noted by Bramanti (2012), «an uneducated customer is unlikely to accept a premium price for craft objects and / or will automatically place it in the niche of luxury goods where

it competes (at a disadvantage) with branded goods».

The deadly effects on the crafts' market produced by consumers' incomplete information on the quality of the products and on the traditional knowledge that they embed, have been widely analysed by cultural economic literature with regard for example to Murano glass production in Venice, pashmina shawls and many others (Stephen [1991]; Santagata [2002]; Russo, Segre [2005]).

The ability to know how to communicate the products, and the choice of the best means to do so, constitutes today a strategic issue that requires economic and human capital investments by individual craftsmen or their representatives.

- *Access to credit.* Typically, crafts' businesses are characterized by small size and little capital and, for this reason, access to credit is a greater problem for them compared to other businesses. Without the support of institutions that believe in crafts and their potential for economic growth, it is unlikely that crafts will be able to adapt to new tendencies, given the capitals and investments required. An alternative is, for craftsmen without financial resources and access to credit, to become providers and collaborators of luxury industries, which have greater access to credit and to global markets, and which have already shown a strong interest in the potential of artistic and traditional crafts.

- *Knowledge transmission.* One of the great elements of fragility in the world of crafts is that of the transmission of technical and cultural knowledge at the basis of this type of production. The loss of skills not only undermines the survival of these activities, but also weakens the production of instrumental goods for the craft sector (for a detailed analysis see Paragraph 4), such as the production of particular materials, pigments and tools etc.

The root of these problems lies in the profound social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place in recent decades. On the one hand, the handing down of artisanal know-how "from father to son" has been interrupted, since

new generations tend to be interested in different studies and professions. On the other hand, the more institutionalized forms of training have proven inadequate, especially when it comes to transmitting many uncoded skills and notions.

- *Workshops and spaces.* Traditionally, at least in western countries, workshops were always located in the historical centre of towns, characterized by the proximity of housing and workplace. Today, the cost of real estate, the colonization process by global retail chains to have their flagship stores in historical buildings in the most central areas of cities is causing a decline in the presence of workshops and traditional stores.

In some cases, entire productive activities have been relocated to the periphery leaving only the store in the town centre. In other cases, small and extremely small workshops have chosen unofficial, less visible locations (Biondi [2011]). These tendencies are changing the look of urban centres and, more seriously, are diminishing the visibility of artisans, for whom workshops traditionally serve also as windows through which they market their work.

A partial answer to these problems has come from the flourishing of coworking spaces and makerspaces. This is an interesting phenomenon also due to the possible effects on product innovation processes deriving from multidisciplinary collaborations. This is why many countries are studying the phenomenon today with targeted research activities (Sleigh, Stewart, Stokes [2015]).

- *Preserving originality.* While traditional craft objects are often the result of the cultural and social identities of the communities that produce them and incorporate century-old notions and techniques, the appearance of the finished product can often be easily appropriated. Globalization has led to the widespread production of fakes and, once again, the cultural education of customers and their capacity to distinguish quality both in the production process and in the finished product is fundamental to protect original crafts. There is also a need for greater protection of intellectual property and originality in artisanal know-how. «Notwithstanding the fact that craft products are

often assimilated to artistic creations, the majority of people does not acknowledge their right to intellectual property» (Howkins [2001]). Furthermore, in many artistic crafts there are no quality labels that artisans can adhere to in order to certify and communicate to customers the value of their creation.

- *Dynamic innovation / tradition*. Despite the undisputed quality and value of artistic craft products, sometimes artisans, in their understandable desire to preserve tradition, remain faithful to models that have changed little over time. This can lead to a gap between the aesthetics of the product and consumer taste. Tradition is not static and the production of culture, in all its forms, is a cumulative and innovative process, especially in the case of goods and services that compete in a market where taste and demand are changing at an increasingly rapid pace. This problem also suggests the opportunity of a closer dialogue between traditional artisans and designers, in which the latter could have the function of supporting the technical and artistic skills of artisans by providing new aesthetic forms, which would appeal also to the younger generations of customers.

#### 4. CRAFTS AND SUPPORT MICRO-SERVICES: A COMPLEX SYSTEM

The above described problems highlight the profound connections that craft production has not only with the territories on which production insists and with global value chains, but also with a series of other production and service activities that support the sector. These micro-services can be described as «the structure that makes creativity and culture sustainable», including material culture, «because they localize them and the benefits, they produce in a given area» (Bertacchini, Santagata [2012]: 27). Any consideration on the economic and cultural importance of crafts today should therefore also include an analysis of this wider world.

Figure 1 summarizes some of the most important services and micro-services supporting crafts' value chain, which can be synthetically arranged

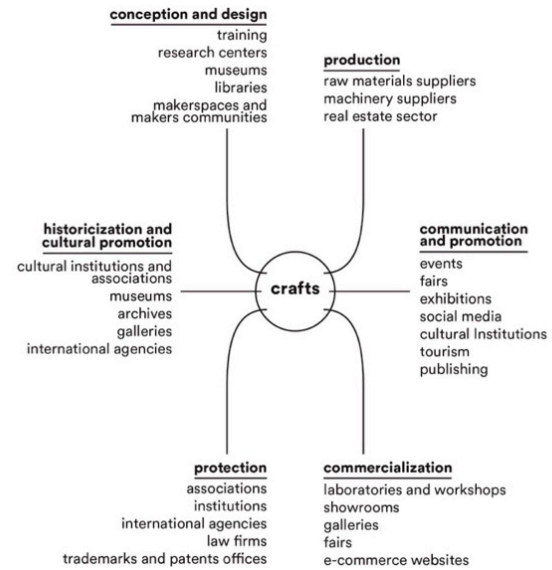


Figure 1. Crafts' filière: support services and micro-services.

in six macro-classes: conception and design; production; communication and promotion; commercialization; protection; historicization.

An examination of these categories will shed light on how interactions between activities that, while disaggregated, are strongly interconnected, plays an important role both from a cultural and economic point of view (Bertacchini, Santagata [2012]:27).

1) *Conception and design*. The support system to conception and design should be seen as a set of cultural infrastructures, services and activities ranging from research and training centres to libraries and museums, from archives to territorial cooperation networks. These places and services have the task on one hand of bringing out creative and entrepreneurial talents, on the other of inspiring and supporting their activity.

2) *Production*. The production support system extends to include, in addition to other artisan businesses operating in coplanar fields (such as an artistic foundry for sculpture or a furnace for working with ceramics), a whole series of mold makers, turners, plasticizers, computer scientists, etc. Then there is the wide world of makerspaces and fablabs that often welcome and support the production of traditional crafts.

3) - 4) *Promo-commercialization*. How is craftsmanship communicated today? What services does communication require? On this phase we find both more traditional services and digital and innovative tools. Among the first, there are initiatives such as workshops, fairs but also exhibitions hosted by cultural institutions. Among the latter, we find the services related to the design and development of new tools and platforms of online promotion and commerce (websites, apps etc.). Another interesting area to consider is that of cross-sectoral collaborations such as those with the tourism industry with initiatives and projects aimed at offering experiences to travellers in artisan shops and promoted through online booking engines, online travel agencies and tourism professionals.

5) *Protection*. Protection can be understood in a broad way and involves the recognition and support of the professional figure of the craftsman, through the work of the institutions and trade associations.

At the local level, the services for the protection of craftsmen are available in various forms, from law firms to services offered by chambers of commerce and trade associations. An important role is also played, internationally, by some agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) or the International Labour Organization (ILO). The intellectual property protection services obviously do not only concern the product but also process or product innovations relating, for example, to the use of new materials.

6) *Historicization and cultural promotion*. This is a relatively “new” phenomenon in the crafts’ world: some traditional products due to their historic value, to their idiosyncratic nature or aesthetic value are being showcased in museums and exhibitions. A number of cultural institutions are nowadays specifically committed in valorizing traditional knowledge and traditional craft’s practices.

The role of these institutions, as places of inspiration and dialogue between past and future, can be interpreted in a twofold way: function-

al not only to the historical settling and to the memorial maintenance of craftsmanship but also to its development.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today craftsmen are regarded, in many countries, as the model for economic resurgence, thanks to their ability to combine local productive know how, technological research, knowledge of materials, and the ability to personalize products.

There is, however, no agreement on what the craftsman of the future should be. At least two schools of thought exist (Friel, Saccone [2012]). Some observers argue that, if left to themselves, craftsmen will be less and less able to meet market challenges, and thus foresee their gradual inclusion as OEMs in small or middle-sized creative companies, or absorption in the productive processes of the great luxury brands. Advocates of this hypothesis cite many success stories around the world. This debate, for example, appears to be particularly lively in countries such as Italy (Micelli [2011]) where traditional craft practices have been very much valorised by “Made in Italy” fashion and furniture design companies.

The second scenario, instead, is one of independent artisanal workshops working on a short supply-chain. To survive, however, these craftsmen must overcome the challenges described in the previous section, from the loss of traditional knowledge to price competition and difficulties in communicating the cultural and technical values embodied in their products.

This alternative vision of the “craftsman of the future” finds interesting echoes in the world of design. The independent craftsman has become the hub of the new paradigm of design that we mentioned above, which is centered on self-production. Over the last few years, design, also intended as a strategic approach to innovation, has led to the rise of new manufacturing companies, the growth of small to middle-size companies that started out as local workshops, and the transformation of artisanal activities, steering them

towards a renewal of their products and of their communication strategies.

Of course, these two scenarios are complementary rather than alternative. In any case, it seems beyond doubt that, to survive and earn the role it deserves in our economic and cultural fabric, the artistic crafts sector will have to face these challenges, choose its path, and integrate its tradition into the new local, national and global trends.

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**Citation:** A. Nicolini (2020) *Se dépendre de soi-même. A Critique of Foucault's Ethics*. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 91-99. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-10738

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## *Se dépendre de soi-même. A Critique of Foucault's Ethics*

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**Abstract.** Between the first and the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* there is a gap of eight years in which Foucault did not publish anything except interviews. Analyzing some of those interviews, the article reconstructs the reasons that lead Foucault to abandon the thematization of power's constraints imposed on the subject and start to elaborate an ethics in which the subject can be rid of him or herself through a care of pleasure(s). Arguing how this change does not represent for Foucault a denying of his previous work but its evolution, the article shows that, despite Foucault's attempt to establish a discourse other than psychoanalysis, his ethics of sexuality unwittingly returns to the "force" that psychoanalysis recognizes as animating sexuality.

**Keywords.** Ethics, pleasure(s), drives, de-subjectivisation, *Askēsis*.

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### LIMIT-EXPERIENCES

In an interview with Duccio Trombadori originally published in Italian, Foucault recalls that he was able to dispose of the philosophies that were dominating the scene of his youth – «the Hegelian system, on the one hand, and the philosophy of the subject, on the other» (Foucault [1981a]: 44) – because he discovered a "protean" and "nomadic" way of doing philosophy unhooked from the traditional cogito<sup>1</sup>. For Foucault, those kinds of metaphysics were absolutely unsuitable. If in fact the Hegelian system wanted to reduce the multiple and divergent truths of history into the rationality of a closed unity, then the philosophy of the subject – either in the form of phenomenology or existentialism – «firmly maintained the supremacy of the subject and its fundamental value, without any radical breaks» (Foucault [1981a]: 48), reducing the contradictions of human experiences to the uniformity of the Cartesian subject.

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<sup>1</sup> «Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille: they are the writers who permitted me to free myself from the others who had formed me during my university education at the beginning of the 1950s» (Foucault [1981a]: 44).



Not only did the Hegelian system and its faith in the all-encompassing power of reason appear naïve to Foucault, but so did the philosophy of the subject. Although it was centered in the theorization of everyday life experience, it was still unable to hear what Foucault called *la pensée du dehors* – which is to say, the force of negativity:

*The phenomenologist's experience is basically a way of organizing the conscious perception (regard réflexif) of any aspect of daily, lived experience in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meaning. Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, on the contrary, try through experience to reach that point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or extreme. They attempt to gather the maximum amount of intensity and impossibility at the same time. The work of the phenomenologist, however, essentially consists of unfolding the entire field of possibilities connected to daily experience. Moreover, phenomenology tries to grasp the significance of daily experience in order to reaffirm the fundamental character of the subject, of the self, of its transcendental functions. On the contrary, experience according to Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille has rather the task of "tearing" the subject from itself in such a way that it is no longer the subject as such, or that it is completely "other" than itself so that it may arrive at its annihilation, its dissociation. (Foucault [1981a]: 30-32)*

As evidenced in this quotation, what interests Foucault is not the re-appropriation of an experience through its putative meaning but on the contrary, encountering the limits of experience, namely that point of life in which experience itself exceeds reason and therefore cannot be understood. The "extreme" or "the limit-experience" to which Foucault is interested escapes the grip of consciousness and imposes itself as the totally "other" to a transcendental subject that is structurally unable to grasp it. Furthermore, escaping rationality, this "other" jeopardizes the stability of a subject that is sustained by rationality.

*My encounter with Bataille, Blanchot and, through them, my reading of Nietzsche. What did they represent for me? First of all, an invitation to call into*

*question the category of the "subject," its primacy and its originating function. And then, the conviction that an operation of that kind would not have made any sense if it had been confined to speculation: to call the subject into question had to mean to live it in an experience that might be its real destruction or dissociation, its explosion or upheaval into something radically "other". (Foucault [1981a]: 46)*

Thanks to these philosophers who «tried to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the "unlivable", to that which can't be lived through», Foucault discovered and acquired the method for a philosophy of de-subjectification, that is, a philosophy in which «the idea of limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself» is the cornerstone (Foucault [1978a]: 241). «It is this de-subjectifying undertaking, declares Foucault, the idea of a "limit-experience" that tears the subject from itself, which is the fundamental lesson that I've learned from these authors. And no matter how boring and erudite my resulting books have been, *this lesson has always allowed me to conceive them as direct experiences to "tear" me from myself*, to prevent me from always being the same» (Foucault [1981a]: 31-32). If in the same interview Foucault can declare without hesitation that he never considered himself a philosopher<sup>2</sup>, it is because *anti*-philosophers such as Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot have inspired all his work. «These thinkers, Foucault observes, were not "philosophers" in the strict, institutional sense of the term» since they «didn't have the problem of constructing systems, but of having direct, personal experiences» through their philosophy (Foucault [1981a]: 30). Foucault declares: «there is no book that I've written without there having been, at least in part, a direct personal experience. I had a personal, complex, direct relation with madness, psychiatric hospitals, and illness. And even with death» (Foucault [1981a]: 38).

Even if we do not follow the controversial interpretation of Foucault's life and philosophy that James Miller offers in his biography, an inter-

<sup>2</sup> «I don't consider myself a philosopher» (Foucault [1981a]: 29).

pretation according to which Foucault always tried to reach death or, at least “limit experiences” as close as possible to death (through sadomasochism and drugs from Miller’s point of view)<sup>3</sup>, we have to acknowledge that, according to this interview from 1978, a philosophy of “de-subjectification” – to which Foucault refers as a philosophy that «requires the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time,» or as a philosophy that leads to «limit-experience that tears the subject from itself» (Foucault [1981a]: 30) – is not just a phase of his research or a peregrine interest, but is instead the theoretical framework that guided Foucault in *each* of his intellectual elaborations.

#### THE ASKĒSIS OF PLEASURE(S)

This perspective becomes even more evident near the end of his life when Foucault abandons the thematization of power’s constraints imposed on the subject and starts to elaborate an ethics in which the subject can be rid of him or herself through a care of pleasure(s). At the time, Foucault was no longer interested in showing how the subject is imprisoned inside an *historical a priori* that reduce him or her to a puppet of society, but in understanding how the subject can be changed by self-transformative practices. This does not mean either that Foucault was disavowing his work on power or that he was no longer interested in understanding the possibilities of resisting social constraints, but rather that he was changing his perspective and putting at the center of his reflection *les modes de subjectivation* instead of the structures of dominance that produce the subject. As Deleuze underlines, «c’est n’est pas du tout qu’il répudie l’œuvre précédente. Au contraire,

c’est toute son œuvre précédente qui le pousse vers ce nouvel affrontement» (Deleuze [1986a]: 149) Indeed, given that the subject is always caught in dynamics of power, Foucault was trying to understand how the subject can escape from him or herself, how he or she can resist the structures that create him or her as he or she is.

Obviously, this change of perspective was difficult for Foucault. Deleuze talks about a real crisis: «Après *La volonté de savoir* il a traversé une crise, de tout ordre, politique, vitale, pensée. Comme chez tous les grands penseurs, sa pensée a toujours procédé par crise et secousses comme condition de création, comme condition d’une cohérence ultime. J’ai eu l’impression qu’il voulait être seul, aller là où on ne pourrait pas le suivre, sauf quelque intime. J’avais beaucoup plus besoin de lui que lui de moi» (Deleuze [1986b]: 115). It took eight years of silence in which Foucault published nothing except interviews<sup>4</sup> to come out from his crisis with the book that marked the turning point<sup>5</sup> in the way he conceived his work: *The Use of Pleasure*, Volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality*. In the preface, he explains the reasons why he changed his perspective and how important the crisis was for his philosophical thought:

*As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to*

<sup>3</sup> «The crux of what is most original and challenging about Foucault’s way of thinking, as I see it, is his unrelenting, deeply ambiguous and profoundly problematic preoccupation with death, which he explored not only in the exoteric form of his writing, but also, and I believe critically, in the esoteric form of sado-masochistic eroticism» (Miller [1993]: 9).

<sup>4</sup> «C’est pourquoi les entretiens de Foucault font pleinement partie de son œuvre» (Deleuze [1986c]: 144).

<sup>5</sup> «Sans doute *La volonté de savoir* dégageait des points de résistance au pouvoir; mais justement, c’est leur statut, leur origine, leur genèse qui restait vagues. Foucault avait peut-être le sentiment qu’il lui fallait à tout prix franchir cette ligne, passe l’autre côté. Aller encore au-delà de savoir-pouvoir. Même s’il fallait remettre en question tout le programme de l’*Histoire de la sexualité*» (Deleuze [1986a]: 148-149).

the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The “essay”—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an “*ascesis*,” *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought. (Foucault [1984a]: 14-15)

From this standpoint we understand that the notion of *askēsis* that Foucault brings out from the texts belonging to the Greek and Latin wisdom, although it emerges explicitly only in the last part of his life, should be considered the (*anti*-)philosophical keystone that bears the theoretical elaboration of all his books<sup>6</sup>. It is this very

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of *The Order of Things* that Foucault considered a purely academic book: «I have already spoken to you about the “limit-experiences”; this is really the theme that fascinates me. Madness, death, sexuality, crime: these are the things that attract my attention most. Instead, I have always considered *The Order of Things* a kind of formal exercise. [...] *The Order of Things* is not my “true” book: it has its “marginality” compared to the depth of participation and interest which is present in and which subtended the others. Nevertheless, by some

notion, thought of as a *technique de transformation de soi-même*, that not only pushes Foucault to change completely the history of sexuality but also becomes the final goal of the desexualization of pleasure(s) that, as we will see now, characterizes his ethics. The reason why Foucault decides to dig into texts that belong to antiquity can be read in an interview with Rabinow and Dreyfus:

What I wanted to do in Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality* was to show that you have nearly the same restrictive, the same prohibitive code in the fourth century B.C. and in the moralists and doctors at the beginning of the empire. But I think that the way they integrate those prohibitions in relation to oneself is completely different. I don't think one can find any normalization in, for instance, the Stoic ethics. The reason is, I think, that the principal aim, the principal target of this kind of ethics, was an aesthetic one. (Foucault [1983]: 254)

The attempt of those texts «was not to normalize the population», indeed they were not meant for common people. On the contrary they were reserved for a “small elite” of people who could afford to have an aesthetic relation with life that could try to *transform* their own lives in an exemplary existence that should be remembered (Foucault [1983]: 254). During the last part of his life Foucault is more interested in developing an “aesthetic of existence” or, to put it in other words “an art of living” that, borrowing the name from antiquity, he calls *askēsis*.

From this perspective, we should remember that the word “aesthetics” comes from the Greek verb *αἰσθάνομαι*, which means to perceive in physical terms. The ethics of Foucault is in fact devoted to an *increasing* of the capacity

peculiar paradox, *The Order of Things* has been the book that has had the greatest success with the public. Probably because of the unheard of concentration of criticism that it received at the time of its publication, everyone wanted to buy it. Tens of thousands of copies were sold. It's a paradox that is due to the unhealthy character of the consumption of a theoretical text in relation to the quantity of criticism that appears in newspapers and magazines» (Foucault [1981a]: 99-101).

to feel pleasure(s) in order to transform the self rather than a renunciation of these same pleasures. This is the reason why the notion of *askēsis* theorized by Foucault should not be confused with the notion of ascetism. The ethics of Foucault is not in fact an ethics of sacrifice and deprivation of worldly pleasures aimed to embrace either a metaphysical or a religious dimension. There is no transcendence at all in Foucault's account. On the contrary, what Foucault presents is the «pure immanence»<sup>7</sup> of a life that, following Nietzsche's step, wants to become art. For this reason, I agree with Deleuze who explains that «quand Foucault en arrive au thème ultime de la "subjectivation," celle-ci consiste essentiellement dans l'invention de nouvelles possibilités de vie. Comme dit Nietzsche, dans la construction de véritables styles de vie : cette fois, un vitalisme sur fond d'esthétique» (Deleuze [1986b]: 125).

Obviously, Foucault's return to the Greeks should not be read as a prescriptive rule. Foucault is far from providing us with any prescriptions or rules whatsoever. His aim is to show examples of how it is possible to create aesthetic relations with life that, by increasing the subject's capacity to feel pleasure, can transform the subject itself. Deleuze suggests that for Foucault:

*Il s'agit d'inventer des modes d'existence, suivant des règles facultatives, capables de résister au pouvoir comme de se dérober au savoir, même si le savoir tente les pénétrer et le pouvoir de se les approprier, mais les modes d'existence ou possibilités de vie ne cessent de se recréer, de nouveau surgissent, et s'il est vrai que cette dimension fut inventé par le Grecs,*

<sup>7</sup> «Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, to something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject. [...] Immanence is not related to Some Thing as a unity superior to all things or to a Subject as an act that brings about a synthesis of things: it is only when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can speak of a plane of immanence. No more than the transcendental field is defined by consciousness can the plane of immanence be defined by a subject or an object that is able to contain it. We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE» (Deleuze [1995]: 26,27).

*nous ne faisons pas un retour au Grecs quand nous cherchons quels sont ceux qui dessinent aujourd'hui, quel est notre vouloir-artiste irréductible au savoir et au pouvoir. Pas plus qu'il n'y a de retour aux Grecs, il n'y a de retour au sujet chez Foucault. Croire que Foucault redécouvre, retrouve la subjectivité qu'il y avait d'abord niée, c'est un malentendu assez profond [...] Je crois même que la subjectivation a peu de choses à voir avec un sujet. Il s'agit plutôt d'un champ électrique ou magnétique, une individuation opérant par intensité (basses autant que hautes), des champs individués et non pas des personnes ou des identités. C'est ce que Foucault, dans d'autres occasions, appelle la passion. (Deleuze [1986b]: 127)*

The «other occasion» to which Deleuze refers is a dialogue with Werner Schroeter in which Foucault, after declaring himself to be a man of passion<sup>8</sup>, finally reveals that «l'art de vivre c'est de tuer la psychologie» (Foucault [1981b]: 256). This dialogue is fundamental because it lays bare the direction of Foucault's ethics. If the goal of Foucault's ethics is to establish an aesthetic relation with life that can turn it into a work of art, and if this work of art consists precisely in killing off psychology, then we understand clearly that the desexualization of pleasure(s) which Foucault sustains is nothing but practices that lead the subject to get rid of him or herself. Practices that, in other words, lead the subject into a state of passion in which he can do nothing but cease being him or herself. These «technologies of the self», in a Foucauldian expression, are aimed at nothing but creating a desubjectivized art of living.

In this dialogue Foucault also explains the passion that, according to Deleuze's interpretation, characterizes the desubjectivized art of living that Foucault sustains:

*Qu'est-ce que la passion? C'est un état, c'est quelque chose qui vous tombe dessus, qui s'empare de vous, qui vous tient par les deux épaules, qui ne connaît pas de pause, qui n'a pas d'origine. En fait, on ne*

<sup>8</sup> When Werner Schroeter asks directly: «Avez-vous une tendance pour la passion ou l'amour?» Foucault answers concisely: «La passion» (Foucault [1981b]: 253).

*sait pas d'où ça vient. La passion est venue comme ça. C'est un état toujours mobile, mais qui ne va pas vers un point donné. Il y a des moments forts et des moments faibles, des moments où c'est porté à l'incandescence. Ça flotte. Ça balance. C'est une sorte d'instant instable qui se poursuit pour des raisons obscures, peut-être par inertie. Ça cherche, à la limite, à se maintenir et à disparaître. La passion se donne toutes les conditions pour continuer et, en même temps, elle se détruit d'elle-même. Dans la passion, on n'est pas aveugle. Simplement, dans ces situations de passion, on n'est pas soi-même. Ça n'a plus de sens d'être soi-même. On voit les choses autrement.* (Foucault [1981b]: 251)

If I had not identified already the person who wrote these lines, one might have thought they had been written by Lacan, or at least by someone who wanted to describe what Lacan means by *Jouissance*. We can, of course, resist Deleuze's interpretation of Foucault and refuse to associate Foucault's *askēsis* with the passion described in this dialogue – but how could then we explain that Foucault, besides defining himself as a man of passion, also describes the state of passion with the same words used in describing the *askēsis* he is trying to achieve? How can we ignore that it is Foucault himself who declares that the only form of knowledge that is worthwhile is «*celle qui permet de se déprendre de soi-même*» since the «*épreuve modificatrice de soi-même est le corps vivant de la philosophie, si du moins celle-ci est encore maintenant ce qu'elle était autrefois, c'est-à-dire une «ascèse» [askēsis]?*» And what does it mean to “kill off psychology” if not to live in a state of passion in which the subject «*n'est pas soi-même*» given that «*ça n'a plus de sens d'être soi-même*»? Foucault himself summed up the question that he tried to answer throughout his life in these terms: «*can it be said that the subject is the only form of existence possible? Can't there be experiences in which the subject, in its constitutive relations, in its self-identity, isn't given any more? And thus wouldn't experiences be given in which the subject could dissociate itself, break its relationship with itself, lose its identity? Wasn't this perhaps the experience of Nietzsche, with*

the metaphor of the Eternal Return?» (Foucault [1981a]: 49).

#### THE DRIVES BEYOND PLEASURES

According to Foucault, «there is no “abnormal” pleasure, there is no “pathology” of pleasure» and for this reason it is possible to derive from the ethics of the ancients (Greeks and Latins) an *art de vivre* devoted to the increase of pleasure (Foucault [1978b]: 388). Nevertheless, he has to admit that:

*What seems to have formed the object of moral reflection for the Greeks in matters of sexual conduct was not exactly the act itself (considered in its different modalities), or desire (viewed from the standpoint of its origin or its aim), or even pleasure (evaluated according to the different objects or practices that can cause it); it was more the dynamics that joined all three in a circular fashion (the desire that leads to the act, the act that is linked to pleasure, and the pleasure that occasions desire). The ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported “by the pleasures and desires”? The ontology to which this ethics of sexual behavior referred was not, at least not in its general form, an ontology of deficiency and desire; it was not that of a nature setting the standard for acts; it was an ontology of a force that linked together acts, pleasures, and desires.* (Foucault [1984a]: 43)

The Greeks were aware of the *forces* that sustain pleasure (in fact, Greek tragedians acutely demonstrated the overwhelming power of negativity). They knew, moreover, that the destruction of the subject comes often by their pleasure. Even if it is true, as Foucault argues, that the Greeks were not concerned about kinds of pleasure<sup>9</sup>, it

<sup>9</sup> «In Antiquity people were very attentive to the elements of conduct and they wanted everybody to pay attention to them. But the modes of attention were not the same as those that came to be known later. Thus the sexual act itself, its morphology, the way in which one seeks and obtains one's pleasure, the “object” of desire, do not seem

is also true that they were insistent on the necessity of moderating their force. «The sexual act did not occasion anxiety because it was associated with evil but because it disturbed and threatened the individual's relationship with himself and his integrity as an ethical subject in the making; if it was not properly measured and distributed, it carried the threat of a breaking forth of involuntary forces, a lessening of energy, and death without honorable descendants» (Foucault [1984a]: 136-137). This is the reason why the Greeks and the Romans wrote numerous texts that sought to understand and control what psychoanalysis has subsequently defined as the drive. Indeed, as Foucault affirms, what is essential for Greek and Roman morality is to develop «a certain style of morality that is *self-control*. Sexual activity is represented, perceived as violence, and therefore problematized from the point of view of the difficulty there is in controlling it. Hubris is fundamental. In this ethics, one must constitute for oneself rules of conduct by which one will be able to ensure that self-control» (Foucault [1984b]: 261).

From this perspective, it is important to remember that ὕβρις is the most execrable sin for the Greeks. The *hybristes* is in fact the person who, driven by his or her own *daimon*, goes beyond the limits of his or her own human condition so far as to defy the gods. But what does it exactly mean to defy the gods for the Greek culture? It means to step outside the category to which one belongs in accord with nature (κατὰ φύσιν). When the forces that psychoanalysis labels as drive erupt from the unconscious, they overwhelm the subject, leading him or her to behave in a manner inconsistent with his or her own status. Extricating the person from him or herself, the forces end up pushing him or her outside the category to which he or she belongs. This is why they are so terrifying. «Some even advised to indulge only “if one wants to do harm to oneself”. A very ancient fear, there-

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to have been a very important theoretical problem in Antiquity. On the other hand, what was an object of pre-occupation was the intensity of sexual activity, its rhythm, the moment chosen» (Foucault [1984b]: 260).

fore» concludes Foucault (Foucault [1984a]: 17). For this reason, the most important skill for the Greeks is to manage one's own forces or drives, to develop the ability to resist them<sup>10</sup>. Failing this imperative means being brought to one's own downfall. Therefore, what is important is not to renounce pleasure or turn away from all sexual activity but rather to manage its inherent and frightening “force”:

*If it was necessary, as Plato said, to bridle it [sexual activity] with the three strongest restraints: fear, law, and true reason; if it was necessary, as Aristotle thought, for desire to obey reason the way a child obeyed his tutor; if Aristippus himself advised that, while it was all right to “use pleasures, one had to be careful not to be carried away by them” – the reason was not that sexual activity was a vice, nor that it might deviate from a canonical model; it was because sexual activity was associated with a force, an energeia, that was itself liable to be excessive. In the Christian doctrine of the flesh, the excessive force of pleasure had its principle in the Fall and in the weakness that had marked human nature ever since.*

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<sup>10</sup> «These are almost the same words that Antiphon the Sophist employed on his own account: “He is not wise [*sôphrôn*] who has not tried the ugly and the bad; for then there is nothing he has conquered [*kratein*] and nothing that would enable him to assert that he is virtuous [*kosmios*]. “One could behave ethically only by adopting a combative attitude toward the pleasures. As we have seen, the aphrodisiacs were made not only possible but desirable by an interplay of forces whose origin and finality were natural, but whose potential, by the fact that they had their own energy, was for revolt and excess. These forces could not be used in the moderate way that was fitting unless one was capable of opposing, resisting, and subduing them. Of course, if it was necessary to confront them, this was because they were inferior appetites that humans happen to share – like hunger and thirst – with the animals; but this natural inferiority would not of itself be a reason for having to combat them, if there was not the danger that, winning out over all else, they would extend their rule over the whole individual, eventually reducing him to slavery. In other words, it was not their intrinsic nature, their disqualification on principle that necessitated this “polemical” attitude toward oneself, but their possible ascendancy and dominion» (Foucault [1984a]: 66).

*For classical Greek thought, this force was potentially excessive by nature, and the moral question was how to confront this force, how to control it and regulate its economy in a suitable way. (Foucault [1984a]: 50)*

The *energeia* that drives sexual activity – a force produced, according to the Greeks, by pleasure *and* desire – is intrinsic to that activity and cannot be avoided. What the Greeks believed was possible was to learn how to manage this *energeia* in order to remain master of themselves. They believed that «the battle to be fought, the victory to be won, the defeat that one risked suffering, these were processes and events that took place between oneself and oneself. The adversaries the individual had to combat were not just within him or close by; they were part of him» (Foucault [1984a]: 67). This is the reason why in an interview with Rabinow and Dreyfus, Foucault admits that the question at stake in the moderation of pleasures that sustained the ethics of the Greeks was always: «Are you a slave of your own desires or their master?» (Foucault [1983]: 260).

## CONCLUSION

Foucault's ethics, although aspiring to the creation of an *art de vivre* that could lead to a de-subjectivated *askēsis* of pleasure(s), arises from the ethics of the Greeks, an ethics concerned with a strong subjectivity able to moderate the forces driving sexual activity. It is true that, as we have seen, Foucault's return to the Greeks is not a return *strictu sensu*. On this regard, Deleuze rightly observes that «Foucault n'emploie pas le mot sujet comme personne ni comme forme d'identité, mais les mots "subjectivation" comme processus, et "Soi" comme rapport (rapport à soi).» But then he acutely adds: «Et de quoi s'agit-il? *Il s'agit d'un rapport de la force avec soi,*» unmasking the problem intrinsic in Foucault's anti-psychoanalytic perspective (Deleuze [1986b]: 127). What is this force against which the subject has to fight? What kind of force is it that, by operating inside the subject, resists its will and even imposes itself, up to threaten the subject's relation to his or her

pleasures? If Foucault's ethics constantly oscillates between an *askēsis* of pleasure(s) which leads to a de-subjectivated *art de vivre* and a care of those same pleasure(s) in order to remain master of himself, this is because Foucault, despite himself, ultimately shows that what really de-subjectivates the subject is not a willing pursuit of pleasure(s), but an unwilling fall into the abyss of the drives.

Therefore, even if we ignore either Bersani's critique, which reads S/M as the eroticization of power instead of a parodic performance that relaxes the fixation of its social structure (Bersani [1994]: 77-113); or Gratton's, which shows the «miraculously *unsullied*» quality of the notion of pleasure as theorized by Foucault (Gratton [2001]: 31-40); or Deleuze's, which shows that pleasure is not inherently extraneous to social constraints, (Deleuze [2003]: 112-123). we still reach the same conclusion. Even, that is, if we naively embrace the *askēsis* of pleasure(s) theorized by Foucault, and sustained by theorists of S/M (Califia [2003]; Weinberg, Levi Kamel [1983]; Mains 1984; Hopcke [1991]), we paradoxically arrive at the same point held by psychoanalysis – namely the inconsistency of the Cartesian subject in relation to his or her own drives<sup>11</sup>. What is this passion described by Foucault but the *drive* or, to be more explicit, the *death drive*? Despite Foucault's resistance to psychoanalysis, what in fact emerges from the Foucauldian attempt to escape from psychology is nothing but a subject who encounters the de-subjectivized effect of the drives that undermine its putative sovereignty. What are the limit-experiences to which he refers in the interview with Trombadori if not the moment in which we are overwhelmed by forces that tug at and expropriate our sovereignty over the world and ourselves? Are not these moments precisely *those* that anti-philosophers such as Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, – and Foucault consequently – tried to

<sup>11</sup> Foucault had to admit that «Lacan brought up the fact that the theory of the unconscious is not compatible with a theory of the subject (in the Cartesian but also the phenomenological sense of the term)» (Foucault [1978a]: 251).

acknowledge? If the goal of Foucault's *askēsis* of pleasure is to «extricate yourself from yourself» [c'est dépendre de soi-même] (Foucault [1984a]: 8), then the issue does not concern pleasure(s) but what is beyond pleasure(s) – namely the drives.

Thus, even if we follow Foucault's attempt to establish a discourse other than psychoanalysis with which to articulate an ethics of sexuality, we cannot ignore Foucault's own unwitting return to the "force" that psychoanalysis recognizes as animating sexuality. Thanks to psychoanalysis, we understand that pleasure cannot be the reparative loophole by which we escape our desires. Indeed, pleasure is nothing but the other face of desire, and, like desire, it is a site in which the drives jeopardize the subject and his or her fantasy of sovereignty.

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**Citation:** M. Hanif, M. Madadzadeh (2020) Foucault's Biopower and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 101-114. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11108

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Foucault's Biopower and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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**Abstract.** *Society Must Be Defended* is a collection of Michel Foucault's courses at the College de France in 1976. In this volume, Foucault discusses the emergence of a new technology of domination called biopower. It is a power that is not "individualizing", but "massifying", that is directed at man as a member of a "species". Biopolitics exerts control over relations between the human races. Yet, some critics claim that Foucault's biopower does not address colonial societies and problems. This paper argues that Foucault's theory of biopower could be applied to the postcolonial discourse, too. To trace Foucauldian biopower in postcolonial literature, the authors of this article have focused on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. In this paper, the plot and the dialogue of Forster's novel is studied based on Foucault's theory of biopower as discussed in his *Society Must Be Defended*. It is concluded that in Forster's novel, it can be noticed that the English power, which dominated early twentieth century Indian society, employs biopower to subjugate the Indian population. The English officials control India not merely by means of disciplinary institutions, but by manufacturing norms for an entire race which are explainable in terms of Foucault's theory of biopower.

**Keywords.** Biopower, power, war, *A Passage to India*, E.M. Forster, Michel Foucault.

### INTRODUCTION

Juridical power is exercised by monarchs and sovereignty is all about and for the royal power. Royal power could be entirely defined in juridical terms. In classic juridical power, power is regarded as a right which can be possessed and which can be transferred or alienated. This power is concrete and any individual can hold it, so it is inherited. Juridical power is defined as the right to death, the right to take life or let live. It operates on prohibitions and punishments, and in other words it prohibits and punishes. Its agents of prohibitions are institutions, like laws and governments. Indeed, it is directly exercised upon the individuals rather than an entire mass of people.

However, Sovereign power has two categories which stand in contrast to it: disciplinary power and biopower. These two do not

function through violence, but by training bodies and keeping people alive respectively. Disciplinary power is the technology of individuals, while, biopower is the technology of mass control. As Juridical power has the right over one's death, disciplinary and biopolitical power are the power over life. Foucault develops the idea of power over life to describe the other ways that power functions. Power over life includes norms, like body size and gender, and in general, any sort of measurement and statistical analysis of population. This sort of power can quantify, measure, and appraise. This power wants "better life" by managing all the little details. It is located in unofficial institutions. It is in the unwritten laws, the social norms that everybody knows them.

The first kind of power over life is disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is the normalization of individual bodies. It optimizes capabilities and makes the body function efficiently. It works through the normalization of your body and thus is enforced through surveillance. But biopower is the normalization of populations and it administers population. In fact, Biopolitics wants to make sure that not the individual life but the life of a population is most optimized; Hence, the focus is on the life of all people of a society not just the life of one person and consequently, it is not linked to the individual body but to a population.

Some critics, such as Robert Young (2001), have pointed out that there is almost a calculated absence of the colonial world in Foucault's works. It is curious that, Young writes, «for the most part he preserved a scrupulous silence on such issues and has, as a result, been widely criticized for alleged eurocentrism» (397). Yet, Foucault had the experience of living in the postcolony of Tunisia. Also, despite the fact that Foucault's career was mostly in academic institutions, he had the experience of residing in other countries such as Sweden, and even thought of moving to Zaire. This had certainly made him acquire first-hand knowledge of colonialism. He was, moreover, interested in the interrelationship between racial issues and political Marxist causes. In a letter to Canguilhem, Foucault wrote:

*Nationalism plus racism adds up to something very nasty. And if you add that, because of their gauchisme, the students lent a hand (and a bit more than a hand) to it all, you feel quite profoundly sad. And one wonders by what strange ruse or (stupidity) of history, Marxism could give rise to that (and supply a vocabulary for it). (Quoted in Macey [1994]: 204)*

Indeed, in Foucault's case, his transformation and politicization came about during a self-imposed exile to the neighboring colony of Tunisia. Postcolony had therefore a decisive role to play in giving shape to the work of this prominent thinker. Ahluwalia (2010) states:

*Foucault's Tunisian experience provided the impetus for him to develop frameworks which could comprehend the complexity of the political scene post 1968, forcing a rethinking of key social and political institutions. This new form of analysis is one that eventually paved the way for his conceptualization of governmentality, the analysis of who can govern and who is governed but also the means by which that shaping of someone else's activities is achieved. (Ahluwalia [2010]: 6)*

in addition, Foucault at some point endorsed 1979 Iranian revolution, although he modified his views on it some time later (Afary, Anderson [2005]: 260). As in September and November 1978, he visited Iran twice. The revolutionary movement in Iran and Foucault shared several passions the most prominent of which was their ardent opposition to the West's colonial policies and imperialism (9).

In fact, Foucault has had a great impact on the humanities and social sciences, as Ahluwalia (2010) concludes that «it can be argued that the post-colonial is embedded deeply at the root of post-structural thinking» (1) and «Michel Foucault's works has been highly influential within postcolonial studies, from informing Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to the work of subaltern studies and beyond, his analysis of power, authority, modes of surveillance and governmentality have been vital to understanding the dynamics of

the colonial world» (5). Indeed, «the rendition of politics that Foucault witnessed in Tunisia is germane to his later lectures that were released as *Society Must be Defended*» (Schmitt [1985]: 40 ). In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault discusses the emergence of a new technology of domination, called biopower, that is not “individualizing”, but “massifying”, that is directed not at the body of one single man, but at man as member of an entire species or a large community of people. So biopower is the control over relations between the human races (Foucault [2003]: 243). In the colonial context it is done by prioritizing one race over another. As Milne explains, E. M. Forster is one of the great figures of English literature who cast a critical and reforming eye on the abuses of the world. His main interest in his works is most often is personal relations and society. And his last novel, *A Passage to India*, portrays the relationship between the British and the Indians in colonial India in the 1920s.

In the central episode of *A Passage to India*, which occurs in the Marabar caves, Aziz, Mrs. Moor, and Miss Adela explore the caves. But Adela is terrified in the caves when she is alone. In fact, she feels that she was assaulted by something or somebody. Aziz becomes the accused of that consummate crime; and this is mostly because he is a dark-skinned Indian. The racial tension between the British and the Indians builds up when Aziz is arrested. Then Fielding, the English principal, comes to defend Aziz. But the British colonists stigmatize Fielding calling him «the blood traitor» (Forster [1924]: 71). The other British colonists, contrary to Fielding, believe that Aziz is guilty. This mystery is not resolved until Adela confesses that nothing happened in the caves and that Aziz was not even in the same cave. When Adela admits that she is wrong and Aziz is not guilty, the colonists assume that Adela is also a traitor who has betrayed the British race. Michel Foucault believes:

*An important phenomenon occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the appearance, one should say the invention, of a new mechanism of*

*power which had very specific procedures, completely new instruments, and very different equipment. This new mechanism of power applies primarily to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces. This new type of power, which can therefore no longer be transcribed in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of bourgeois society's great inventions.* (Foucault [2003]: 35-36)

So Foucault (2003) calls this new technology of power, biopolitics or biopower. According to him, «it is the right to take life or let live. And this obviously introduces a startling dissymmetry» (240-241). This is the power of modern society which is not repressive. Then Foucault (2003) claims, «unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied not to man as body but to the living man, to man as living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man as species» (242). Then he explains, «biopower is applied in general ways to the population, life, and living beings» (273). The power is practiced on population not individual. This invisible power, however, is not forced upon population but exists everywhere and is invisibly overserved by the population. In addition, Foucault (2003) speculates, «what we are dealing with in this new technology of power is not exactly society (or at least not the social body, as defined by the jurists), nor is it the individual as body. It is a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, can not necessarily be counted». The disciplinary power and repressive power are focused on individuals to regularize them, but biopower is directed on population to normalize all the people of a society. So, biopolitics administers population and it wants to make sure that not the individual life is optimized but make sure that the population life is “improved”. For him this problem is the combination of biological and power's problem (245). So, everybody is subjected to this power and they are constructed to be normal people. Foucault (2003) argues, «what I mean is the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being that the biological came under State control, that

there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological» (237-238). Sam Holder (2019) states, «The review of *Society Must be Defended* suggests that race theory, postcolonial investigation, and other critical interventions (and interventionists) are well-suited to heed Foucault's encouragement and deploy analyses and engage in praxis to confront contemporary political challenges» (20). Indeed, Foucault explains, «the mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures» (246). In fact, it is the state that dominates one group of people over another group based on their biology. It is the domination of one population as superior over another population as inferior. He maintains, «it is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes racism in the mechanisms of the State» (254). Therefore, Foucault describes the other way that power functions and he focused on the normalization of populations.

In this paper, the authors will look into the plot and the dialogue of *A Passage to India*, while drawing on Foucault's theory of biopower as he expounded in *Society Must Be Defended* to find the traces of what Foucault defined as biopower. By the same token, we can clarify the impact Foucault had on an important aspect of colonial or post-colonial studies; namely, the regularization of the subjected race at the hand of the colonial power. As Foucault never directly mentions the relation of his theory of biopower to the post-colonial discourse, Forster's novel portrays the surreptitious domination of the colonialists over the natives through "massifying" a large body of people/race.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *Periphrasis, Power, and Rape in «A Passage to India»*, Brenda R. Silver (1998) arrives at the association between periphrasis, power, and rape that structures both linguistic and social relations in *A Passage to India* and provides the space for re-reading E. M. Forster's most enigmatic novel.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, he concludes that to a great extent, the rhetoric of power manifests itself within the novel in the use of synecdoche and metonymy to reduce the other, the signified, to a materiality, a physicality that denies the irreducibility and multiplicity of the individual subject.

Also, in «*A Passage to India*», *the National Movement, and Independence*, Frances B. Singh (1985) points out the novel's relationship to the national movement. It is asserted that «the independence is a complex issue in the novel, and reflects the viewpoints of contemporary politicians such as Mohammed Iqbal, Mohammed Ali, M. K. Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru». Also it is mentioned that «the influence of the Hindu and Muslim religions can be traced in the attitudes and actions of two characters who have been shaped by these religions Godbole and Aziz» (265-278). Actually he compares Aziz with the politicians mentioned above. Singh's reading of the novel is historical and absolutely context-bound which he draws on palpable political and religious overtones of the text.

Moreover, in *Materiality and Mystification in «A Passage to India»*, Benita Parry (1998) mentions, «alongside its many material and sentient Indians, which act to estrange the time-honored topos of a mysterious land, the novel also constructs an obfuscated realm where the secular is scant, and in which India's long traditions of mathematics, science and technology, history, linguistics, and jurisprudence have no place». Then he adds, «But although Forster does juxtapose a mystified to a material and historical India, he did not follow the utopian writers in affirming India as the Wisdom-land of Carpenter's expectations, or in designating it as that farthest destination» (174-194). Parry therefore argues that «the fiction, far from rendering India as epistemologically vacant, reconfigures the sub-continent as a geographical space and social realm abundantly occupied by diverse intellectual modes, cultural forms, and sensibilities» (185).

In another article, titled *Towards an Extended Theory of Face Action: Analyzing Dialogue in*

*E.M. Forster's «A Passage to India»*, by R.A. Buck (1997), the interaction of Brown and Levinson's social principle of face action with speech acts, and the cooperative principle, with general principles of conversational exchange structure are examined in a discourse analysis of selected dialogue between non-intimate characters of unequal power relation in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. He concludes that «the notions of face act and speech act must be kept distinct, and that a social principle of face action not only directs and constrains the linguistic choices made at the level of the sentence but also explains how and why linguistic utterances cohere in large units of extended discourse» (83-106). Indeed, Buck studies the novel linguistically to investigate the social interactions between the characters.

In *Symbolism in E. M. Forster's «A Passage to India»*: Temple, V.A. Shahane (1963) stresses on the unexplored elements of Forster's symbolism, and aims at expounding the significance of the third section of the novel, Temple. He declares, «The three sections: Mosque, Caves, Temple, represent the three seasons of the Indian Year. Mosque is associated with arch, Caves with echo, Temple with sky. These symbols have a positive as well as a negative meaning» (423-431). Here Shahane studies the novel linguistically and literally and examines the symbolism of Marabar caves from an Indian viewpoint.

In *Hinduism in E. M. Forster's: «A Passage to India»*, Michael Spencer (1968) attempts to answer the questions: Is the religion very important in the purpose of the novel or is it more a part of the cultural pattern which forms the background of the lives of the characters? And is Mohammedanism actually more important to the novel than Hinduism, in view of the fact that Aziz is more central in the story than any Hindu? Actually, he mentions, «Hinduism plays the key role in the nature of the character of Godbole, a man whose greatest role is in the third section of the novel. [and] a variety of images [with strong overtones in Hinduism], such as sun, bird, snake, echo, arch, and wasp, run through the novel». Then he continues, «to turn to the novel itself-the best

method of dealing with such an issue we can see Mohammedanism dismissed with the comment that it, like Christianity, does not penetrate very far into the mysteries of reality» (265-278). All in all, however, no considerable writing exists about the study of *A Passage to India* based on Michel Foucault's lecture in *Society Must be Defended* and especially his notion of biopower. And this study is almost the first concentrated attempt to explicate the novel in light of biopower.

## DISCUSSION

Forster in *A Passage* tries to show the interaction between Indian and British cultures. The relationship between Major Callendar and Aziz shows how the British elites mistreated the Indians. In chapter two, a servant arrives, bearing a note from the Civil Surgeon; Callendar wishes to see Aziz at his bungalow about a medical case. We notice Callendar resents Aziz's superior skills, and expects Aziz to come immediately as he says, «Why Aziz had not come promptly when summoned» (Forster [1924]: 24). Examples as such illustrate how the British power dominated the Indians no matter if they are from among the educated or upper-class strata of the society. According to Foucault,

*In the case of the classic juridical theory of power, power is regarded as a right which can be possessed in the way one possesses a commodity, and which can therefore be transferred or alienated, either completely or partly, through a juridical act or an act that founds a right; it does not matter which, for the moment, thanks to the surrender of something or thanks to a contract. Power is the concrete power that any individual can hold, and which he can surrender, either as a whole or in part, so as to constitute a power or a political sovereignty.* (Foucault [2003]: 13)

The life of Indian people in *A Passage* is under power, which is not visible. In fact, the British believe and act in a way that the Indians are not under their control and they are equal to them. Yet, as we study the novel we figure out that this is not true and in fact a hidden mechanism of con-

trol and rule runs through the society. Foucault continues:

*Power must, I think, be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of some, and it is never appropriated in the way that wealth or a commodity can be appropriated. Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them. (Foucault [2003]: 29)*

So every individual has got the power but nobody exerts it over others directly. as Danaher et al. (2000) believe, «power for Foucault is not a thing that is held and used by individuals or groups. Rather, it is both a complex flow and a set of relations between different groups and areas of society which changes with circumstances and time» (14).

Indeed, Forster repeats a particular view towards knowledge as power through most of the characters, as Nawab Bahadur says in a part of the novel, «India advances by what is the opposite of superstition which is knowledge that can be gained only by means of education» (Forster [1924]: 100). Fielding is an English school-teacher and is Forster's top man to demonstrate the kind of understanding that the world needs. He believes not only Englishmen, but also educated Indians should help in education as he says, «well-qualified Indians also need jobs in the educational» (Forster [1924]: 114). The need for education as the power is very urgent for Indians according to Aziz as he says, «Mr. Fielding, we must all be educated promptly» (Forster [1924]: 274). Again in another part, Forster insists on his belief in education that gives power to people and he repeats it through Fielding's words as this: «My job's Education. I believe in teaching people to be individuals, and to understand other individuals. It's the only thing I do believe in» (Forster [1924]: 124). Of course, the other English officials look at Indians as a mass, or group, Fielding, however, is

a good-intentioned person. The other educated Indian is Professor Godbole, a Hindu who is separated from the Muslims by his religion and from the English by both his religion and nationality. And then he becomes the Minister of Education at Mau because he loves his people and his aim is to help them by means of education as he mentions, «I am returning to my birthplace in Central India to take charge of education there. I want to start a High School there on sound English lines, that shall be as like Government College as possible» (Forster [1924]: 183). Indeed, Godbole knows that few Indians think education is good, and because the Indians do not believe in the power of education they cannot help themselves. According to Lemm (2017), «Foucault discovered that power went much deeper because it was deeply intertwined with Knowledge» (40). Fielding and Godbole aim to offer a kind of education which is «on sound English lines». So, Aziz believes they can save India in the future by means of education which will be revealed not now but in the future and he makes a statement about future generations driving the English out of India (Forster [1924]: 51). So according to Foucault (2003), «the delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation, and those apparatuses are not ideological trimmings or edifices» (33-34). Therefore, this normalizing power exists in society and scientific organizations such as schools and universities are the source of this power because they construct and educate people to be normal. Thus knowledge entails power. This knowledge is not specifically the way of knowing about facts, but is contingent on knowing the discourse and convention of society in order to be considered a "normal" member of society. If they do not acquire this knowledge they are simply ostracized and excluded.

In chapter sixteen, the climactic event happens when Adela is lost in Maraber caves, and then becoming accused of assaulting Adela in the cave, Aziz is sent into prison. Different from other British officers, Mr. Fielding seems to understand the most realistic assessment of colonial system

in India. It is only Fielding who believes that he is innocent and it was impossible for Aziz to have committed this (Forster [1924]: 70). McBryde, the English police superintendent, believes Aziz attacked Adela, even though Adela never tells that he did; as he declares, «the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm» (Forster [1924]: 96).

Sovereign power for Foucault (2003) is associated with the monarch and it is repressive as the way that prisoners were punished (36). But, Foucault believes there is also a disciplinary power in modern society. There is no violence in it but its punishment is about supervising, controlling and training. Power is not made visible in disciplinary power. So here violence is not used but rules and regulations are used. Above and over the disciplinary power is a «new mechanism of power» (35) which he calls, «biopower» (246). This power «does not exclude disciplinary technology» and it combines with sovereign power. In fact, «this new technique does not simply do away with the disciplinary technique, because it exists at a different level, on a different scale, and because it has a different bearing area, and makes use of very different instruments» (242). In fact, this power is everywhere and it is invisible. And here it is not only powerful people possess power, but everybody is subjected to power. In fact, it is not about laws but about norms and statistics. So, in biopower the opinions are regulated. As in *A Passage* the English opinions are regulated in a way that the Indians are guilty and inferior.

During Aziz' trial we can recognize that Aziz should be guilty because he is Indian. Indeed, he is the symbol of Indian-ness and how a species with dark complexion is destined to behave. So he is judged based on his species. Foucault remarks:

*So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualizing, but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man as body but at man as species. After the anatomo-politics of the human*

*body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a "biopolitics" of the human race. (Foucault [2003]: 243)*

In juridical power, punishment is done on the individual. But biopower administers life and population. And it is focused on species of body. then for optimizing the life of population the groups that are not normal are considered as threats for the population so they should be vanished. So biopolitics or biopower is what Foucault discussed as a new technology of power that we can trace it through *A Passage*. As a matter of fact, Forster depicts the society of India in the novel in a way that we can feel the presence of this new technology of power. In fact, Foucault (2003) declares, «biopolitics last domain is control over relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are a species, insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live» (244-245). It can be noticed through the relationship between Indian and British people and how the British treat the Indians.

So Foucault (2003) calls «biopower» a power that is applied in general ways to the population, life, and living beings. As Campbell and Sitze (2013) mention, «biopower is, quite simply, a complex web of systems targeting populations and the overall administration of life as its subject» (20). And he explains, «this technology of power, this biopolitics, will introduce mechanisms with a certain number of functions that are very different from the functions of disciplinary mechanisms. The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures» (246). Therefore, biopower includes norms such as color of skin, IQ scores, body size or any measurements. So the society is a normalizing society and People want to appear normal.

On the surface of the novel, there is peace in the society and people have no objection. But as we read it, we can feel the existence of a silent war. Most of the characters are aware of this war but they do not talk about it. Here the reader feels



this war through the behavior of the characters. There are two hypotheses according to Foucault (2003); as he claims, «First hypothesis, which is that the mechanism of power is basically or essentially repression» (15), and the second hypothesis, «Power is war, the continuation of war by other means» (15). In fact, the war exists in a civil society, in all its power relations. Foucault (2003) explains, «according to hypothesis one, the mechanism of power is repression, for the sake of convenience; I will call this Reich's hypothesis, if you like. And according to the second, the basis of the power-relationship lies in a warlike clash between forces, for the sake of convenience, I will call this Nietzsche's hypothesis» (16). Then he continues, «according to this hypothesis, the role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to re-inscribe that relationship of force, and to re-inscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals» (16). As a result, Foucault (2003) mentions, «war is about two things: it is not simply a matter of destroying a political adversary, but of destroying the enemy race, of destroying that sort of biological threat that those people over there represent to our race» (257). As Downing (2008) believes, «Foucault gestures towards a fruitful reading of class struggle and racial tensions, which are habitually subsumed under the operations of peacetime bio-politics» (19).

India that Forster describes in his novel is suffering from chaos and disorder. In the first part the author describes it as a dead and sad area as he mentions, «the streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest» (Forster [1924]: 1). Also in Chapter five, Adela tries to see the “real” India. She is a kind of person who wants to see things as they really are. As Baranay (n.d.) asserts, «Adela is eager to embrace the experience of India, with a naïve passion to see the real» (1). Then her curiosity to see the real India makes Turton give a bridge party for her in that he invites some rich Indian families and British foreigners. The Bridge Party was not a success at

least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Adela were accustomed to consider a successful party. «They arrived early, since it was given in their honor, but most of the Indian guests had arrived even earlier and stood massed at the farther side of the tennis lawns, doing nothing» (Forster [1924]: 18). This party did not help Moore and Adela to see the “real” India, because here Forster wants to show the death of Indian people in such gatherings. That is why they could not see the real Indian people as they are not treated as alive people. As Foucault (2003) writes, «power has no control over death, but it can control mortality» (248). This is Foucault's power over life. Here in *A Passage* we can see the power over the life of the Indians. Therefore, Foucault (2003) believes, «broadly speaking, racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or a population, insofar as one is an element in a unitary living plurality» (258). This is considering a group of people as a threat for the normalized population. So it is right to kill them. Therefore, it is the function of biopower through investment and disinvestment. So, race is used for differentiating between who is invested, whose life is optimized and whose life is left to die. Indians are otherized and pushed to believe that potency and life is dead among them. The picture we are given of India and the Indians is of a cleanly sterilized people whose spiritual potency is administered by the British ruling power.

In chapter eighteen, Forster introduces Mr. McBryde, who is the District Superintendent of Police. During the trial of Aziz, he claims, «all unfortunate natives are criminals at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude 30. They are not to blame, they have not a dog's chance we should be like them if we settled here» (Forster [1924]: 73 *emphasis ours*). In fact, according to McBryde, all the Indians are victims because they live in this country. So he assumes Indians have no political right as if they are dead and not being considered alive. It is what Foucault (2003) insists, «When I say “killing”, I obvious-

ly do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on» (256). Indeed, Forster portrays the political death of Indians. Here racist acts do not mean the treatment of an individual anymore, it is an institutionalized and deeply fossilized procedure of literal and metaphoric “mass murder” and zombification. It is performed by shifting resources from the inferior group; by not giving them sources they need to have a successful life. In this way they are protecting the life of the English by keeping away the right of a living entity from the Indians.

Adela wishes to see «the real India» (Forster [1924]: 12). She complains that they have seen nothing of India, because she wants to find out the Indian culture and be among the Indian civilians and talk with them. But she faces India which is governed by the English, rather a replica of England. In fact, Forster describes this country clearly that we can understand through Adela's curiosity and effort to see the real India with the effect of ruling state in this country. The English state controls the country as a replica of England without giving them the right of originality. In Chapter Five, during which Foucault critiques the Hobbesian theory of sovereignty, he also briefly refers to the “boomerang effect” of colonial practice, beginning in the late sixteenth century. «A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West... and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself» (Foucault [2003]: 52).

At the end Forster (1924) notes, «Indians should be citizens of their own nation» (340). He concludes India does not need English officials and interference, but it needs an Indian state that can provide the basis of education for Indians. So this novel states Indian people are able to make their own country without the English forces. Forster expresses this idea in the words of Aziz as he says, «India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one!» (Forster [1924]: 340). Obviously, Aziz is the

young Indian doctor whom Adele accuses. He is politicized, as we would say now, by his arrest. He comes into the novel already bitter about the English and after the trial goes to live in an Indian-ruled state. Then in another part of the novel Aziz says, «what does unhappiness matter when we are all unhappy together?» (Forster [1924]: 72). So, Aziz excitedly declares that India must be united and the British be driven out. This would have been a fervently ideal desire that, even if materialized, surely would not have put things way where they used to be before the colonial rule. Bio-politics, in fact, functions even when a race is physically absent in a previously colonial area.

Said (1994) maintains that «imperialism is not about a moment in history; it is about a continuing interdependent discourse between subject peoples and the dominant discourse of the empire. Despite the apparent and highly-praised end of colonialism, the unstated assumptions on which empire was based linger on, eliminating visions of an “Other” world without domination and restricting the imaginary of equality and justice» (35). In the novel the Indians are treated as an inferior race. The English interact with the Indians as if they interact with their servants. In chapter three, when Ronny explains about the Indians to his Mom, he scorns them:

*It's the educated native's latest dodge. They used to cringe, but the younger generation believes in a show of manly independence. They think it will pay better with the itinerant M.P. But whether the native swaggers or cringes, there's always something behind every remark he makes, always something and if nothing else he's trying to increase his izzat in plain Saxon, to score. Of course there are exceptions.* (Forster [1924]: 14)

According to Downing (2008), «Foucault's discussion of race is strangely silent on the subject of colonialism» (19). But as we read Foucault (2003), he clearly states that «racism first develops with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide» (257). Also, he declares,

*The other race is basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant*

*and dominant, but that it is a race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body, or which is, rather, constantly being re-created in and by the social fabric. In other words, what we see as a polarity, as a binary rift within society, is not a clash between two distinct races. It is the splitting of a single race into a super-race and a sub-race. (61)*

Said (2003), who was seriously engaged with Foucauldian methodologies, also believes, «there are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated» (36). In chapter five, Mrs. Turton's idea exemplifies the racism as she says, «You're superior to them, anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis and they're on equality» (Forster [1924]: 19). Likewise, Foucault (2003) comments:

*It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population. It is in short, a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain. This will allow power to treat that population as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate, to treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races. That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower. (Foucault [2003]: 255)*

In fact, society is divided by the binary mode of race war. Species are divided to subspecies by studying their biology. In chapter three, Mrs. Calendar says that the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die (Forster [1924]: 12). This is what Foucault (2003) points out, «racism is the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior» (254-255). So, this is how killing is justified in order to defend society. In all, Foucault (2003) states, «the very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more» (255). In such situation the Indians are the threat for the English. Even though, they are in

India that is not the English people's country; the English protect their race by letting more Indians die. In addition, Foucault (2003) remarks,

*On the one hand, racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I, as species rather than individual, can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate. The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer. This is not, then, a military, warlike, or political relationship, but a biological relationship. (Foucault [2003]: 255-256).*

«I know all about *him*. I don't know *him*» (Forster [1924]: 38 emphasis ours). Although Fielding presumes that he knows Aziz's race, he is unsettled when he realizes that Aziz is an individual whose traits and characteristics might be at odds with a general preconception the British have about the Indian race. This is where biopolitical strategies of a dominating race fails, albeit for a short moment, to hold to its presumably categorically indubitable ideological cornerstones.

However, as a matter of fact, this racism, through the exertion of biopolitics, controls the population. Here it protects the English population from the Indians who are "inferior" to them. So, they do this by isolating and excluding the bad race. Hence, a surreptitious war for power and retrieval of the rights breaks out between the opposing races.

In chapter eight, it is remarked that Ronny has a racist conclusion about Indians as he expresses his opinion about Aziz's collar-stud:

*Aziz was exquisitely dressed, from tie-pin to spats, but he had forgotten his back collar-stud and there you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail; the*

*fundamental slackness that reveals the race. Similarly, to "meet" in the caves as if they were the clock at Charring Cross, when they're miles from a station and each other.* (Forster [1924]: 35)

Ronny massifies Aziz, only to remind us that in spite of all what Aziz does to show how tidy and formal he is clothed, still he «reveals the race», by his «inattention to detail». However, Foucault (2003) emphasizes that

*It will become the discourse of a centered, centralized, and centralizing power. It will become the discourse of a battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage.* (61)

Modern racism does not deal with the individual only. This is different from what we read about the dark-skinned people who had no right many centuries ago. As Foucault (2003) asserts, «in the biopower system, in other words, killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race» (256). Therefore, race is the biologization of war. This racism is not only prejudice. It functions as recognition of worthy and unworthy life. And it operates within biopower. Here the Indian race is the biological threat to the English.

This new technology of power surely includes modern racism. Similarly, Foucault (2003) notes, «so you can understand the importance, I almost said the vital importance, of racism to the exercise of such power: it is the precondition for exercising the right to kill» (256). Then he continues, «the specificity of modern racism, or what gives it its specificity, is not bound up with mentalities, ideologies, or the lies of power. It is bound up with the technique of power, with the technology of power» (258). In the novel we find out that racism is an aspect of the social organization of the colonial state. In fact, there is no sovereign power

and there are no laws about the right to exclude Indians. But through biopower, the power of the English over life of Indians, it is right to disinvest the Indians or not to consider right for them. As Foucault (2003) tells us, «so racism is bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power» (258). And he continues, «racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State» (256). Indeed, the racism that Forster depicts in the novel is not the one that is depicted repeatedly like slavery of a group of people as in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Kelly (2004) adds, «when Foucault claims that "the modern state can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain lines and subject to certain conditions..." he is not talking about "ordinary racism", which is to say, the simple hatred of other races, but rather, state racism, biological racism» (3).

In the novel, Forster shows us a big chaos in India which is made at the hands of the British. Ronny best exemplifies English officials who thinks nothing is private in India as if he looks at India as a prison not a society in which life goes on and he thinks Indians have no right, not even having private things, as Ronny believes, «India isn't home» (Forster [1924]: 29). In fact, there is a feeling of superiority of the British ruling class and the sting the Indian feels as the subject race. Or in bridge party Forster depicts Indian guests as shy and timid people who think they are oppressed by English foreigners even in the party, that Turton compares the Indians in the party to an island which has no change and is not allowed to grow, as he says, «an island bared by the turning tide, and bound to grow» (Forster [1924]: 37). Here the Indians know they are being watched. So, they monitor themselves too to make sure they are following norms. and this is the internalization of gaze in biopower. Basically society supervises people but everyone is supervising him/herself too.

In another part of the novel Aziz says «I wear collar to pass the police because they think I am an Englishman so they do not notice me» (Forster [1924]: 28). Also Foucault (2003) remarks, «it is no longer: “We have to defend ourselves against society”, but we have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence» (61). Lemm agrees as he supports Foucault, «this division is instrumental to conceiving the distinction between self and other, friend and enemy, no longer in military terms but in biological ones» (43). So, there is always an ongoing war that is a biological war. Its aim is the life of a population that should be defended and protected against another population that is a threat.

In the other part Fielding, who is an educated Englishman confesses that «England holds India for her good» (Forster [1924]: 114). Indeed, the most obvious example of injustice and chaos in India is the trial for Aziz before which Ronny sends away his mother to England who is a witness. So, Adela's supposed assault becomes an excuse for the British officials to exercise authority over their Indian subjects with Aziz as the example. Chakraborty (n.d.) asserts, «Forster intended to show how officialism worked to corrupt the English, whether they began as decent fellows or not» (5). Similarly, Foucault (2003) declares, «a state racism is a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products» (62). As Kelly (2004) notes, «the coexistence of biopolitics and the sovereign right to kill is a fact. Hence there needs to be a way in which this killing can be squared with biopolitics. This is where state racism comes in» (3). So, it is a decision for mass murder of Indians, who are inferior race for the English.

According to Lemke (2011), the health of higher race depends on the death of lower race (65). During Aziz' trial in chapter sixteen, it is noticed that the British court insists that Aziz is guilty. Aziz is just a symbol of Indian people that the state accuses without any sensible justification. This is what Foucault (2003) wants to tell us, «in

one sense, to say that the sovereign has a right of life and death means that he can, basically, either have people put to death or let them live, or in any case that life and death are not natural or immediate phenomena which are primal or radical, and which fall outside the field of power» (240). And he continues, «it is the power to make live and let die. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die» (241). We see in the novel that Indian people live in their own country, apparently there is no slavery, and there is peace in their lives, but there is a big shadow of racism in their lives and their life and death is closely administered by disciplinary and bio powers. In the words of Foucault (2003):

*It is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes racism in the mechanisms of the State. It is at this moment that racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised modern States. As a result, the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain limits and subject to certain conditions.* (Foucault [2003]: 254)

In chapter three, when Adela is asking about how to keep in touch with Indian people, Turton answered her, «well, we don't come across them socially, he said, laughing. They're full of all the virtues, but we don't and it's now eleven-thirty and too late to go into the reasons» (Forster [1924]: 12). Forster displays his objection to this way of thinking which negligently otherizes the Indians and is done through most of the English characters such as, Turton, Burton, McBryde, and Major Callendar. Through the novel we understand that it is normal for Indians, too. This kind of rude behavior towards Indians become normalized in their society. According to Foucault (2003), «the norm is something that can be applied to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize» (253). «Norms seem to have their place primarily in the knowledge of populations, since they demarcate distributions» (Gutting [2005]: 118). Forster successfully depicts this regularization in the society of India. In the

words, as Lemm (2017) holds, «when one does not follow norms, one is not breaking them; one is simply showing dysfunctional or abnormal behavior» (42). Also, Gutting (2005) states, «Foucault most often discussed normalization as a technique of power» (119). Indeed, the English primarily changed the norms of society instead of punishing and setting disciplines for Indians. As Foucault (2003) asserts, «it is, in a word, a matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man as species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized» (246-247). So, this invisible power in Indian society is not repressive, it is normalizing. In fact, nobody has forced the power upon people. The power makes people do what they have to do. Indeed, the normalizing society regulates people.

#### CONCLUSION

Biopower that Foucault discusses is a new mechanism of power that has been a matter of utmost importance in colonized societies. In the (post-)colonial era, the colonizers do scarcely use force or violence for controlling a large population. This new mechanism of power functions surreptitiously by fossilizing its ideological bases in the mind of an entire race. One side of this “war” comes to believe that they have the right to administer the life/death of the other race and, on the other hand, the subjugated race begins to struggle with the idea that if they truly deserve to be kept under the surveillance of the “superior” race. Biopower is more impressive than other forms of power such as sovereign and disciplinary, because it is not the technology of controlling individuals, but of a large population. It actually affects an entire society not just an individual. In *A Passage to India*, it can be noticed that the English power which dominated the Indian society, is more than mere sovereign or disciplinary power. Apparently, the English officials try to manage the country in the way of improving it. But we realize that the English power is in fact subjugating the Indian race to improve their own and this is done

through massifying and controlling the population of the “impure” Indian race. Through the exertion of biopower, although the Indian people are portrayed as if they live, work, breathe, talk, etc. they have in fact, been spiritually mass-murdered by the ruling colonial power. Overall, the English officials control India not by means of prejudiced disciplines, but by normalizing the colonial power and domination. The biopower as defined by Foucault and as illustrated in *A Passage* thus can help to explain how for decades the colonial powers managed to regulate and normalize their stay in and domination over a nation.

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**Citation:** L. Brignoli (2020) Riscrittura e maschere dell'io: *Le Mauvais genre* di Laurent De Graeve. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 115-125. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11596

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Riscrittura e maschere dell'io: *Le Mauvais genre* di Laurent De Graeve

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**Abstract.** This article aims to investigate the reasons that push an author to rewrite a great classic, if the motivation of marketing is not pertinent. In the rewriting practice there are works that arise from deeper expressive needs and it would be completely wrong to explain them through purely opportunistic reasons; in fact, it is possible that the author uses the mask of the well-known character to express, by rethinking it, some complex, unexpressed, uncomfortable or difficult aspects of himself or society. We will try to show the plausibility of this hypothesis through the analysis of one of the most successful rewritings of the *Liaisons Dangereuses* by Laclos, *Le Mauvais genre* by Laurent de Graeve, trying at the same time to highlight one of the implications related to the connection between fiction and truth.

**Keywords.** Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Laurent de Graeve, *Le Mauvais genre*, Yourcenar, *Feux*, rewriting, fiction and truth.

### 1. PREMESSA E OBIETTIVI

L'«ipertestualità mimetica», espressione usata da Genette per definire la ripresa di personaggi o di situazioni narrative in nuove diegesi, è una pratica molto antica che è stata ripresa in modo massiccio in epoca postmoderna e che l'epoca attuale, da alcuni chiamata ipermoderna<sup>1</sup>, non sembra voler abbandonare. Anzi negli ultimi trent'anni essa è divenuta dilagante al punto che, più recentemente, sono state le stesse case editrici a incoraggiare la riscrittura. Marcos y Marcos, Minimum Fax, Gruppo editoriale L'Espresso, Marsilio sono alcuni degli esempi italiani che propongono collane o sollecitano direttamente autori noti a riscrivere grandi classici ottenendo esiti assai diversi, che possono intrattenere legami molto variabili con l'ipotesto<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Si veda Raffaele Donnarumma (2011), e il successivo dibattito che il tentativo di definizione ha aperto. In particolare, si veda Remo Ceserani (2012).

<sup>2</sup> La terminologia è di Gérard Genette (1982) e, nonostante i numerosi tentativi di revisione, resta ancora la più utilizzata.



La finalità di una casa editrice è facilmente intuibile: il ritrovamento di un personaggio già noto in una nuova avventura diegetica è uno dei più indiscussi procedimenti di seduzione del lettore. Nel complesso meccanismo del marketing editoriale, questa strategia è indubbiamente proficua.

Ma se si esamina il fenomeno dal punto di vista della sua genesi viene da chiedersi che bisogno abbia uno scrittore di riprendere visibilmente l'opera di altri per esprimersi. Dal Romanticismo in poi, la valorizzazione dell'originalità nella percezione e nella comunicazione della realtà si è accompagnata spesso alla novità formale e contenutistica. A metà del Novecento, questo tipo di esigenza è diventata la norma, basta pensare ai Nouveaux Romanciers. Eppure, soprattutto verso la fine del secolo, sono andati aumentando gli autori che scelgono di infondere nuova vita ai classici. Le ragioni alla base di questa scelta naturalmente possono essere diversissime, ma non si creda che la volontà di sfruttare la popolarità di un personaggio sia quella predominante. Certo questa è una possibilità, ma riguarda prevalentemente la paraletteratura<sup>3</sup>.

Ciò detto, va comunque riconosciuto che anche in ambito riscritturale vi sono opere che nascono da necessità espressive più profonde e che sarebbe del tutto errato ricondurre a ragioni meramente opportunistiche; è infatti ipotizzabile che l'autore usi la maschera del personaggio noto per esprimere, ripensandolo, aspetti di sé o della società complessi, inespressi, talvolta scomodi o difficili da dire. Questo articolo è finalizzato a dimostrare la plausibilità di questa ipotesi attraverso l'analisi di un testo particolarmente significativo, che ci consentirà anche di mettere in luce uno dei risvolti legati all'articolazione fra *fiction* e verità<sup>4</sup>.

Nel vastissimo panorama della transfinzionalità, *Le Mauvais genre* (2000) dello scrittore belga Laurent de Graeve, continuazione delle *Liaisons dangereuses* di Laclos, si segnala come «l'un des textes les plus originaux de la nombreuse postérité de Laclos» (Seth [2008]: 177). Ma non è questo il solo motivo per cui l'abbiamo scelto per dimostrare la nostra ipotesi. Esso è infatti un esempio eccellente, di rara ricchezza e complessità feconda, del concetto stesso di riscrittura, nel senso in cui essa viene intesa più oltre. Se ne affronterà l'analisi, attraverso l'ottica della ricezione<sup>5</sup>, di una tematica precisa, che risulta essenziale sia nell'ipotesto che nell'ipertesto: il rapporto con la realtà e la questione dell'autenticità; essi ci forniranno la giusta angolazione per motivare la scelta riscritturale operata da De Graeve.

## 2. LA QUESTIONE DELLA RISCrittURA

Prima di addentrarci nell'analisi del testo, è opportuno riprendere per sommi capi la problematica della riscrittura, all'interno della quale si situa il percorso critico principale. Dopo Gérard Genette, Richard Saint-Gelais è il critico che ne ha descritto meglio il funzionamento, operando dapprima una distinzione fra l'ipertestualità genettiana, che stabilisce una relazione di similarità fra testi, e la transfinzionalità, che consiste piuttosto in «une relation de migration de données diégétiques» (Saint-Gelais [2011]: 10-11): «On a transfictionnalité lorsque des éléments fictifs sont repris dans plus d'un texte» (Saint-Gelais [2011]: 19-20). Generalmente, sono i personaggi che, migrando da un testo all'altro, stabiliscono il legame, come accade per esempio con Madame Bovary, Sherlock Holmes, Hamlet, Robinson Cru-

<sup>3</sup> Sia detto per inciso, essa resta comunque un ambito di indagine non trascurabile, nella misura in cui non solo attraverso il suo studio è possibile mettere in luce alcune leggi che governano il mercato editoriale, ma anche perché l'attuale mescolanza fra cultura "alta" e "bassa" ne rende più spinosa la distinzione.

<sup>4</sup> La questione è stata oggetto di diverse riflessioni, a partire da John Searle (1979), Gérard Genette (1991) e

Marie-Laure Ryan (1991), che hanno alimentato il dibattito fra "integrazionisti" e "segregazionisti", per giungere fino alle riflessioni di Cécile De Bary (2013), e Françoise Lavocat (2016). Affrontata dall'angolazione della riscrittura, la questione assume contorni ancora più complessi.

<sup>5</sup> Questa prospettiva è un di fatto un superamento della questione ipertestuale impostata da Genette dalla angolazione della produzione (Wagner 2002).

soe, o, per avvicinarci al nostro argomento, con Madame de Merteuil.

Non si sottolinea mai abbastanza che ogni riscrittura è prima di tutto una lettura, e dunque, in certi casi più che in altri, una interpretazione del testo. I modi in cui essa si esprime sono diversi, e si parlerà di espansione, versione, o crossover riguardo ai meccanismi trasformativi principali, suddivisibili a loro volta in espansioni prolettiche, analettiche, parallattiche chiamate più comunemente *sequel*, *prequel*, *paraquel* (Meneghelli [2018]), in versioni controfattuali, variazioni del punto di vista o del genere adottato etc. In tutti questi casi, l'ipertesto sfrutta i silenzi dell'ipotesto. Esiste un non detto che non si limita a ignorare le ridondanze che il lettore può facilmente dedurre leggendo: certe lacune possono sembrare reticenze, o dipendere dalla focalizzazione scelta. Dunque, ogni tipo di variazione introdotta, che sia il punto di vista, la localizzazione della storia, il genere adottato o altro, consente di riempire i silenzi del testo (creandone di nuovi, inevitabilmente)<sup>6</sup>.

Come afferma Saint-Gelais, la transfictionnalité richiede «une batterie d'approches variées qui [...] s'intéressent [...] à ce qu'une transfiction *fait* à la fiction à laquelle elle s'articule. Un *faire* divers et paradoxal, car la transfictionnalité ne consiste jamais à intervenir sur le texte initial, bien évidemment inchangé, mais sur sa diégèse, c'est-à-dire au bout du compte sur la reconstitution que les lecteurs en font, ou consentent à effectuer sur la base d'une continuation, d'une rectification, d'une version décalée ou même transgressive» (Saint-Gelais [2011]: 70).

Saint-Gelais annovera un amplissimo ventaglio di ipertesti, categorizzandoli in modo efficace, ma senza introdurre distinzioni sulla base del legame più o meno serrato con l'ipotesto; né i critici che prima o dopo di lui se ne sono occupati si soffermano sulla questione, che tuttavia non smette di essere cruciale: quale deve essere

il legame fra ipotesto e ipertesto per poter legittimamente parlare di riscrittura? Per rispondere, e al contempo avvicinarci al focus di questo studio, si consideri l'esempio delle *Liaisons dangereuses*: si tratta certamente di uno dei romanzi più riscritti della letteratura francese, se si eccettuano i *feuilletons* ottocenteschi come *I tre Moschettieri* e *Il Conte di Monte-Cristo*. Dalla metà dell'800 a oggi, pur escludendo gli adattamenti teatrali e cinematografici, se ne contano almeno una ventina di versioni, non solo francesi<sup>7</sup>. Varrebbe la pena chiedersi se davvero siano tutte riscritture. Sotto questa etichetta infatti si raggruppano le opere più diverse, che possono avere un rapporto anche molto lasco con l'ipotesto. Bastano davvero due libertini, una giovane ingenua e una innamorata fedele per parlare di riscrittura del romanzo di Laclos? Così viene annoverato<sup>8</sup> per esempio il romanzo di Marc Lambron, *La Nuit des masques* (Flammarion, 1990), ambientato in una Parigi novecentesca, in cui si muovono tre personaggi che ricordano molto lontanamente i loro eponimi. Lui, seduttore seriale, si innamora di un'attrice che gli darà del filo da torcere, sotto lo sguardo dapprima divertito poi decisamente geloso dell'amica che vorrebbe tirare le fila dell'intreccio. Al di là di questo schema, di cui si è voluto cogliere proprio i soli elementi che riconducono a Laclos, nulla in questo romanzo rimanda alle *Liaisons dangereuses*.

<sup>7</sup> Citiamo qui solo le riscritture novecentesche: Lucas de Peslouan, *Les vrais mémoires de Cécile de Volanges*, 1927; Robert Margerit, *Les amants*, 1957; Manuel Puig, *Boquitas pintadas*, 1969; Hella Haase, *Een gevaarlijke verhouding. (Une Liaison dangereuse. Lettres de la Haye)*, 1976; Heiner Muller, *Quartett*, 1981; Christiane Baroche, *L'hiver de beauté*, 1987; Marc Lambron, *La nuit des masques*, 1990; Georges-Noël Jeandrieu, *Les successions amoureuses*, 1990; Pascal Quignard, *La fin des liaisons*, in *La haine de la musique*, 1996; Laurent de Graeve, *Le Mauvais Genre*, 2000; Sarah K., *Connexions dangereuses*, 2002; Roger Kumble, *Cruel Intentions I*, 1999, II 2000 (film); Scott Ziehl, *Cruel intentions III*, 2004 (film); Camille de Peretti, *Nous sommes cruels*, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Da Herman (2003) e, prima di lui, da M. Delon, che a dire il vero usa un'espressione più cauta: «témoignent à leur manière de la vogue actuelle des *Liaisons*» (Delon [1986]: 109; enfasi nostra).

<sup>6</sup> Per una trattazione più ampia e riferimenti bibliografici più esaustivi, ci permettiamo di rinviare a Brignoli (2019).

Né i nomi dei personaggi, né l'ambientazione storica, né il contesto sociale, e tutto sommato neppure il carattere dei personaggi il cui linguaggio resta distante dalle raffinatezze verbali di Laclos: decisamente più debole la libertina, che arriva a prostrarsi davanti al novello Valmont per tornare a farsi amare, meno libertino lui, quasi contraria alla fragile Tourvel l'attrice che ne dovrebbe riprendere il ruolo. L'unico riferimento a Laclos si trova in quarta di copertina ma, alla lettura del romanzo, la frase che dichiara questa «comédie sensuelle, placée sous le signe de Lubitsch et de Laclos» trova pochi riscontri all'interno del testo. Si tratta allora di una riscrittura? In ambito letterario non esistono risposte semplici a domande complesse. Considerando il termine in senso ristretto si potrebbe essere inclini a dire di no: a ben guardare, se si riducono le storie ai loro elementi essenziali, i meccanismi archetipici che le fondano non sono più di una dozzina. E allora tutto si ridurrebbe a essere riscrittura. In un certo senso, nel senso più lato del termine, tutto lo è.

Pur consapevole del fatto che questa affermazione potrebbe aprire un dibattito, e che per questo non sia priva di avventatezza, preferiamo usare il termine in un senso più ristretto, consentendoci di parlare di riscrittura quando la conoscenza dell'ipotesto è indispensabile per capire l'ipertesto, quando i riferimenti al primo non si limitano a rendere il secondo più interessante, ma finiscono per modificare la stessa ricezione del testo più antico.

### 3. ANALISI DEL TESTO

Secondo le categorie individuate da Saint-Gelais, *Le Mauvais genre* di De Graeve rappresenta una *variatio* della vicenda espressa nelle *Liaisons dangereuses* attraverso la sua continuazione: il suo avvio cronologico, infatti, si innesta su una delle ultime lettere delle *Liaisons*, quella del 7 dicembre che racconta della morte di Valmont (CLXIII), e prosegue fino al 13 gennaio, cioè poco oltre la data dell'ultima lettera laclosiana (26 dicembre).

Essa si configura come la confessione sotto forma di diario di una Madame de Merteuil che ha appena saputo della morte di Valmont. Conosciamo tutti una delle lettere finali delle *Liaisons laclosiane* (CLXIII): in una mattina invernale, Valmont si lascia uccidere da Danceny, il pallido amante di Cécile. Sacrificare l'amore per la Présidente de Tourvel alla sua fama di libertino aveva svuotato di senso la sua vita. Da lì l'esito suicidario di un duello che avrebbe potuto finire altrimenti.

Apparentemente arida, dura e gelida come il paesaggio innevato che osserva dalla finestra, la novella Mme de Merteuil, incapace di piangere la morte del suo amante-sodale, guarda indietro e rivive alcune scene cruciali del romanzo di Laclos: è così che cala la maschera e racconta, talvolta direttamente, talaltra per via metaforica, il percorso che l'ha condotta al libertinaggio. Nel corso della lettura, si scopre così una bimba male amata, un rapporto incestuoso col padre, un matrimonio di convenienza concluso con un "aiutino" per l'eliminazione del marito, insieme a quella volontà ferrea e a quella determinazione di cui già Laclos aveva descritto l'origine nella famosa lettera LXXXI. Un abisso di immoralità scavato in un pozzo di dolore.

Rilevare il dolore all'origine del percorso potrebbe preludere a un tentativo se non di discolorare Madame de Merteuil, quanto meno di smusarne la mostruosità. Ma il finale indica altro: in un'ultima lettera che costituisce il seguito della diegesi, la Merteuil propone a Cécile di fuggire con lei in Olanda, per condividere una vita di coppia più autentica. Un finale del genere è tale da rendere quanto meno non pertinente la questione dell'assoluzione.

De Graeve espande qui una serie di indizi che Laclos aveva inserito nel suo romanzo, lasciando intravedere un possibile quanto fugace rapporto saffico fra la Merteuil e Cécile<sup>9</sup>. I legami fra ipotesto e ipertesto sono serratissimi: la scelta di questo esempio, non certo fra le riprese più palesi, intende mostrare a quale livello di minuzia si sia spinta la lettura e la riscrittura di De Graeve. Riscrittura

<sup>9</sup> Si vedano le lettere XX, XXXVIII, XXXIX, LV, LVII.

che di fatto non si limita a espandere il testo, ma arriva a conferirgli anche delle intenzioni che non aveva, abbondando in un senso più congeniale a De Graeve di quanto non fosse a Laclos.

Non è necessario soffermarsi a lungo sugli elementi che De Graeve ha mantenuto né sui cambiamenti che ha introdotto, perché il già citato studio di Catriona Seth è piuttosto esaustivo su questo aspetto<sup>10</sup>. Solo per doverosa chiarezza riprendiamo qui alcuni punti già toccati da lei. Il testo di De Graeve insiste sulla perversione dei comportamenti, annerendo alcuni tratti taciuti nelle *Liaisons dangereuses*: l'atteggiamento di profonda ostilità di Mme de Volanges verso Valmont scaturirebbe, secondo la lettura moderna, da una passata relazione fra i due da cui sarebbe nata Cécile – ed è questo il secondo incesto nel romanzo, dopo quello subito dalla Merteuil bambina.

La morte di Mme de Tourvel è drammatica al limite dell'insopportabile nel *Mauvais genre*, poiché nel fazzoletto che Cécile le tende per asciugarsi le lacrime, ella riconosce il monogramma di Valmont, e da quello capisce tutto, compreso il fatto di essere stata uno strumento nelle mani della marchesa.

I cambiamenti più importanti riguardano peraltro proprio il ruolo della marchesa, anch'essa personaggio ben più perverso del suo originale: si è già detto che nella lettura di De Graeve lei ha ucciso il marito con l'aiuto del farmacista. Il processo intentato dalla famiglia di lui avrebbe dunque anche questo risvolto, ben altrimenti serio per la marchesa. Il giudice chiamato a dirimere la questione è proprio il marito di Madame de Tourvel: ecco perché lei chiede a Valmont una lettera di "capitolazione" scritta da quest'ultima, da utilizzare, in caso di andamento negativo del processo, contro il Presidente: «faire miauler Madame, c'était en quelque sorte pouvoir faire chanter Monsieur» (De Graeve [2000]: 76). Come si vede, l'eliminazione di alcuni personaggi – come Prévau – non

implica affatto l'allentamento delle maglie della trama: anzi l'aggiunta di questi dettagli scabrosi contribuisce a rafforzarne l'impianto logico.

Nella riscrittura, la marchesa è infatti ancora più abile nel tirare le fila della vicenda: anche i presunti errori che lei avrebbe commesso, come scrivere quelle lettere che poi Danceny avrebbe diffuso a suo danno, risultano in effetti frutto della sua volontà. Stanca del mondo, e soprattutto della maschera di morigeratezza che era costretta a portare, decide come svelare il suo volto, scegliendo persino di farsi credere affetta dalla malattia delle alcove e dei rapporti torbidi, «des chambres noires et des copulations anonymes» (De Graeve [2000]: 153). Va detto che il personaggio della Marchesa non è ripreso a grandi linee. Al contrario è carico di tutta la complessità che le ha conferito Laclos, a cui si aggiungono nuovi elementi.

De Graeve conosce alla perfezione l'ipotesto e se ne distanzia con uno scopo: le sue infedeltà non sono gratuite. Forse le più importanti riguardano la sessualità e la lingua: tutti i personaggi (anche i più secondari, come il Président de Tourvel) hanno una sessualità aperta, che non preclude esperienze con il loro stesso sesso. Apertura che si manifesta anche sotto il profilo linguistico: distanziandosi dalla lingua raffinata della società libertina del XVIII secolo, in cui le varianti sono dovute unicamente all'esistenza di pensieri più o meno intelligenti nei personaggi, De Graeve usa un linguaggio nettamente più vario, non privo di anacronismi<sup>11</sup>, nel quale la più grande raffinatezza verbale viene volentieri mischiata a espressioni familiari<sup>12</sup> e popolari, quando non francamente volgari<sup>13</sup>.

Questo stile che combina ricercatezza estrema e massima trivialità ben si adatta a espri-

<sup>10</sup> A nostra conoscenza, a parte questo articolo e due pagine in Herman (2003: 133-134), non esistono altri studi scientifici sull'opera. A questo autore scomparso troppo presto Szczur (2018: 140-141) consacra una pagina.

<sup>11</sup> Si veda per esempio: «Madame de Tourvel piqua un fard» (De Graeve [2000]: 127): l'espressione non compare prima del XIX secolo.

<sup>12</sup> «Je ne couine pas» (De Graeve [2000]: 16), «ce demi-sourire hésite, crâne» (De Graeve [2000]: 18), «c'est à sa dentition que se fixe le prix de la carne» (De Graeve [2000]: 39).

<sup>13</sup> «J'ai beau fouiller l'organe, titiller le muscle, triturer la viande» (De Graeve [2000]: 15) «Elle boit vite, cul sec, l'un après l'autre.» (De Graeve [2000]: 28).

mere l'immagine diffratta di Mme de Merteuil, contraria a quella di *femme du grand monde* che il testo di Laclos ha diffuso, e che persiste, nonostante la sua riconosciuta immoralità. Fin dall'inizio l'immagine di Merteuil si sdoppia: è il vetro della finestra che lei si ostina a fissare dopo aver appreso la morte di Valmont, irrigidita nella sua incapacità di lasciar uscire un dolore che tenta di negare, a offrirle un doppio di sé, un doppio torbido, appannato dal suo stesso respiro. Questa rappresentazione fissata in una materia immobile e gelida si fa metafora del suo io sociale, che poco a poco si distacca da sé, consentendole di osservarsi dall'esterno, parlando di sé alla terza persona: dopo aver assistito senza far nulla all'autodafé dei due sodomiti, nella carrozza insieme a Mme de Volanges visibilmente gratificata dallo spettacolo, si giudica «lâche comme les autres, je métais tue comme tout le monde. Je suppose que Madame de Merteuil ne pouvait que se taire en regardant négligemment ses ongles» (De Graeve [2000]: 31).

Le difformità rispetto al testo originale, per quanto importantissime al punto di snaturare il personaggio della Merteuil laclosiana, sono tuttavia bilanciate dalla presenza dell'ipotesto tale da non consentirci la comprensione dell'ipertesto senza un'adeguata conoscenza dell'opera settecentesca. Per questa ragione si può considerare *Le Mauvais genre* una vera riscrittura, nel senso ristretto definito sopra. Ma le infedeltà ci sono: Catriona Seth, da settecentista, afferma chiaramente che «la réécriture de De Graeve n'est guère fidèle au texte de Laclos» (Seth [2008]: 176).

Fermo restando che sono proprio le infedeltà a costituire l'originalità di ogni riscrittura, esse diventano interessanti nella misura in cui, come in questo caso, si riconosce un'analogia fedeltà al testo.

Ma allora giunge inevitabile la domanda: perché riscrivere un classico? Cosa spinge un autore a impossessarsi di personaggi canonici per trasmettere contenuti altri? E, nella fattispecie, cosa ha spinto De Graeve ad appropriarsi del personaggio di Laclos?

La risposta come sempre va cercata nelle pieghe del testo, e in questo caso viene suggerita dai

riferimenti intertestuali. Ve n'è uno che predomina nettamente su tutti gli altri, la sua presenza è più sottile, più sotterranea e insieme più fondamentale: alla lettura, un ritmo particolare<sup>14</sup>, quello che potremmo chiamare il "timbro di voce del testo" richiama alla mente *Feux, Fuochi*, di M. Yourcenar. L'analisi più attenta, effettuata a livello linguistico, retorico e tematico, rivela una filiazione voluta, di cui diamo di seguito alcuni esempi.

A livello linguistico, vi si ritrovano massime, frasi brevi (soggetto verbo complemento), costrutti paratattici, un certo numero di *tourneures* come «à force de... je finirai bien», o l'anteposizione della causa alla spiegazione di un comportamento: «parce qu'il l'avait vue frissonner, il se décida d'attaquer» (De Graeve [2000]: 99), già tipici dell'opera yourcenariana.

A livello retorico, litoti, reticenze, oppure – vero marchio dello stile di Yourcenar – la similitudine la cui funzione comparativa, affidata a due verbi diversi, si accompagna a una volontà di trasformare un comportamento individuale in una legge assoluta: «Madame de Tourvel pleure en silence, sans pouvoir s'arrêter, comme on se vide de son sang»<sup>15</sup> (De Graeve [2000]: 69).

A livello tematico, la trasformazione del teatro in aula di tribunale: ne è vittima Madame de Merteuil quel 16 dicembre in cui si presenta alla Comédie Italienne e viene sommersa dal biasimo della società. In De Graeve la libertina, ben consapevole della «curée» a cui sarebbe stata sottoposta, vi si rende «comme on se présente au tribunal» (De Graeve [2000]: 151). Allo stesso modo, in *Feux*, è Clitemnestra, l'eroina del teatro classico, a

<sup>14</sup> Sulla questione del ritmo, è utile consultare il numero speciale della rivista "Semen" (2003), *Le rythme de la prose*, e Rodriguez (2015).

<sup>15</sup> Naturalmente, ciò è dato dall'uso di «on» nel secondo termine di paragone, soggetto che ha la funzione di definire l'azione come appartenente all'intera umanità. Cfr. per esempio, in *Feux*: «ces joueurs misant à chaque coup leur maximum de vie tombèrent comme on se suicide» (Yourcenar [1982]: 1001); «Penthésilée tomba comme on cède» (Yourcenar [1982]: 1004); «je suis près du noyau mystérieux des choses comme la nuit on est quelquefois près d'un cœur.» (Yourcenar [1982]: 1122).

comparire davanti al pubblico come in un'aula di tribunale<sup>16</sup>.

A tutto questo vanno aggiunte le citazioni deviate; si consideri il seguente pensiero di *Feux*:

*Solitude... Je ne crois pas comme ils croient, je ne vis pas comme ils vivent, je n'aime pas comme ils aiment... je mourrai comme ils meurent.* (Yourcenar [1982]: 1083)

cui fa eco De Graeve:

*Hors la loi: vous ne vivez pas comme ils vivent, vous n'aimez pas comme ils aiment, vous ne dansez pas comme ils dansent et il est plus que probable que vous ne mourrez pas comme ils mourront.* (De Graeve [2000]: 170)

O ancora, sempre nel *Mauvais genre*:

*C'était au temps où la Terre était plate; à cette époque, jurait-il, les dieux n'étaient pas morts.* (De Graeve [2000]: 88 e passim)

Solo un lettore bene informato conosce *Les Dieux ne sont pas morts*, una raccolta che Yourcenar aveva pubblicato in gioventù pentendosi poi per quei poemi giudicati da lei stessa «du démarquage d'écolier» (Yourcenar [1980]: 52). Per quanto ingenui, scolastici, non di rado pretenziosi, in essi vi si scoprono già i temi che ritroveremo in *Feux*, ed è certamente questa la ragione che ne giustifica la citazione da parte di De Graeve. Ma cos'ha di particolare *Feux* che possa averlo interessato? È probabile che siano due sue caratteristiche: la prima è che si tratta di un'opera autobiografica ben più di quanto non lo sia la trilogia del *Labyrinthe du monde* - la critica è infatti unanime nel riconoscerla come l'opera in cui Marguerite Yourcenar ha riversato il suo io più intimo; l'altra è che questa espressione del sé autoriale e dei suoi sentimenti è mediata: invece di rivelare la sua storia d'amore infelice, l'autrice sceglie di raccon-

tarsi indirettamente, alternando pensieri tratti da un diario a nove leggende mitiche<sup>17</sup>. Yourcenar la definisce, nella prefazione, un «bal masqué», rivelando in ultima battuta ciò che nell'opera ha affidato allo stile «prezioso», a ciò che lei chiama «espressionismo barocco» che è ciò «neuf fois sur dix que le poète a cédé en effet au désir d'étonner, de plaire, ou de déplaire à tout prix» (Yourcenar [1982]: 1079). «Ce qu'on peut dire de pis de ces audaces verbales est que celui qui s'y livre court perpétuellement le risque de l'abus et de l'excès, tout comme l'écrivain voué aux litotes classiques frôle sans cesse le danger de sèche élégance et d'hypocrisie» (Yourcenar [1982]: 1079).

In questo eccesso verbale si annida infatti la rivelazione della passione che l'ha ispirata e che ha riversato in modo così intenso in questo libro da desiderare, paradossalmente, «che non venga mai letto», come afferma il primo pensiero tratto dal diario.

In quest'opera Yourcenar esprime dunque in modo mediato, attraverso nove storie mitiche, e in modo eccessivo, sovrabbondante, la passione bruciante provata per un uomo e l'impossibilità di lui di corrispondervi nella reciprocità. Due modalità che la accomunano al *Mauvais genre*: anche nel romanzo di De Graeve, infatti, tutto è portato al parossismo<sup>18</sup> e, come vedremo di seguito, mediato.

La scelta di questo intertesto da parte di De Graeve è infatti un chiaro indizio destinato a orientare l'interpretazione del *Mauvais genre* verso una forma di autobiografia trasversale: come Yourcenar in *Feux*, De Graeve suggerisce di aver messo molto di sé in quest'opera. Espressione mediata, mascherata. Ecco la parola chiave che

<sup>17</sup> Per entrambi gli aspetti la critica è molto abbondante. Ci limiteremo a citare Brunel P. (1988); Farrel E. et Farrel F. (1988); Biondi C. (1990); Biondi C. (1997); Julien A.-Y. (2002); Brémond M., «Le mythe, paravent du moi?» et Fréris G., «*Feux* ou le quiproquo du moi», in Poignault et al. (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Al punto per esempio che le litoti non hanno mai una funzione di attenuazione ma sono veicolo di ironia e di enfasi. Cfr.: «La sensation ne fut pas insupportable» (De Graeve [2000]: 77); «La marchandise ne sembla pas déplaire à nos pirates mondains» (De Graeve [2000]: 83).

<sup>16</sup> Sulla riscrittura del mito di Clitemnestra in *Feux* la bibliografia è molto abbondante. Si vedano, fra gli altri: Biondi (1990 e 1997); Brignoli (2012), Poignault (1995); Farrel (1988); Caserta (1991); Restori (1988).

accomuna le opere in questione, compresa quella di Laclos: maschera, la maschera che Madame de Merteuil aveva addosso<sup>19</sup> e che nell'ipertesto finalmente dismette designandola con chiarezza («jeter le masque», De Graeve [2000]: 179), la maschera dei miti che Yourcenar ha indossato per rivelare parti di sé, la maschera della riscrittura che De Graeve ha usato per esprimere la sua propria “mostruosità”. Non è certo un caso che egli dedichi la sua opera «Aux Monstres comme moi», scegliendo, con questo appellativo feroce, di identificarsi alla Marchesa<sup>20</sup>, un personaggio che questa riscrittura rende ancora più complesso di quanto già non fosse nell'originale. Le “mauvais genre” del titolo ha peraltro un triplice riferimento: rinvia a un cattivo soggetto, o a un aspetto poco raccomandabile, ma anche a un genere sbagliato<sup>21</sup>.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONE

È arrivato il momento di concludere richiamando quanto ci eravamo posti all'inizio: quale rapporto con la realtà può avere un romanzo che rinvia ad altre invenzioni romanzesche? E quanto l'ipertesto può influire sull'ipertesto in merito a questa problematica?

Prima di rispondere a questa domanda è opportuno ricordare che, sotto il profilo formale, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* rappresenta il punto di non ritorno di una moda, quella del romanzo epistolare, che aveva imperversato nel Settecento<sup>22</sup>. Era nata nel secolo precedente con le *Lettres portugaises* (1669) e si era diffusa rispondendo alla

richiesta di “autenticità” che da sempre impone l'avvicinarsi delle forme del romanzo. L'artificio del ritrovamento degli scambi epistolari fra i personaggi doveva rinserrare il legame con il reale, garantendo la veridicità di un'avventura il cui svolgimento si poteva dedurre e ricostruire attraverso la lettura delle lettere. Ma, con il suo capolavoro, Laclos indica che la lettera, per quanto autentica, può non essere espressione di sincerità, anzi, nel suo romanzo egli dimostra proprio che quella che fino ad allora era considerata una testimonianza autentica può trasformarsi invece in un mezzo di inganno, tanto più efficace quanto più preconcettualmente portatore di un valore contrario<sup>23</sup>.

Questo paradosso viene ripreso negli avantesti che, sulla questione dell'autenticità, forniscono due risposte diametralmente opposte: l'«Avertissement de l'éditeur» colloca l'epistolario nel campo della finzione romanzesca e per provarlo cita l'inverosimiglianza dei costumi descritti (anche se l'evidente ironia delle argomentazioni finisce per avvalorare l'idea contraria); la «Préface du rédacteur» rivendica l'autenticità delle lettere ma non mancando di far leva sul pubblico che sarà «séduit par l'idée que tout ce qui est imprimé est le fruit d'un travail»<sup>24</sup>.

Laclos dunque lascia volontariamente in sospeso la questione dell'autenticità, quasi a suggerirci che la verità del testo si situa a un altro level-

<sup>19</sup> E che Danceny rende palese pubblicando le sue lettere: «J'ai cru de plus que c'était rendre service à la société que de démasquer une femme aussi réellement dangereuse que l'est Madame de Merteuil» (Laclos [2011]: CLXIX).

<sup>20</sup> E non solo: l'epigrafe della prima parte è una frase di Phèdre («Et moi, triste rebut de la nature entière, / Je me cachais au jour, je fuyais la lumière»), la protagonista dell'omonima tragedia raciniana che aveva dentro di sé la mostruosità della sua ascendenza.

<sup>21</sup> La questione del *gender* è stata affrontata da Seth (2008).

<sup>22</sup> Sul romanzo epistolare si veda Rousset (1964), Bray (1967), Versini (1979) e Calas (1996).

<sup>23</sup> «Exploitant les ressources de la forme épistolaire, Laclos risque d'en inverser la signification. Témoignage du vécu et de l'authentique, la lettre devient parfois dans *Les Liaisons dangereuses* son contraire, le signe de l'artificialité du langage. Plénitude de la parole, mime de la présence, elle devient la marque du silence et de l'absence. [...] Alors que le genre exprime un besoin de sincérité, de vérité, de spontanéité, un refus des masques sociaux et des conventions, il devient chez Laclos le mode d'une hypocrisie généralisée. Les libertins changent de style selon leurs correspondants, les vertueux eux-mêmes sont piégés par leurs contradictions. Le roman amène à suspecter chacun, à ne croire personne sur parole. L'authenticité n'est plus qu'une illusion où se prennent les naïfs, une arme supplémentaire entre les mains des roués.» (Delon [1986]: 50-51). A questo proposito si veda anche Versini (1988) e Nervi (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Si veda anche quanto afferma Migeot (2005).

lo<sup>25</sup>: il suo romanzo, che mette in scena comportamenti non inauditi nella società del XVIII secolo, induce il lettore, a mezzo di un'opera di seduzione non meno efficace di quella intrapresa dai libertini su alcuni personaggi<sup>26</sup>, a riflettere sulla complessa articolazione fra virtù e ipocrisia, fra moralità e apparenza.

Ed è esattamente a questa riflessione che rinvia anche il romanzo di De Graeve, con l'ausilio dei riferimenti intertestuali che invitano il lettore a ritrovare in filigrana una verità biografica. Ricorrendo alla riscrittura, tuttavia, De Graeve non rischia di compromettere il suo scopo? In effetti la pratica dell'ipertestualità, sfiorando costantemente l'esercizio accademico, a prima vista sembrerebbe allontanarsi dall'esperienza personale autentica, la quale richiede addirittura l'invenzione di un nuovo linguaggio<sup>27</sup>. Così ritengono la maggior parte dei critici – a partire da Genette stesso – che affermano come l'ipertestualità esalti la finzionalità della vicenda raccontata: essa scaverebbe il fossato tra finzione e realtà.

E tuttavia, assumendo il punto di vista del lettore, la questione va rimodulata alla luce del fatto che la differenza tra mondo finzionale e mondo reale è di grado più che di natura (Pavel [1986]: 26-74). Approfondire questo risvolto significherebbe spingere la nostra riflessione oltre il limite di un solo articolo e ben oltre la questione della riscrittura. Ci limiteremo pertanto a focalizzarci

<sup>25</sup> A questo proposito, è utile rileggere quanto afferma Thomas Pavel nell'*Univers de la fiction*: «Le sens d'un texte peut se déployer à plusieurs niveaux; un mythe ou un roman allégorique composé seulement de propositions fausses peuvent dégager une vérité allégorique perceptible à un niveau autre que celui du sens littéral.» (Pavel [1986] : 34). Pavel riprende, approfondendole e risolvendone le contraddizioni, le posizioni teoriche di Kendall Walton. Si veda, in particolare, Walton (1978, 1978a, 1990 e 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Limpidamente analizzata da Minogue (1973).

<sup>27</sup> Ricordiamo quanto diceva in particolare Nathalie Sarraute, che ha usato parole vibranti, nei *Fruits d'or* (Sarraute [1996]: 601), per caldeggiare la necessità di un'espressione originale, totalmente nuova rispetto ai modelli anteriori. Si veda, a questo proposito, Pierrot (1990): 348-350.

su quest'ultima. Ora, sappiamo che il riscrittore è prima di tutto un lettore e che, nel suo caso, il meccanismo di implicazione nelle vicende dell'ipotesto può essere molto profondo: non sono rari gli autori che dichiarano come certi personaggi abbiano ormai scavalcato il confine che separa la realtà dalla finzione<sup>28</sup>. L'operazione di appropriazione rescinde il legame fra un personaggio e il suo creatore: Merteuil smette di essere il prodotto dell'immaginazione di Laclos entrando in quella del lettore De Graeve, che lo "usa" non solo per esprimere la sua propria marginalità morale, ma anche con l'intento di spingerci a riflettere sull'autenticità della sua ispirazione artistica. La forza del romanzo di De Graeve risiede precisamente nella sua capacità di discostarsi dall'accademismo nell'atto stesso di dar voce alla sua eccentricità appoggiandosi su quella di un personaggio scandaloso. Laddove Laclos aveva sapientemente evitato di prendere posizione, giocando sulla referenzialità, De Graeve sembra invece suggerire che è nel cuore della finzione che si annida l'espressione più autentica: esiste forse personaggio migliore della Merteuil, proverbiale incarnazione della finzione, per esprimere questa verità? Verità allegorica, ben inteso, quella che rende poco pertinente la riflessione sulla verità ontologica dell'opera d'arte (Pavel [1986]: 23-74).

A questo aspetto, si aggiunge un vincolo legato alla ricezione che da qualche tempo è tenuto in maggior conto: è noto che la comunicazione della novità avviene con più grande incisività laddove questa si innesti nel già noto. La presenza dell'ipotesto svolgerebbe allora la funzione, non secondaria ai fini dell'efficacia comunicativa, di preparare il lettore a esprimere (nel esso sia anche un del riscrittore) o a cogliere (nel caso sia un mero lettore) un contenuto nuovo la cui accettazione talvolta può essere, come nel caso del *Mauvais genre*, moralmente impegnativo.

<sup>28</sup> È il caso di Amleto che, come ha dichiarato esplicitamente Ismail Kadaré, è "entrato nella vita nel senso proprio del termine", o di Zenone, il protagonista dell'*Oeuvre au noir*, che Marguerite Yourcenar avrebbe voluto al suo capezzale.



Da tutto ciò appare chiaro quindi che la finzione non è l'analogo – né il contrario – della realtà. È piuttosto «un'epifania della verità» (Nafisi [2003]: 18) e la sua funzione non è tanto quella di imitare il reale, quanto piuttosto di comunicarlo, di renderlo comprensibile, talvolta anche di dargli coerenza. O, nel caso di trasgressioni importanti, di legittimarlo, inserendolo in un'aristocrazia del sapere che lo renda tollerabile, per sé ancora prima che per gli altri.

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**Citation:** L. Rodler (2020) La post-fisiognomica di Goffredo Parise. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 127-133. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11147

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## La post-fisiognomica di Goffredo Parise

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**Abstract.** In the 1960s Goffredo Parise made use of a series of interesting similes in order to describe men and women of his time. The similarity between human being and animal makes room for comparisons with objects, that would mean the end of the traditional physiognomy. Can this rhetorical choice be considered a lucid and visionary anticipation of post-humanism?

**Keywords.** Cosmetic surgery, consumerism, violence, United States, Italian women.

Nel settembre 1980 lo scrittore italiano Goffredo Parise (1929-1986) trascorre più di un mese in Giappone e racconta questo viaggio in una serie di venti articoli pubblicati dal “Corriere della Sera” dal 25 gennaio 1981 al 24 febbraio 1982. Essi vengono in seguito raccolti in volume con il titolo *L'eleganza è frigida*, un romanzo-reportage che descrive lo stile di vita giapponese. Il titolo cattura l'attenzione: perché questo giudizio che Parise trae dal poeta Saito Ryokuu? Lo spiega Marco, narratore e controfigura di Parise: il Giappone è frigido perché «c'era in giro e nell'aria troppa forma ed eleganza, dunque artificio, perché la sessualità e la sensualità prendessero molto spazio» (Parise [1982]: 1109). Persino il night giornaliero nell'estrema periferia di Tokyo pare a Marco uno «zoo, infermeria o pronto soccorso» con le donne che disinfettano i loro partner prima del contatto fisico: «Era uno spettacolo bizzarro e molto originale ma di erotico non c'era anche lì assolutamente nulla» (Parise [1982]: 1117). Ovunque i Giapponesi paiono a Marco «come pesci dai bellissimi colori aurei» che si mostrano «dentro un acquario nel loro volteggiare lento e solenne, o affollato e quasi trasparente, privi di quei gesti bizzarri e comici che caratterizzano eroticamente i mammiferi» (Parise [1982]: 1109). In questa sede interessa la similitudine zoomorfica: i Giapponesi sembrano pesci in un acquario, vivi ma prigionieri, eleganti ma innaturali. Tuttavia, la frigidità dell'eleganza affascina Marco che la preferisce alla volgarità occidentale,

soprattutto quella di donne che non sono né carne né pesce, ma maschere, abiti, oggetti in un'Italia consumistica che è iniziata negli anni Sessanta del Novecento.

Secondo il filosofo Roberto Esposito proprio quel decennio è fondamentale per il pensiero italiano che riconosce il conflitto tra «il potere della vita» di chi riflette e resiste, e «il potere sulla vita» esercitato da istituzioni e storia ufficiale; nel primo caso l'individuo è corpo e parola, nel secondo forma e artificio (Esposito [2016]: 164). Nello stesso periodo, cioè molto tempo prima del viaggio nipponico, Parise racconta qualcosa di simile a proposito del disagio dell'individuo dinanzi alla società del benessere. In varie occasioni egli narra la metamorfosi dell'identità contadina e povera degli Italiani in uno stile di vita americanizzante, reificante, post-fisiognomico. In questa sede l'analisi si concentra sulle similitudini con cui Parise descrive soprattutto le donne. Belle come farfalle o come i manichini dei grandi magazzini? Cioè zoomorfiche secondo la tradizione umanistica o cyborg-morfiche, per dirla con un neologismo modellato sulle teorie della biologa Donna Haraway (1985)?

### 1. COME UNA FARFALLA

Vicenza, 1947. «Voli di farfalle, visioni di bellezza»: alcune giovanissime pattinatrici esibiscono la loro abilità con grazia e leggerezza. Paiono farfalle (Parise [1947]: 1485).

Roma, 1962. Silvia è una giovane moglie che vive con istintività, senza tenere conto delle abitudini del marito. Lui vorrebbe un caffè al risveglio, e Silvia lo brucia ogni giorno. Lui vorrebbe le porte dell'appartamento chiuse, e lei le lascia sempre aperte. Per distrazione e leggerezza. Come una farfalla (Parise [1977<sup>2</sup>]: 515-534).

Treviso, 1963. Una giovane donna ha l'eleganza e la bellezza di una farfalla tropicale: è seducente, emozionante. Tuttavia la sua assoluta naturalità le rende impossibile il dialogo con un uomo. Perciò si circonda di oggetti (Parise [1967]: 563-648).

Queste tre figure femminili sono descritte da Parise anche grazie alla similitudine con un ani-

male: l'aspetto e il comportamento delle giovani donne viene paragonato a quello di una farfalla, a significare bellezza, leggerezza, istintività e mistero. Le farfalle interessano perché rappresentano un immaginario antropocentrico tradizionale (Braidotti [2013]: 81): secondo il pensiero fisiognomico, infatti, il carattere di ogni individuo si conosce anche attraverso la somiglianza con gli animali. Questo sapere pseudoscientifico caratterizza l'umanesimo italiano e produce due sintesi fortunatissime in Europa e negli Stati Uniti: il *Della fisionomia dell'uomo* di Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615) e, tre secoli più tardi, gli studi su delinquenti, prostitute e pazzi dell'antropologia criminale di Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). Sempre lo zoomorfismo serve per sottolineare la naturalità del corpo femminile, dando spesso forma alla misoginia (Magli [1996]: 135-156). In Parise, la similitudine del giornalista giovanissimo veicola un'ammirazione che, negli anni Sessanta, diviene invece distanza tra l'uomo razionale e analitico, e la donna istintuale e convenzionale. In entrambi i casi tuttavia lo scrittore si serve dell'animale per parlare dell'individuo. D'altronde all'inizio del decennio Parise legge *L'origine dell'uomo* di Charles Darwin e anche per questo è attento al pensiero scientifico: l'evoluzione, la lotta per la sopravvivenza, le trasformazioni dei caratteri degli individui e della specie. E tutto ciò diviene ancora più chiaro dopo avere visitato New York, Miami, Dallas, New Orleans e Las Vegas.

### 2. COME JAMES BOND O LA PUBBLICITÀ DEL SAPONE PALMOLIVE

Nella primavera del 1961 Parise compie il primo viaggio americano con l'entusiasmo del provinciale alla ricerca della libertà. Accade però che le aspettative vengano deluse quando osserva città sporche, misere, decadenti, e avverte, con qualche decennio di anticipo, lo spaesamento dei non-luoghi: motel e distributori di benzina delle periferie accolgono infatti la solitudine di individui alla Edward Hopper che sprecano la propria esistenza nel consumare oggetti. Reduce da questo «choc

conoscitivo», Parise scrive *Il Padrone* (che vince il prestigioso premio Viareggio nel 1965), la storia di un provinciale che scopre la violenza di una grande città industriale italiana e insieme il fascino dello stile di vita all'americana (e nella trama si intuisce un riferimento autobiografico all'esperienza di Parise nella Milano della Garzanti). Sono le medesime sensazioni di Parise: da una parte egli riflette sull'omologazione della civiltà di massa (nell'intervista a Andrea Barbato per «L'Espresso» dell'11 aprile 1965):

*C'è in America un'identificazione fra persona e oggetto. Non è solo il luogo comune della standardizzazione, della civiltà di massa. C'è una chimica interna che è identica per tutti. È una legge scientifica. Tendiamo all'indifferenziazione. Le specie vittoriose si rafforzano, si dispongono a nuove avventure, ma nell'interno della specie gli individui che la compongono si somigliano sempre di più. Tutto questo in America è chiaro, e appare in una forma spettacolare e grandiosa. È una realtà disperante, ma è quella del mondo moderno, non si può rinnegarla o respingerla. (Barbato [1965]: 15)*

Ma, dall'altra parte, Parise viene emozionato da questa realtà spettacolare, grandiosa, e al tempo stesso disperante, sin dall'arrivo a New York, città sradicata, onirica, artificiale (come suggerisce il racconto *Arrivato*):

*È una città stupenda. Ed è forse l'unico luogo al mondo che non mi delude. Perché? Mi faccio continuamente questa domanda. Perché non è una città reale. Perché essa ha subito per prima, nel nascere, il fatto più importante del mondo moderno. Cioè il processo di derealizzazione, di sradicamento dalla realtà. Lo sospettavo e l'ho trovato: quali sogni, immagini, parvenze, epifanie, visioni ed ectoplasmi della ragione escono fumando da queste pareti, da queste porte, da questi ascensori. (Rodler [2016]: 141)*

Nella seconda parte del decennio Parise conosce anche l'America del Vietnam: come è possibile pensare di vincere i vietcong con tante armi e nessuna idea, se non quella dell'anticomunismo? I resoconti di guerra di Parise sono indagini lucidissime di antropologia dello spaesamento dei giova-

ni militari statunitensi. Essi eseguono senza comprendere gli ordini del comandante supremo delle forze armate americane, il generale Westmoreland, «prodotto perfetto dell'industria americana», identificato con «una serie di immagini in serie»: «il volto d'un console romano, la struttura ossea e muscolare del discobolo, l'autorità di Abramo Lincoln, lo scatto di James Bond, i poteri sovrumani di Superman e infine la dolce, familiare, universale marca Palmolive» (Parise [1976]: 847-849). Ancora una volta le similitudini aiutano a comprendere il pensiero sull'umano di Parise: Westmoreland non ha nulla di naturale perché rappresenta l'ideologia di un paese già post-fisiognomico.

Eppure, nell'autunno 1975, Parise decide di tornare proprio a New York, anche sapendo che la città americana è diventata il mito onirico dell'occidente. La situazione personale è molto cambiata: ormai quarantenne, autore affermato del *Padrone* e del *Sillabario 1* e instancabile reporter di guerra, Parise osserva la realtà americana dello «spreco» (esito darwiniano del consumo anni sessanta) per comprendere la «colonia» italiana negli anni di piombo. Così, mentre Pier Paolo Pasolini (1975) predispone la raccolta degli *Scritti corsari* prima di essere ucciso il primo giorno di novembre, Parise identifica New York come modello della «grande rivoluzione» del benessere postbellico: teatro principale della lotta «disumana» del consumismo, New York è al tempo stesso vetrina e macelleria, istituto di bellezza e obitorio della nuova cultura. E gli italiani imitano l'*American way of life*, rinunciando anzitutto a un rapporto autentico con la terra, la famiglia, la cultura nazional-popolare, la religione e la politica, cioè con la propria realtà tradizionale (Parise [1977<sup>1</sup>]: 1000-1005). Il fatto è che l'America produce e consuma in un «binomio» sostanziale, mentre l'Italia consuma e basta, grazie a una cultura «a-ideologica, basata sul materialismo» che ha deformato i «caratteri nazionali» dopo il miracolo economico. Il rischio di questo *Italian way of life* è presto detto (e viene denunciato più volte, ad esempio negli articoli *Ecco dove porta la via del consumo* del 19 giugno 1979 e *Ribelliamoci ai dogmi: ogni uomo è diverso dagli altri* del giugno 1985): diventare la cari-

catura di New York che in certi momenti appare «un immenso mondezzaio battuto dal vento, dove rifiuti e uomini si confondono, prefigurando l'immagine di tutte le città del futuro» (Parise [1977<sup>1</sup>]: 1035-1041). Un mondo artificiale in cui, anche ad ascoltare il regista Robert Altman intervistato al festival del cinema di Venezia nel 1982, abiteranno mostri americani o americanizzati (Parise [1982]: 1480-1484).

### 3. COME UN BARATTOLO

Ma ritorniamo al primo viaggio negli Stati Uniti del 1961, quando Parise scopre un mondo che dà più importanza agli oggetti e al denaro che agli individui, che valgono solo se consumano o addirittura sprecano, tutti allo stesso modo. La ricchezza non risulta solo una questione sociale, ma definisce due specie differenti che lottano per la produzione di cose e persone («e per specie si intende una vera e propria specie biologica, con caratteri somatici, psichici e psicologici ben definiti, che raramente, anzi mai, concordano con quelli dell'altra specie» (Parise [1965]: 926)). Questo conflitto determina una vera e propria regressione evolutiva, un imbarbarimento che fa pensare a un pre-umanesimo piuttosto che a un post-umanesimo. Ma di recente Cary Wolfe (2010: 89) ha sottolineato l'ambiguità del prefisso *post* che può anche indicare una dimensione che viene prima dell'idea umanistica di individuo. Si tratta comunque di una metamorfosi che interessa la natura essenziale dell'umano, quell'integrità coerente di corpo, comportamento e parola definita dalla fisiognomica classico-rinascimentale. Ancora una volta una similitudine è rivelatrice: alla fine del *Padrone* il narratore si augura di avere un figlio-oggetto, privo di ragione e parola: «Gli auguro una vita simile a quella del barattolo che in questo momento sua madre ha in mano, solo così nessuno potrà fargli del male» (Parise [1965]: 1073). Nella società del benessere, infatti, solo la sottrazione delle componenti umanistiche dell'individuo garantisce la serenità: la ragione e la parola vanno perciò sostituite con automobili, televisori e frigoriferi. D'al-

tronde, si chiede il narratore, pensando al proprio silenzioso matrimonio con Zilietta, la donna affetta da sindrome di Down che ha sposato su sollecitazione del «padrone»: «a cosa serve la parola? Dicono che la parola serva agli uomini per comunicare tra loro e per essere poeti. Forse sarà servita un tempo. Per conto mio essa è soltanto uno strumento di difesa e di offesa nella lotta. Tra me e Zilietta non ci sono né parole, né lotta, e, a differenza di altre coppie che parlano tra di loro e litigano, siamo molto felici» (Parise [1965]: 1073).

Pertanto, il bambino-barattolo è l'*homo tacens* che garantisce il «potere sulla vita» da parte del consumismo (per dirla con Esposito). Non per caso il silenzio ritorna spesso nei trentatré racconti scritti tra il 1963 e il 1967 e in seguito riuniti nel *Crematorio di Vienna* (pubblicato nel novembre 1969 da Feltrinelli, subito esaurito e ristampato in dicembre). Si tratta di un testo splendido che analizza il rapporto tra l'individuo, le cose e il denaro, oltre che la convenzionalità e l'aggressività dei comportamenti. Il titolo proposto dall'editore doveva essere *L'uomo in serie* per due ragioni: la descrizione di individui archetipi di una condizione umana generale e una scrittura gelida, alla Alberto Moravia. Così, ad esempio, una mamma-tipo di periferia, guardarobiera in un ristorante del centro di una città industriale, è la narratrice di *Difettoso* (racconto pubblicato sul «Corriere della Sera» il 21 febbraio 1966): la donna cresce da sola tre maschietti di nove, sei e due anni e mezzo e chiede loro il silenzio delle macchine perfette, utili in società. Purtroppo il più piccolo le dà qualche problema: strilla, anzi «abbaia» senza tregua, come un televisore, una radio, un registratore difettosi per un errore di fabbricazione. Ce ne sono molti «abbandonati in piccoli mucchi senza senso e senza voce oltre il recinto delle case popolari» nella zona dei capannoni industriali. Che fare allora per ridurre al silenzio il figlio difettoso? «L'ho sollevato da terra dove stava, la testa contro il pavimento del recinto nuovo, ho aperto la finestra e l'ho gettato in direzione della fabbrica» (Parise [1969]: 165-170). Ecco come l'umanesimo della parola finisce tra i rifiuti.

#### 4. COME UN MANICHINO O UN VOLTO DA CALENDARIO

Dinanzi ai difetti psicosomatici, la fisiognomica umanistica e una parte dell'antropologia criminale prevedono l'esercizio della virtù, cioè l'intervento di cultura, educazione e società per compensare eventuali mancanze della natura. I brutti, ad esempio, possono farsi amare se scelgono di essere saggi, come Socrate, almeno secondo quanto afferma, tra gli altri, il fisionomo cinquecentesco Giambattista Della Porta. Anche negli anni Sessanta del Novecento esiste il libero arbitrio, ma viene declinato in un modo del tutto differente, almeno in Italia. E Parise coglie una nuova idea di perfettibilità resa possibile dalla tecnologia, in anticipo su quella che Paul Steehan (2015: 245) ha definito tecnofilia contemporanea.

Così, qualche anno dopo l'invenzione di Barbie, una commessa di ventitré anni né bella né brutta, dal carattere serio, deciso e testardo, che da cinque lavora in un grande magazzino, cambia la fisionomia del volto con la chirurgia estetica per essere bella come un manichino in vetrina. Tutto nasce dal male che le hanno fatto le parole insistenti dell'ex fidanzato: «Tu sei diversa da tutte le altre. Però mi piaci lo stesso» (Parise [1969]: 126). La protagonista del racconto *Diversa*, pubblicato sul «Corriere della Sera» dell'11 gennaio 1965 e poi nel *Crematorio di Vienna*, sente ancora sullo stomaco quel «però», soprattutto dopo essere stata lasciata dall'uomo: per essere amate bisogna essere uguali a tutte le altre donne. Non c'è dubbio:

*Se avessi avuto un'altra faccia, mettiamo una faccia come se ne vedono tante nelle riviste di moda o nelle pubblicità, o, appunto, nei manichini che arrivano dall'America, nessuno avrebbe trovato da ridire e io sarei stata uguale alle altre.*

*Non mi resta dunque che cambiare faccia. Per questo, come tutti sanno, è abbastanza facile. Basta andare da un chirurgo plastico, come ce ne sono tanti in questa città. (Parise [1969]: 128)*

Sono passati vent'anni dalla similitudine delle farfalle. E il nuovo immaginario offre una testimonianza importante: le riviste di moda e i

manichini (e così pure il cinema e poi la televisione) diffondono in Italia l'esibizione di un corpo standard e perciò seduttivo che può essere realizzato grazie alla tecnologia medica made in USA (Ferrando [2016]: 37). Sono state necessarie il perfezionamento dell'anestesia, la scoperta degli antibiotici, oltre che un diffuso benessere economico, per dare avvio alla vetrinizzazione di un corpo che si vergogna solo della propria eventuale diversità (Ghigi [2008]: 161; Codeluppi [2007]: 29). Nessun pudore, invece, nel contemplare se stessi allo specchio: «ho cominciato a guardarmi allo specchio per ore!» (Parise [1969]: 129) afferma questa Orlan in miniatura che scarta subito l'ipotesi di parlare a uno psicoterapeuta delle proprie insicurezze. Sceglie invece un giovane medico che ha imparato il mestiere per dieci anni in America: egli accoglie e chiarisce il desiderio di «diventare un'altra», una replicante di se stessa nel corpo e nel carattere e offre alla commessa un catalogo di fotografie che sembrano tutte uguali - riflette la giovane - «come i bicchieri: ce ne sono tanti e di tanti tipi, eppure sono tutti di vetro e servono tutti per bere» (Parise [1969]: 129). Queste donne oggetto mostrano

*un'espressione vaga e sorridente, come di persona dolce, modesta, soddisfatta, insomma di persona a cui va tutto bene, a cui piace tutto, che non si domanda tanti perché, che non trova da ridire su niente e anzi approva e si stupisce delle cose come se fossero ogni volta delle novità. Dunque proprio quello che andava bene a me. (Parise [1969]: 129)*

Nell'ideale di conformismo della donna-bicchiere, del bambino-barattolo e dell'uomo alla Westmoreland Parise intuisce la nuova identità post-fisiognomica, modellata su cinema, pubblicità, oggetti, consumi. Il «potere della vita» naturale, attuato anche grazie all'esercizio faticoso della virtù (secondo l'ipotesi dellaportiana) arretra dinanzi al «potere sulla vita» della chirurgia estetica, così come spiega il chirurgo alla giovane paziente:

*«E avrò, oltre i capelli che si fa presto, una fronte così, un naso così, gli occhi verdi così, una bocca e un mento così?»*



«Certamente. Non solo avrà quella fronte, quegli occhi, quel naso, quella bocca e quel mento, ma avrà anche l'essenza di quella fronte, quegli occhi, quel naso e quel mento, essendo, l'una e gli altri, la stessa cosa». (Parise [1969]: 130)

Non è più dunque solo una questione di similitudine. La figura retorica che ha accompagnato la fisiognomica tradizionale consegna apparenza ed essenza del corpo umano al bisturi chirurgico e diviene una metafora. Il che significa che ciascuno di noi può diventare un altro, a propria scelta. E infatti, dopo due mesi di operazioni, dolori e speranze, la donna «diversa» è finalmente «uguale alle altre» e perciò contenta: «È vero, a toccarmi sono tutta un po' fredda, in faccia, ma questo non dovrebbe dare nessun fastidio. Quello che conta è che l'espressione è completamente cambiata, anzi più che cambiata è scomparsa» (Parise [1969]: 131). E le soddisfazioni arrivano a breve: un giovane ingegnere la corteggia con parole ben diverse da quelle dell'ex fidanzato. Invece di alludere a una supposta diversità, indica una somiglianza evidente con la ragazza del calendario appeso dietro il bancone di un bar. Ecco la reazione della giovane, la felicità e la sicurezza della post-fisiognomica:

*Era vero. Ero uguale a quella ragazza [...] ho riso, tutta contenta e mi è parso anche di arrossire. «Ma sono io» ho detto, così in fretta che non mi sono nemmeno accorta di mentire. Ma mentivo? Pensandoci mi sono detta che non mentivo affatto: quelli erano i miei capelli, il mio naso, i miei occhi, la mia bocca e perfino il mio cappuccio del paltò. Dunque che differenza c'era tra me e quella ragazza? Nessuna.* (Parise [1969]: 131)

Così la commessa diviene ragazza immagine, secondo la profezia metaforizzante del chirurgo: il fuori modella il dentro, l'artificio ha la meglio sulla natura, l'*homo mendax* è l'alternativa vincente di *homo tacens*. Parise insiste più volte sulla degradazione dell'individuo a una caricatura dell'umanesimo, suggerendone anche una possibile causa in un'intervista rilasciata a Rosanna Guerrini per il mensile «Il Dramma» del gennaio 1970 (Guerrini [1970]: 123). Dopo la scomparsa della fede in Dio,

l'uomo coltiva l'illusione di «essere Dio di se stesso e di altri», una creatura senza limiti che violenta in tanti modi l'identità propria e altrui: anche scegliendo le parti di ricambio per il proprio corpo in un body shop globale (Bodei [2016]: 23). Perciò, nel mondo post-fisiognomico la similitudine con le farfalle significa ormai assai poco. Va meglio allora ai pesci «frigidi» che volteggiano composti e armonici in un rito elegante che copre forse i silenzi e le oscurità delle passioni. Per questo, alla fine, in una lettera del 3 gennaio 1981, Parise confida ad Alcide Paolini che il Giappone è «il paese di gran lunga più interessante» che ha visitato perché «è tutto psicologia molto nascosta ed estetismo e perfezionismo» (Rodler [2016]: 160). Un'autentica «alternativa», dunque, alla frigidità inelegante degli oggetti e dei corpi artificiali degli Occidentali.

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**Citation:** F. Tononi (2020) Aesthetic Response to the Unfinished: Empathy, Imagination and Imitation Learning. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 135-153. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-10737

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Aesthetic Response to the Unfinished: Empathy, Imagination and Imitation Learning<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This contribution proposes how beholders may internally process unfinished works of art. It does so by considering five of Michelangelo Buonarroti's interrupted sculptures and pointing out their empathic and imaginative potential. The beholder focused on the surface, I propose, is inclined to mentally simulate the artist's gesture that drafted the sculptures through the visible graphic signs of the chisels. This inner simulation takes place within the activation of various brain networks, located in the brain's motor system. Renaissance authors associated the observation of the unfinished to learning and, as this article shows, this assumption seems to find confirmation in recent neuroscientific studies on mirror neurons and imitation learning. In this way, the empathic engagement established between the beholder and the work of art observed – as well as the role played by embodied simulation and imagination in this kind of visual perception – clarifies how the incompleteness can also have that pedagogical function recognised by Giorgio Vasari and Benvenuto Cellini.

**Keywords.** Empathy, imagination, imitation learning, implied actions, unfinished.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To investigate the power that unfinished works of art exercise on the beholder, it seems essential to explore the activity of the brain in relation to their observation. Cognitive neurosciences have made important contributions toward a better understanding of the functions of the human brain, with direct and significant resonances in the history of art and aesthetics. The encounter between art and neuroscience has allowed scholars to produce some original interpretations of works of art – particularly those that emphasise the representation of motions and emotions – and opened an authen-

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Professor David Freedberg (Columbia University in the City of New York) and Professor Manos Tsakiris (Royal Holloway and The Warburg Institute, University of London) for their insightful suggestions for this text.

tically new field of research<sup>2</sup>. The first remarkable attempt in this direction was accomplished by David Freedberg with *The Power of Images* (1989). In this book, Freedberg recovered the discourse of the role of the observer in art and set it on new foundations, enlarging the boundaries determined by Ernst Gombrich (1960) years earlier. Freedberg's pathfinding work has since been carried forward and deepened, both by Freedberg alone (Freedberg [2008]; Freedberg [2010]) and by Freedberg in collaboration with prominent neuroscientists, such as Vittorio Gallese (Freedberg, Gallese [2007]) and Ulrich Kirk (Kirk, Freedberg [2015]).

In a similar, albeit not symmetrical, way, cognitive neurosciences have gained a great deal by operating with philosophical and artistic concepts and by playing a part in theoretical debates. In this way, cognitive neurosciences have remained involved in the general intellectual context, rather than enclosing themselves in a safely circumscribed, specialized field of expertise and practice. They contributed not only to shed light on the way we process reality but also on our engagement with the arts and images in general (Changeux [1994]; Zeki [1999]; Ramachandran [2003]; Gallese [2017])<sup>3</sup>.

The fusion of these two disciplines, art history and neuroscience, gave origin to a new interdisciplinary approach, which has its roots in the philosophical and aesthetic debate inaugurated by some of the most important philosophers, psychologists and art historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Gustav Fechner (1876, 1998), Carl Lange (Lange, James [1922]), William James (James [1890]; Lange, James [1922]), Robert Vis-

cher (1873), Theodor Lipps (1903, 1903–1906), Aby Warburg (1999), Wilhelm Worringer (1907), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1948), and Ernst Gombrich (1960).

Building on this tradition, the present study intends to cast light on the way beholders perceive the unfinished in the visual arts, particularly in sculpture. Under examination is a specific kind of unfinished, that is, the one that presents a rough surface and makes the signs of the tools used by the artist well visible. An emblematic example that deserves new attention in this sense is Michelangelo Buonarroti's unfinished output. By considering Giorgio Vasari's and Benvenuto Cellini's statements, which stress the pedagogical function of the unfinished, for its peculiarity to show the process of art creation, I intend to validate their hypotheses by focusing on specific neuroscientific research. Pertinent for this purpose is the focus on the activity of mirror neurons in relation to the contemplation of implied actions – such as the artist's gestures, no longer perceivable but that can be mentally traced through the signs left by the instruments employed by the artist on the block of marble. Mirror neurons are a specific category of visuomotor neurons that were first discovered in area F5 of the monkey premotor cortex, in 1992, by a team of neuroscientists composed of Giacomo Rizzolatti, Luciano Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese. Subsequent neurophysiological experiments indicated that mirror neurons are also present in humans, precisely in the ventral premotor cortex (encompassing Brodmann's area 44) and posterior parietal cortex (Rizzolatti, Craighero [2004]; Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia [2008]). The functions of this class of neurons are essential for the understanding of the actions of others, such as 'reach out', 'grasp', and 'hold'. This is why the research on mirror neurons also contributed to the study of intersubjectivity, empathy and imitation learning.

Specific brain-body processes seem to be involved during the observation of graphic signs, that is, empathy, embodied simulation, imagination, memory and imitation learning. The activation of imagination, I posit, establishes an

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, David Freedberg's (2011) new reading of Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* and Vittorio Gallese et al.'s (2018) fresh interpretation of Lucio Fontana's *Concetto spaziale* (1956) and Eugenie Paultré's *Senza titolo* (2016). For a brief outline of twentieth-century scholarly skepticism about the role of emotions and empathy in art perception, see Freedberg, Gallese (2007: 199, box 3).

<sup>3</sup> See also the recent collection of essays, most written by psychologists and neuroscientists, in Huston et al. (2015).

empathic relationship between the observer and the work of art observed through a process of simulation of the artist's gestures. In this sense, empathy and imagination would be at the origin not only of an aesthetic experience, capable of involving the brain as well as the body of the viewer, but also of a learning activity.

Although, at present, there are no published experiments testing the way in which beholders respond to certain types of the unfinished, there is empirical evidence indirectly suggesting that the observation of a graphic mark – such as a cut or brushstroke – could lead the beholder to imagine the artist's act of sculpting a material or applying painting on a two-dimensional support.

Even though the neuroaesthetic literature on Michelangelo's unfinished is limited and generic, there are studies that have attempted to address the problem of the perception of the unfinished in the visual arts. Semir Zeki was first to deal with Michelangelo's unfinished within the neuroaesthetic discipline. He did so by considering some examples of Michelangelo's interrupted production, which includes statues, reliefs, paintings and drawings. However, in *Inner Vision* (1999: 22-36), he confines himself to only mentioning a possible response of beholders to the unfinished generally understood – that is, the imagination of hidden forms – without providing any biological evidence in support of his claim or clarifying the kind of unfinished he is referring to<sup>4</sup>.

Zeki deepened the phenomenon of Michelangelo's unfinished in a second study (2002: 65-67), stressing once again its potential for the beholder in neurological terms. In this regard, while talking about the unfinished, he states, «what Michelangelo has done, without acknowledging it, is to leave it to the brain of the spectator to complete it» (Zeki [2002]: 66). Moreover, for Zeki, the observation of an unfinished work «engages the brain more intensely» (Zeki [2002]: 67) than one that has been

finished. Despite the goal of undertaking a cross-disciplinary approach, these statements are not followed by that scientific explanation asserted in the introduction, that «all human activity is dictated by the organization and laws of the brain: that therefore, there can be no real theory of art and aesthetics unless neurologically based» (Zeki, [2002]: 54)<sup>5</sup>.

In another article, Zeki (2004: 190) addresses the problem of Michelangelo's unfinished through a different perspective. He compares Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*, an unfinished statue, with the incomplete triangle of Kanizsa. However, the main statements, including «in trying to make sense of the Kanizsa pattern that constitutes a Kanizsa triangle, the brain 'finishes it off'» and «in Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*, the capacity to give multi interpretations is taken yet a step further», are not followed by an accurate and detailed neuroscientific explanation.

David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese (2007: 197-198) interpret Michelangelo's unfinished works from a neuroscientific perspective, as well, although more clearly and precisely than Zeki. They focus on a specific aspect of the unfinished, that is, its potential to facilitate a motor response in the beholder. According to them, in the unfinished sculpture of the *Atlas Slave*, the «responses often take the form of a felt activation of the muscles that appear to be activated within the sculpture itself». This would explain why, they argue, «the sense of exertion ... is effectively conveyed to the spectator».

Finally, another attempt to investigate Michelangelo's unfinished in neuroaesthetics is provided by Vittorio Gallese and Cinzia di Dio (2012: 691). They see the unfinishedness of the *Slaves* as the key element that strengthens the bodily empathy of art viewers, who, according to the authors, are able «to experience the struggle of the prisoners to free themselves from the stone». Supported by empirical experiments, they propose this interpretation by stressing «the relevance of embodied simulation in art».

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<sup>4</sup> Evidently, not all unfinished can have the same characteristics (for instance, the unfinished does not always have hidden forms) and not all typologies of the unfinished can elicit the same response in the beholders.

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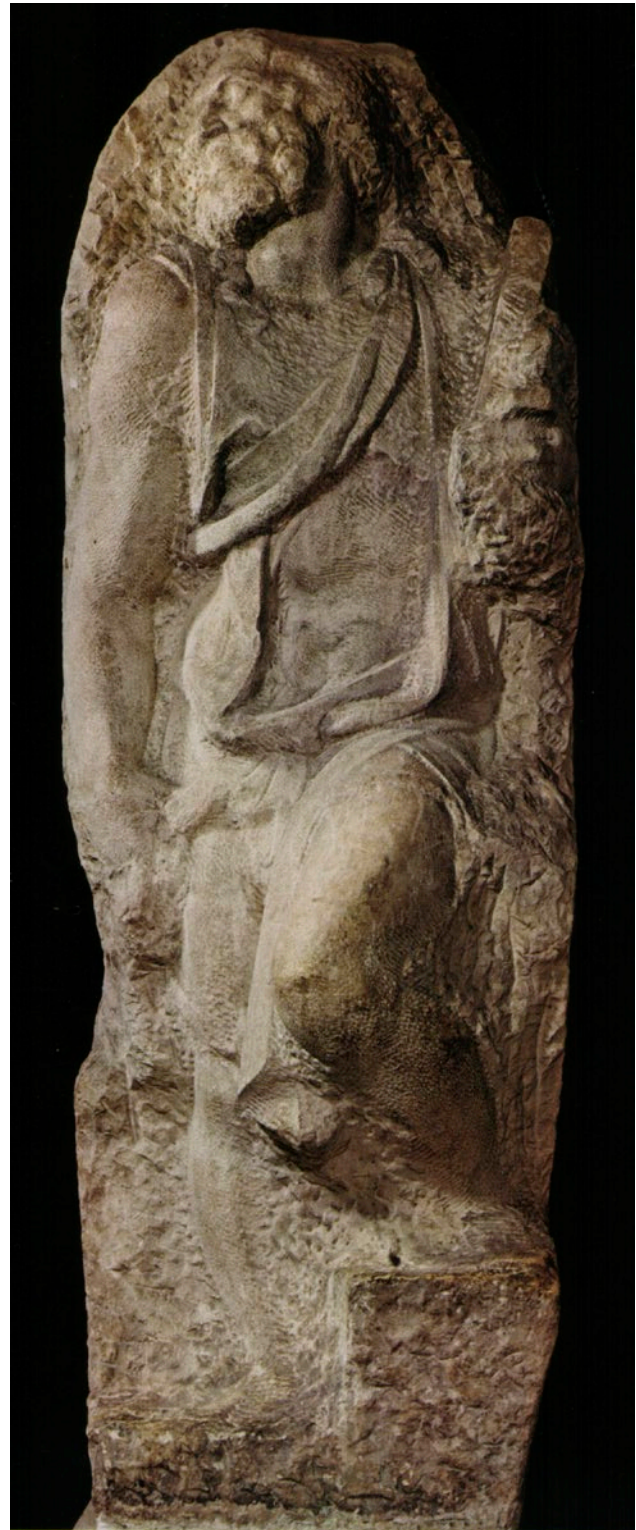
<sup>5</sup> For a detailed review of Zeki's neuroscientific interpretation of art creation and perception, see Ione (2003).

In this study, I intend to take a different angle from the ones previously explained. Considering the sub-personal and unconscious way in which most simulations work, as a form of direct perception, I focus on implied actions, perceivable and simulated through the signs left by the sculptor's instruments, thus revealing the imaginative and pedagogical potentials of the unfinished.

## 2. MICHELANGELO'S *NON FINITO* AND THE PROCESS OF IMAGE-MAKING

«Michelangelo's unfinished works manifest their incompleteness in a way that one cannot help noticing, no matter at what point one gazes, even if it does not always extend over the entire surfaces» (Gilbert [2003]: 57). With this sentence, Creighton Gilbert catches the issue of the perception of the unfinished that is present in many of Michelangelo's works of art, particularly sculptures. In this regard, Vasari wrote, «there are few finished statues to be seen out of all that he executed in the prime of his manhood, and that those completely finished were executed by him in his youth...the others, I say, were all left unfinished, and, moreover, they are many»<sup>6</sup>.

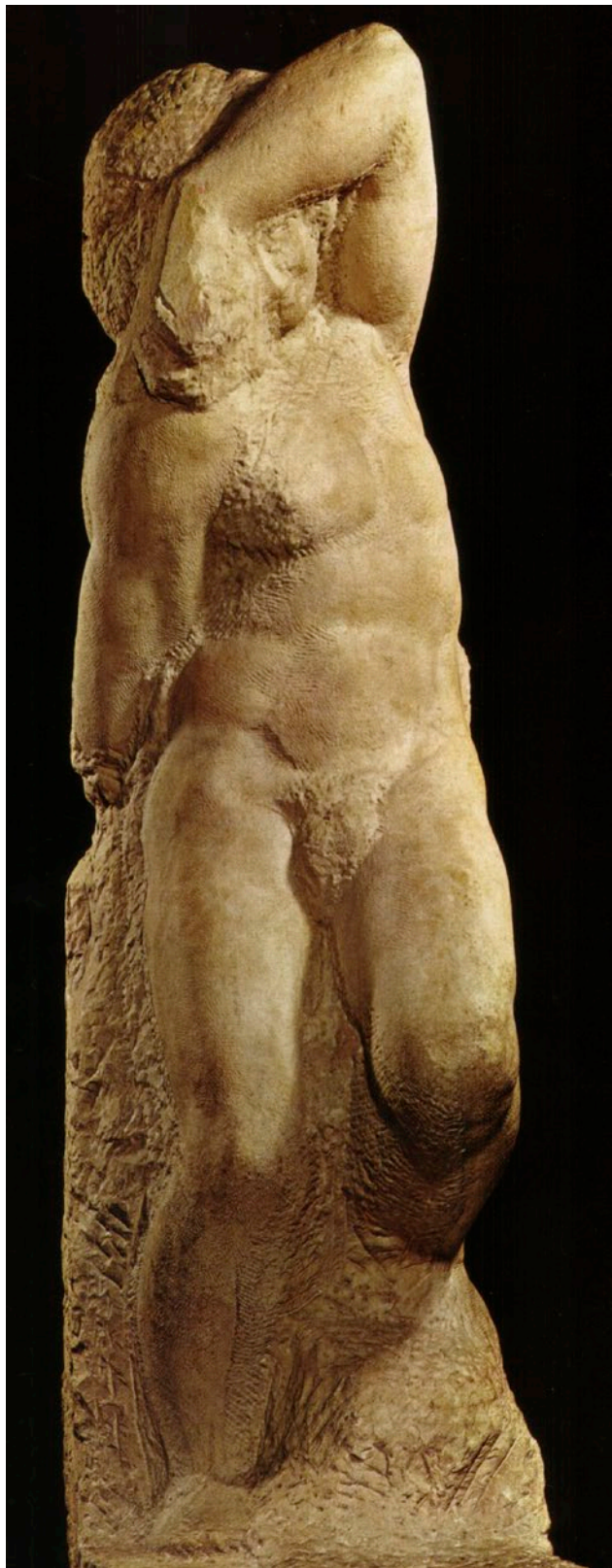
I address the problem of the aesthetic responses of beholders to the unfinished as a rough surface by focusing on five statues by Michelangelo Buonarroti, the solution of which, I argue, requires the application of neuroscientific findings. From Michelangelo's unfinished output, this essay concentrates on the interrupted statue of *St Matthew* (Figure 1) and the unfinished *Slaves* (Figures 2–5). The *Slaves* is a group of six statues realised for Pope Julius II's tomb in San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. Two of them are finished – the *Dying Slave* and the *Rebellious Slave* – whereas the other four – the *Young Slave* (Figure 2), the *Bearded Slave* (Figure 3), the *Awakening Slave* (Figure 4) and the



**Figure 1.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *St Matthew*, 1506, marble (216 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

<sup>6</sup> Vasari (1966: VI, 92): «delle sue statue se ne vede poche finite nella sua virilità, che le finite affatto sono state condotte da lui nella gioventù...l'altre, dico sono [re]state imperfette, e son molte maggiormente». Translated in Vasari (1912–1915: IX, 83).





**Figure 2.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Young Slave*, c. 1525–1530, marble (256 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

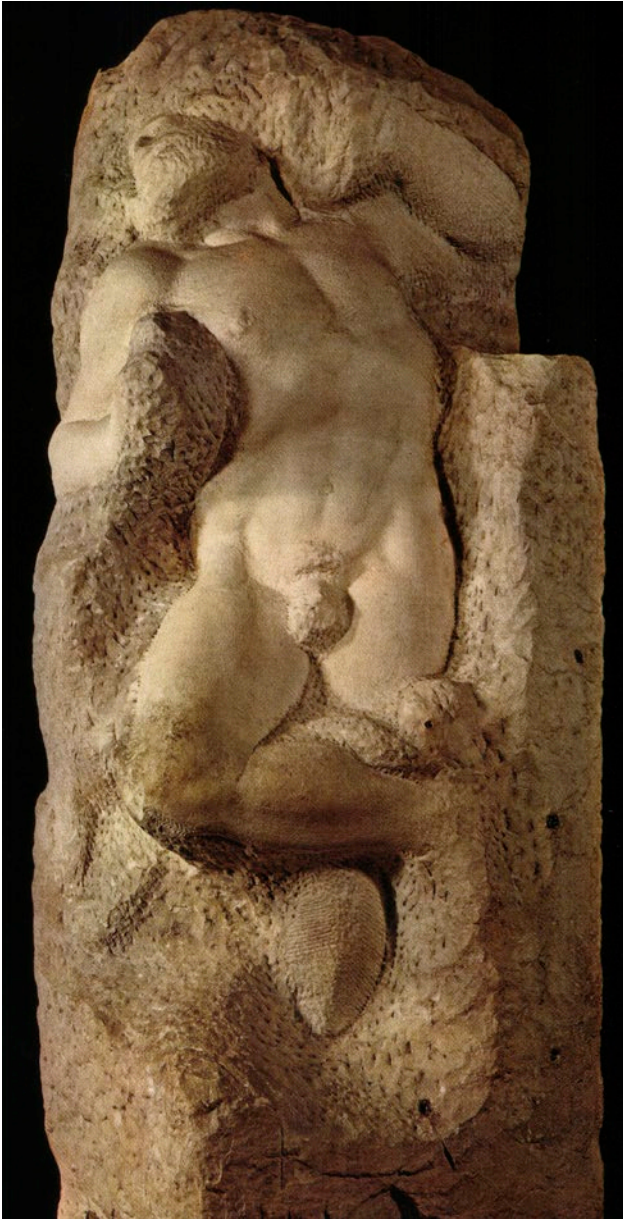


**Figure 3.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Bearded Slave*, c. 1525–1530, marble (263 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

*Atlas Slave* (Figure 5) – are incomplete. Among these *Slaves*, I deal with the last four, which better express, along with the *St Matthew*, the concepts of empathy, embodied simulation, imagination, and imitation learning applied to sculpture.

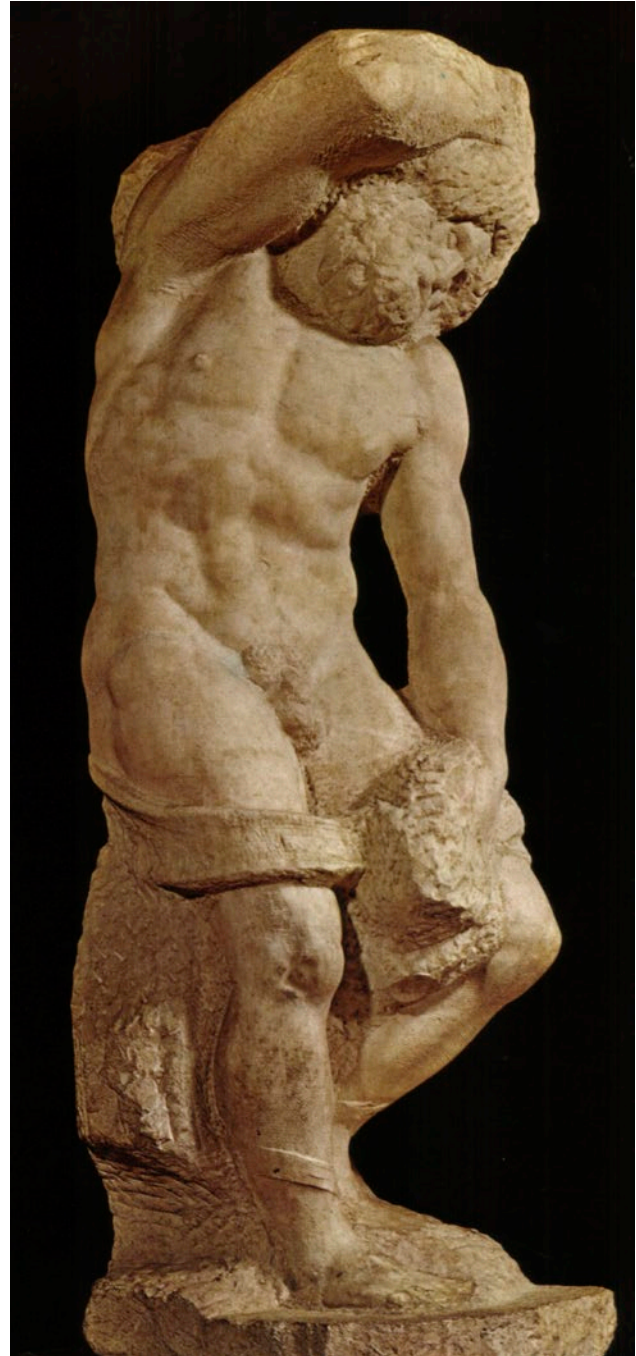
As stipulated in the contract between Michelangelo and the consuls of the Arte della Lana, the





**Figure 4.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Awakening Slave*, c. 1525–1530, marble (267 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

statue of *St Matthew*, which Michelangelo realised in 1506, was part of a group of twelve sculptures, as the number of the Apostles, to be placed in the Florentine Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (Buonarroti [2005]: 18-21). However, as a consequence of his acceptance to realise the tomb for Pope Julius II – as Michelangelo himself stated in a letter dated December 1523 to Giovan Francesco



**Figure 5.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Atlas Slave*, c. 1525–1530, marble (277 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

Fattucci (Buonarroti [1973]: III, 7) – he carved only this unfinished piece. As a result of this new commission, on 18 December 1505, the contract for the *St Matthew* was cancelled (Pope-Hennessy [1963]: catalogue, 12).

Describing the *St Matthew*, Vasari adopted the adjective «sketched» to refer to its unfinished state, stating that «sketched in this manner, it shows its perfection and teaches sculptors in what way figures can be carved out of marble without their coming out misshapen, always improving the figure by removing the marble judiciously and being able to change something, if there were any need»<sup>7</sup>. In this statement is condensed the idea according to which the unfinished allows the observer – in particular, the beginner sculptor – to acquire knowledge about the process and method undertaken by the artist in making the work and, consequently, to learn how to carve stones properly. In this respect, it is worth investigating how the problem concerning image-making and the perception of unfinished works of art are related<sup>8</sup>.

The group of *Slaves*, dated c. 1520–1530, shows many similarities to the sculpture of *St Matthew* previously mentioned. There are some clues that suggest they were part of the project for the tomb of Pope Julius II, dated 1505–1545, as a drawing that represents six well-defined figures seems to hint (Zöllner et al. [2007]: 491). The resizing of the monument – for which Michelangelo realised six projects – decided by the Pope himself, would have forced Michelangelo to exclude the *Slaves* and *Victories* in the final version of the tomb, probably both initially conceived for the ground level<sup>9</sup>.

These sculptures share a similar appearance: all present a rough surface as a result of the hits made by the artist with different types of chisels in



**Figure 6.** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Awakening Slave*, detail, c. 1525–1530, marble (267 cm), Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Image in Public Domain)

the act of shaping the figures. This aspect becomes clearer if we focus on a specific detail. Considering the bottom part of the *Awakening Slave* (Figure 6), for example, we notice that, at the centre, there are two rows of parallel lines, executed with a type of small chisel, which define the lower part of the figure's left leg; around it is a series of strokes, irregularly arranged, which suggest other forms, probably executed with a larger chisel; finally, the right leg is surrounded by small holes, likely made with a hand drill. The object of investigation of this study is exactly this sort of appearance, which is the consequence of the abandonment of works of art in mid-creation by the artist.

These sculptures not only share the same type of rough surface but also a similar level of unfinishedness: some parts of the figures' bodies are inside the stone, others are emerged but only sketched out, and still others are clearly visible and well detailed but with their surface rough. Because of their appearance, Vasari identifies a particular purpose for the unfinished *Slaves* when he states, «four Prisons sketched out, that can teach one how to carve figures out of marbles with a secure manner so not to ruin the stones»<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Vasari (1966: VI, 110): «quattro Prigioni bozzati, che possono insegnare a cavare de' marmi le figure con un modo sicuro da non istorpiare i sassi».

<sup>7</sup> Vasari (1966: VI, 22): «la quale statua così abbozzata mostra la sua perfezzione et insegna agli scultori in che maniera si cavano le figure de' marmi senza che venghino storpiate, per potere sempre guadagnare col giudizio levando del marmo et avervi da potersi ritrarre e mutare qualcosa, come accade se bisognassi». Unless noted otherwise, subsequent translations are my own.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the unfinished as a phenomenon that allows the viewer to see the method undertaken by the artist in creating the work of art, see Carabell (1997); and Bambach (2016).

<sup>9</sup> For Michelangelo's tomb of Pope Julius II, see Condivi (1553: 22-26); and Vasari (1966: VI, 26-30).

Vasari, therefore, in repeating what he says about the *St Matthew*, attributes a pedagogical potential to these sculptures, as they provide instructions to the observer on how to properly deal with marble. However, it is worth clarifying that this potential can be seen as a consequence of the unfinished state and not as the aim of the artist<sup>11</sup>.

We have seen that, for Vasari, it is important for a beginner sculptor to learn from Michelangelo's unfinished works because he adopted the best way to sculpt marble. In fact, his method gave the artist the possibility of applying modifications during the work in progress without damaging the block. At this point, a question arises: what did Michelangelo's method of image-making consist of? To answer this question, we first need to consider the concept of sculpture that Michelangelo had in mind. We find an important indication of Michelangelo's definition of sculpture in a letter that he wrote in 1547 to Benedetto Varchi: «For sculpture I mean what one does by force of taking away»<sup>12</sup>. As it is evident, Michelangelo did not intend sculpture as a process of addition, as it is in the case of clay, for instance. Quite the opposite, he meant sculpture as a process of subtraction. He expands this concept in one of his sonnets, in which he states, «not even the best of artists has any conception that a single marble block does not contain within its excess, and that is only attained by the hand that obeys the intellect»<sup>13</sup>. Michelangelo, in this passage, clearly expresses the idea that the image to be carved is already present inside the block of marble but is covered by the

superfluous. It is the task of the artist to remove the matter in excess and free the image.

Michelangelo's method of carving was celebrated by many of his contemporaries, Vasari being one of them. In another passage, addressed to beginner sculptors, he praises Michelangelo's method of carving, explaining how it works:

*You take a figure in wax or some other solid material, and lay it horizontally in a vessel of water, which water being by its nature flat and level at the surface, as you raise the said figure little by little from the level, so it comes about that the more salient parts are revealed, while the lower parts those, namely, on the under side of the figure remain hidden, until in the end it all comes into view. In the same manner must figures be carved out of marble with the chisel, first laying bare the more salient parts, and then little by little the lower parts; and this method may be seen to have been followed by Michelangelo in the above-mentioned Slaves*<sup>14</sup>.

Vasari here, using a metaphor, gives instructions about how to correctly create a sculpture. Basing his explanation on Michelangelo's unfinished *Slaves*, he states that the sculptor should start carving from the surface of the block of marble toward the depth. The result is that the first forms to emerge are almost finished, whereas the recessive parts are roughly sketched out or remain entirely embedded in the stone.

The method adopted by Michelangelo in sculpture, evident in his unfinished output, seems to have been very different from that practiced by

<sup>11</sup> Zeki's (1999: 51; 2002: 68) argument that Michelangelo left most of his artworks voluntarily unfinished, specifically to express philosophical concepts, must therefore be rejected. In addition, Gilbert's (2003) historical reconstruction contradicts Zeki's assumption. For a detailed review of the literature on the possible reasons why Michelangelo left the majority of his works unfinished, see Schulz (1975).

<sup>12</sup> Buonarroti (1973: IV, 266): «io intendo scultura quella che si fa per forza di levare».

<sup>13</sup> Buonarroti (1991: 302): «Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto, ch' un marmo solo in sé non circoscriva col suo superchio; e solo a quello arriva la man che ubbidisce all'intelletto». Translated in *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Vasari (1966: VI, 110): «che se e' si pigliassi una figura di cera o d'altra materia dura, e si mettessi a diacere in una conca d'acqua, la quale acqua essendo per sua natura nella sua sommità piana e pari, alzando la detta figura a poco a poco del pari, così vengono a scoprirsi prima le parti più rilevate et a nascondersi i fondi, cioè le parti più basse della figura, tanto che nel fine ella così viene scoperta tutta. Nel medesimo modo si debbono cavare con lo scarpello le figure de' marmi, prima scoprendo le parti più rilevate, e di mano in mano le più basse, il quale modo si vede osservato da Michelagnolo ne' sopra detti prigionieri». Translation adapted from Vasari (1912–1915: IX, 106–107).



the majority of the artists of the time. As we know from Benvenuto Cellini – who recorded and recommended Michelangelo’s method in chapter six of his treatise *On Sculpture* (1568) – generally, artists worked from all sides at the same time to carve a block of marble, bringing out the whole figure at once. On the contrary, Michelangelo’s method consisted of completing one side at a time:

*When you are satisfied with your model you draw the principal views of your statue on to the stone, and mind it be well drawn, for if not you may miscut your block. The best method I ever saw was the one that Michelangelo used; when you have drawn on your principal view you begin to chisel it round as if you wanted to work a half relief, and thus gradually it comes to be cut out<sup>15</sup>.*

The method that Cellini describes in this passage is also evident in the statue of *St Matthew*, which was carved from the front of the block towards the back:

*I must not omit to say for the guidance of those who are unskilled in working marble, that they may strike boldly in with their subbia; for the more delicate subbia, provided it be not inserted straight into the stone, does not crack the marble, but just chips off as lightly as possible whatever may be necessary; while with the scarpello a tacca the rough edges may then be brought to an even plane, and you go over the work with it just as if you were making a drawing for the surface. And this truly is the right method, and the one which the great Michelangelo employed. Some have tried other ways, and thinking to have their work done quicker have sought to get their figure out by taking*

<sup>15</sup> Cellini (1971: 789): «E da poi che uno si sia satisfatto nel sopradetto modello, si debbe pigliare il carbone e disegnare la veduta principale della sua statua di sorte che la sia ben disegnata; perché chi non si risolvessi bene al disegno, talvolta si potria trovare ingannato da’ ferri. E il miglior modo che si sia mai visto è quello che ha usato il gran Michelagnolo: il qual modo si è, di poi che uno ha disegnato la veduta principale, si debba per quella banda cominciare a scoprire con la virtù de’ ferri come se uno volessi fare una figura di mezzo rilievo, e così a poco a poco si viene scoprendo». Translated in Cellini (1967: 136).

*a bit off first in one place and then in another, but it took them all the longer in the end, and wasn’t near so good<sup>16</sup>.*

As these written records make clear, the unfinished works of art allow the beholder to see the method undertaken by the artist (in this case, Michelangelo) in creating the work of art and, consequently, to understand and learn the proper process of image-making. Because the figures of these statues are half emerged from the blocks of marble and the signs of the chisels are well visible, the sculptures are perceived incomplete by the observer. I argue that the beholder who perceives works of art as unfinished is led to imagine the process of creation – namely, the gestures of the artist’s hands in the act of carving the block of marble – and to grasp the direction of the working process from the front to the back. In the following sections, I suggest how this may happen in the beholder’s brain-body system, after introducing the phenomenon of empathy, essential for an aesthetic response.

### 3. FROM THE SELF TO THE OTHER: EMPATHY IN AESTHETIC RESPONSE

The form of observation that Vasari and Cellini suggest to beginner sculptors can also occur at a pre-reflective level. Sight, indeed, can provide direct access to the object observed. It is in

<sup>16</sup> Cellini (1971: 790): «Non voglio mancare di non avvertire quelli che non sono pratici al marmo, per quel che la subbia si adopera, confrontando che quanto più si può si vadia in là con essa presso alla fine. Questo si è perché la detta sottilissima subbia non introna il marmo, ché non la ficcando per dritto nella pietra l’uomo spicca dal detto marmo tutto quello che e’ vuole gentilissimamente; e di poi con lo scarpello a una tacca si viene a unire, e con quella si inversa come se proprio uno avessi a disegnare. E questo è il vero modo che ha usato il gran Michelagnolo; perché questi altri che hanno voluto fare altrimenti, come sè dire cominciando a levare ora in un luogo e ora in un altro, ritondando la figura, pensando di far più presto, a questi tali è riuscito il far più tardo e manco bene». Translated in Cellini (1967: 136-137).

this sense that we discuss empathy, mainly a visual phenomenon that can occur when we relate to what we see.

The nineteenth-century German philosophy and art history describe empathy as a consequence of the absorption of the observer in the object observed<sup>17</sup>. In this process of absorption, a decisive role has been assigned to the self, whose distinction with the other would be, during active contemplation, minimised. Wilhelm Worringer (1907: 34), for instance, associated «the concept naturalism with the process of empathy». For Worringer, the observation of naturalistic figures causes a form of loss of self, with consequent absorption of the beholder into the work of art.

Behind Worringer's explanation of the process of empathy are the theories of Arthur Schopenhauer (1818/1819–1844) and Theodor Lipps (1903–1906). For Schopenhauer, «the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself»<sup>18</sup>. In this way, Schopenhauer argues that a beholder involved in a visual contemplation of either a living being or inanimate object loses himself entirely in the contemplated thing. Schopenhauer brings this concept to its extreme consequence by stating that «it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception»<sup>19</sup>. Schopenhauer

<sup>17</sup> For the debate about empathy in the nineteenth-century German philosophical tradition, see Lanzoni (2018: 21–97).

<sup>18</sup> Schopenhauer (1919: I, 246): «ist zugleich der in dieser Anschauung Begriffene nicht mehr Individuum: denn das Individuum hat sich eben in solche Anschauung verloren». Translated in Schopenhauer (1969: I, 179).

<sup>19</sup> Schopenhauer (1919: I, 245–246): «so, daß es ist, als ob der Gegenstand allein da wäre, ohne jemanden, der ihn wahrnimmt, und man also nicht mehr den Anschauenden von der Anschauung trennen kann, sondern Beide Eines geworden sind, indem das ganze Bewußtsein von einem einzigen anschaulichen Bilde gänzlich gefüllt und eingenommen ist». Translated in Schopenhauer (1969: I, 178–179).

penhauer's idea of contemplation was re-elaborated, years later, by Theodor Lipps, who posits that «in empathy, therefore, I am not the real I, but am inwardly liberated from the latter, i.e., I am liberated from everything which I am apart from contemplation of the form. I am only this ideal, this contemplating I»<sup>20</sup>.

However, the distinction between the self and the other in empathy, I argue, remains crucial. Precisely because it is the I that experiences the other, without the I – as stated by Schopenhauer, Lipps and Worringer – there would not be any experience. The loss of self would consequently dissolve the empathic experience. In other words, how can I experience something – in this case, the other – if my I is lost<sup>21</sup>?

After the phenomenological tradition that followed the aforementioned debate, the phenomenon of empathy has recently found new consideration in the fields of cognitive neurosciences, art history and neuroaesthetics with fundamental contributions by Antonio Damasio, Jean Decety, Vittorio Gallese and David Freedberg<sup>22</sup>. At the base of this renewed interest, there is, among other factors, the discovery of mirror neurons, which revolutionised the understanding of empathy, whether in life or art.

In dealing with emotions, Damasio (1994) proposes the “as-if” theory. Based on a neural account, he suggests that, during observation, the beholder feels the same sensation as the subject observed, *as if* (s)he were in the situation contemplated. Gallese's embodied simulation theory goes in a similar direction (Gallese [2005]; Gallese [2011]; Gallese [2017]; Gallese [2018]; Gal-

<sup>20</sup> Lipps (1903–1906: I, 247): «Ich bin also in der Einfühlung nicht dies reale Ich, sondern bin von diesem innerlich losgelöst, d.h. ich bin losgelöst von allem dem, was ich aufser der Betrachtung der Form bin. Ich bin nur dies ideelle, d. h. dies betrachtende Ich». Translated in Worringer (1907: 34).

<sup>21</sup> My argument here seems to find confirmation in neuroscientific research on intersubjectivity (Decety, Somerville [2003]), as shown in the subsequent passages.

<sup>22</sup> For the debate about empathy in the phenomenological tradition, see Zahavi (2010).

lese [2019]). Based on the discovery of mirror neurons, he argues that both the emotions and goal-directed movements observed are inwardly simulated by the beholder, so as to establish an empathic engagement between the self and the other. Decety and colleagues took a slightly different approach. Their work contributed to the study of empathy by showing that imagining one's own action, imagining another's action and imitating an action performed by a model all activate the same areas of the premotor cortex and posterior parietal lobe in the observer as in the observed (Decety et al. (1994); Decety, Grèzes [1999]).

Further empirical evidence indicates that, during external contemplation, the neural network associated with self-recognition overlaps with regions that contain mirror neurons, which, as we have previously seen, provide a link between the self and the other, enabling intersubjectivity and empathy (Decety, Sommerville [2003]; Sugiura et al. [2005]; Uddin et al. [2005]; Platek et al. [2006]). As a consequence, mirror neurons can function as bridges between the self and the other, indicating the pivotal role of the self in empathy.

Finally, Freedberg (2008, 2010, 2011, 2017) applies these empirical results, also in cooperation with Gallese (Freedberg, Gallese [2007]), to the study of the empathic responses to the representations of motions and emotions. In this way, he offers a solid contribution, from the humanities side, to the dialogue between art history and neuroscience.

#### 4. THE TRACE OF THE ARTIST AND THE BEHOLDER'S RESPONSE: IMPLIED ACTIONS, EMBODIED SIMULATION AND IMAGINATION

The phenomenon of empathy can make observation an effective learning activity in numerous contexts, including the observation of unfinished works of art. The neurological implications during the observation of graphic signs, such as those left by a chisel or manual drill, may corroborate this idea, even when the artist is not working on the statue at the time of direct observation. As we will

see, empirical data suggest that in observing certain traces left by an instrument, it is possible to mentally reconstruct the gesture of the hand that produced them through a process of embodied simulation and, I propose, imagination.

Three electroencephalography studies that focus on implied actions perception investigate the connection between the gestures of the artist's hands and the marks produced by those gestures (Umiltà et al. [2012]; Heimann et al. [2013]; Sbriscia-Fioretti et al. [2013]). In doing so, these experiments analyse the observers' brain response to graphic signs, such as letters, ideograms, scribbles, cuts and brushstrokes. The first study suggests that the observation of a letter of the Roman alphabet, Chinese ideogram or meaningless scribble – all handwritten – activates the viewers' motor representation of their hands (Heimann et al. [2013]), which means that an embodied simulation is taking place. A similar motor simulation of the artist's gesture is provoked during the observation of the cuts on canvas by Lucio Fontana (Umiltà et al. [2012]) and the brushstrokes on canvas by Franz Kline (Sbriscia-Fioretti et al. [2013]).

The data of the experiment on the perception of digital images of three abstract paintings by Fontana – showing, respectively, one, two and three cuts on a white canvas – suggest that the observation of the cuts activates the motor system of the beholder's brain, including mirror neurons, and, consequently, an embodied simulation takes place in the viewer – namely, the simulation of the artist's gesture in making those cuts (Figure 7). The gesture of Fontana is therefore (consciously or unconsciously) imagined, or retraced, through the visualization of the cuts, thus confirming the statement of Ugo Mulas, the photographer who immortalised the moment of creation: «Seeing a picture of holes, or a picture of cuts, it is easy to imagine Fontana making the cut with a blade or the holes with an awl»<sup>23</sup>. As the authors of the

<sup>23</sup> Mulas (1973): «Vedendo un quadro di buchi, o un quadro di tagli, è facile immaginare Fontana mentre fa il taglio con una lama o i buchi con un punteruolo».

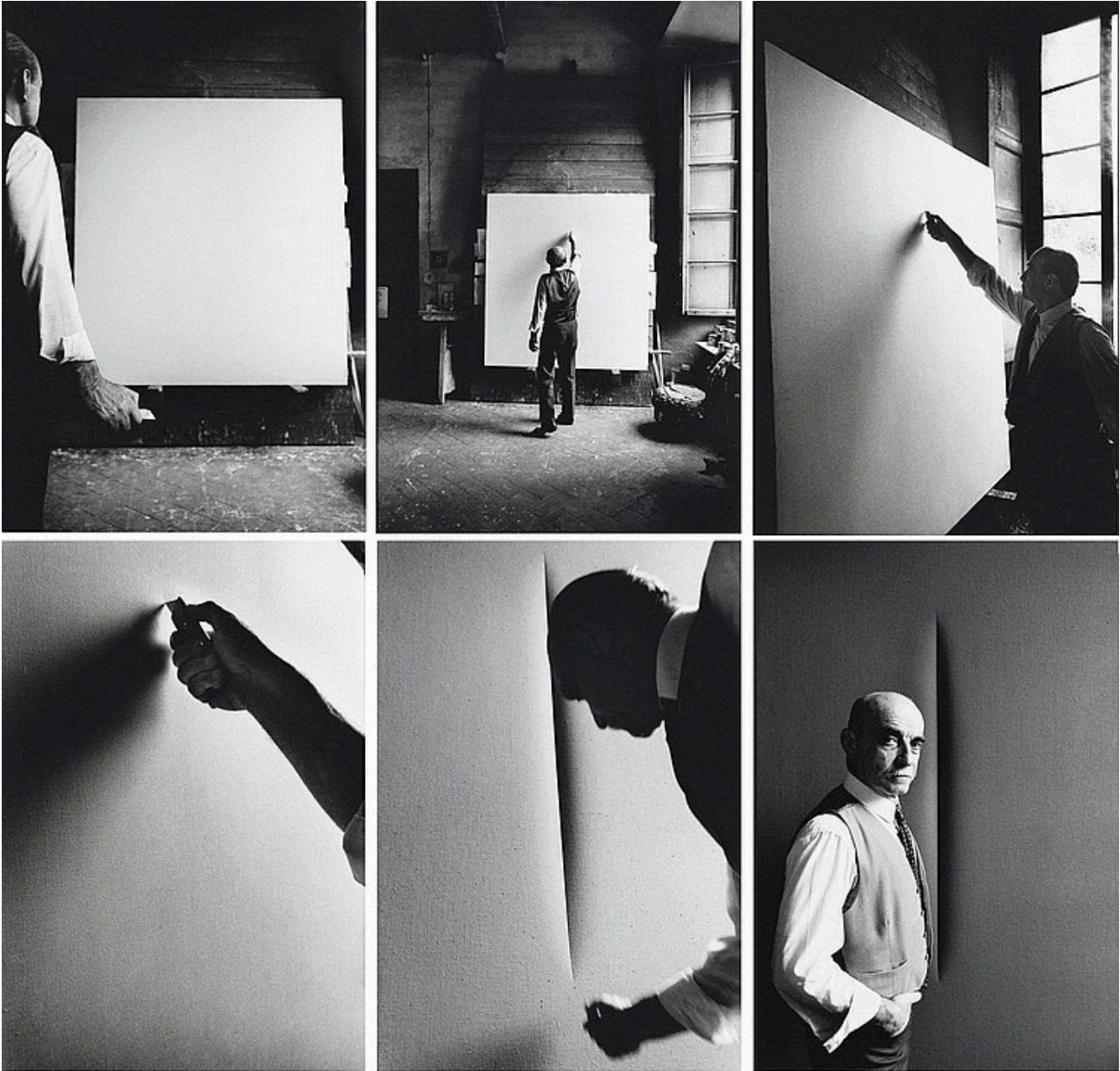


Figure 7. Ugo Mulas, *Lucio Fontana*, 1964. (© Ugo Mulas Estate)

study advance, this embodied simulation of the painter's gesture by the observer can be part of the aesthetic experience, based on the observation of these three works.

The last experiment, which focuses on the perception of digital images of three abstract black and white paintings by Kline – titled, respectively, *Suspended* (1953), *Painting number 2* (1954) and *Painting Number 7* (1952) – confirms the

results of the previous two, that is, to observe an abstract painting – or better, every brushwork of an abstract painting – also means to (consciously or unconsciously) simulate the gestures performed by the painter in creating the signs.

Given the similarities, in terms of dynamism, between the graphic signs investigated in the previously mentioned experiments and the visible traces of the creative gestures on Michelan-

gelo's sculptures, it is likely that the neuroscientific results obtained in those studies can be applied to the kind of unfinished we are examining. Indeed, the signs left by the chisel or manual drill on Michelangelo's sculptures that I have focused on can be inserted in the same category of the signs of the letters of the Roman alphabet, Chinese characters, scribbles, cuts and marked traces of brushstrokes analyzed in those experiments, inasmuch as the latter possess the same dynamic components of the network of crosshatching and the more-or-less regular dots visible on the surface of Michelangelo's statues. Therefore, we can advance the hypothesis that the observation of the signs of the tools in Michelangelo's *St Matthew* and four *Slaves* activates the motor system (including the mirror mechanism) of the viewer's brain, who, as a consequence, is facilitated to retrace – also at an unconscious level – in his or her brain-body system the artist's hands gestures. As a result, the beholder's attention (including an art-trained beholder) would be able to catch the information about the shape, direction and intensity of the hits of the chisels and thereby imitate Michelangelo's artistic method<sup>24</sup>. If my hypothesis is confirmed, the neuroaesthetic approach would validate the pedagogical potential that Vasari and Cellini attribute to Michelangelo's unfinished.

The embodied simulation of the implied movements of the maker, which occurs during the observation of different kinds of graphic signs – including chisel and manual drill marks – reveals, as I have proposed, the imaginative potential of the unfinished. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that the mirror neuron system (the same involved in graphic signs perception) may also contribute to the domain of imagination and that automatic imagination is a crucial mental function for visual perception and social behaviour. We possess the ability to mentally project events

and simulate outcomes, even at an unconscious or pre-reflective level. When we imagine actions done by either ourselves or others – like those executed by an artist in the act of carving a piece of marble, for instance – shared midline and frontoparietal structures are activated (Ruby, Decety [2001]). This has led neuroscientists to believe that imagination is a common domain between the cortical midline structures and mirror neuron system (Uddin et al. [2007]). In this regard, it has been observed that these brain networks might be involved in a number of imaginative processes linked with empathy (Decety, Sommerville [2003]; Ruby, Decety [2004]; Jackson et al. [2005]). Therefore, we can suppose that these inner reactions are the clue to an empathic engagement established between the observer and the unfinished work of art observed. In other words, the attention required for the mental reconstruction of the artist's gestures leads to a process of immersion by the observer in the work contemplated, which would activate mental-body faculties such as embodied simulation and imagination.

##### 5. THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN VISUAL PERCEPTION: A REMARK

In many circumstances, the activity of certain mental processes – such as prediction, mental simulation and imagination – cannot be detached by previously acquired knowledge. A number of studies demonstrate that previous experiences, memories and expertise play an important role in the intensity of activation of mirror mechanisms and the ensuing perceptual contents<sup>25</sup>. It follows that those who already possess some artistic skills – or generically understand the process of art creation – are potentially more advantaged than those who do not in learning new abilities through simple observation.

Consequently, the beholder's memory of a sculptor in the act of carving a block of marble,

<sup>24</sup> It is worth clarifying that knowing how to imitate a method does not mean being able to reproduce the style of the work in question. In other words, succeeding in approaching the block of marble as Michelangelo did does not necessarily follow that one can automatically contribute to sculpture as Michelangelo did.

<sup>25</sup> On the role of memory and experience in mirror neurons activity, see Gallese (2014); Ammaniti, Gallese (2014); Gallese (2016).



for instance, can be a determinant for imagining, or simulating in the embodied mind, those specific actions that were executed to produce those signs. The artistic skills possessed by a beholder, if any, may play a further role in this sense. In this case, (s)he will be more facilitated in improving his or her artistic competences while observing an incomplete work of art realised by a great master, as Vasari and Cellini advise.

## 6. OBSERVATION AND THE BIOLOGICAL BASES OF IMITATION LEARNING

«Observation is always for a purpose» (Gombrich [1960]: 103). With these words, Gombrich sought to draw attention to the importance of observation in the visual arts, both of the artist and the beholder. In this regard, he coined the concept of ‘the beholder’s share’, referring to the psychological mechanism underlying image observation. Also Pliny, in the *Natural History*, recognised the pivotal role of mind during observation: «it is the mind that is the real instrument of sight and of observation; the eyes act as a sort of vessel receiving and transmitting the visible portion of the consciousness» (XI.LIV.146)<sup>26</sup>.

We can advance that one of the purposes of observation is learning. Learning by keen observation (or by imitation through observation) has long been acknowledged as an important aspect of human learning strategy. As we will see, neuroscientific studies on the mirror neuron system show the existence of neural bases of learning by observation and imitation. Furthermore, it seems that this way of acquiring knowledge is very effective and efficient.

As previously mentioned, neuroscientific findings suggest that mirror neurons play a crucial role in observation, particularly during the observation of goal-directed actions, allowing observers to understand the actions of others or even their own

<sup>26</sup> Pliny (1938: III, 522): «animo autem videmus, animo cernimus; oculi ceu vasa quaedam visibilem eius partem accipiunt atque tramittunt». Translated in *ibid.*, 523.

actions<sup>27</sup>. The fact that mirror neurons are activated during both action execution and action observation hints that they also play an important role during the imitation of the actions observed (Rizzolatti [2005]). Empirical evidence suggests that during imitation three cortical areas are involved, that is, the superior temporal sulcus and the two frontoparietal mirror neuron areas (Iacoboni et al. [2001]). This study finds confirmation in Molnar-Szakacs et al. (2005), whose experiment focuses on hand action observation and imitation. The data collected in this study show an activation of mirror neurons during both the observation and imitation of the action. Furthermore, a study conducted by Calvo-Merlino and colleagues (2005), on the role of expertise and motor repertoire of the beholder in action observation, suggests that mirror neurons integrate the «observed actions of others with an individual’s personal motor repertoire»<sup>28</sup>.

These studies indicate that observers are able to imitate the actions that they already know, but what happens when a beholder observes a novel action that does not belong to his or her motor repertoire, which is, after all, the essential precondition for an imitation learning process? This question has been addressed by Buccino and colleagues (2004). In their study, musically naive volunteers were monitored during both the observation of guitar chords (novel for them) and execution of the observed chords. In both cases, an activation of the frontoparietal mirror neuron system was registered<sup>29</sup>. The fact that they succeeded in correctly reproducing the guitar chords observed means that participants were able to learn novel hand actions by simply observing a model. The peculiarity of mirror neurons to

<sup>27</sup> Rizzolatti and colleagues introduced the concept of ‘action understanding’ to explain the function of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti, Fadiga [1998]; Rizzolatti et al. [1996]).

<sup>28</sup> On the role of knowledge and expertise in visual perception, see also Calvo-Merlino et al. (2006); and De Prester, Tsakiris (2014).

<sup>29</sup> They also observed that, in the case of imitation and learning of novel hand actions, other neural areas, including area 46, are involved.

enable the beholder to imitate the actions of others, the authors advance, can facilitate learning. This explains why, for instance, children are able to acquire a new action by simple observation (Shimpi et al. [2013]).

Going back to Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures, these neuroscientific findings might confirm, at least in part, Vasari's and Cellini's statements on the pedagogical function of the unfinished. As we have seen, the unfinished often includes important information about the process and method undertaken by the maker, as well as the tools used. Indeed, the signs on the block of marble enable the observer to recognise the different kinds of chisels and drills used by the artist.<sup>30</sup> This characteristic of the unfinished – that is, to reveal the underlying layout of the sculpture through the marks left by the work tools – is likely to activate specific neurological functions similar to the ones activated during imitation learning. At this point, the beholder's imagination of the hands of the artist in the act of carving the sculpture may function as model to imitate and, therefore, establish an imitation learning process. In other words, observing an artist in the act of carving a block of marble or imagining an artist performing the same action both would activate the same brain networks – although, in imagination, the intensity of the activation of the brain networks would be lower than when we see the actual action. That means that, I posit, imitation learning is taking place in both situations.

However, some clarifications need to be made. That is, in this precise case, with reference to Wittgenstein (1953: 265), the task is not so much to imagine *the precise gesture* that Michelangelo executed, rather to imagine *a gesture* similar to the one that Michelangelo may have performed, a gesture that one may already have in his or her own memory. In other words, there is not, in Wittgen-

<sup>30</sup> In this respect, scholars are able to recognise the various tools used by the maker by observing the different kinds of traces left on the block of marble, thus enabling an understanding of the process of image-making. See Wootton et al., (accessed 9 May 2020); and Russell (2011).

steinian terms, a *correct gesture* to be imagined to imitate Michelangelo's method (not the style). What counts here is to understand (and possibly imitate) the directions and passages of his sculpting process, and this can be achieved by observing his unfinished output<sup>31</sup>.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

By exploring an aspect of Michelangelo's unfinished, this article has shed light on the potentials of unfinished works of art that present a rough surface, that is, empathy, imagination and imitation learning. In its history, the unfinished has been mainly associated with a particular specificity, that is, the possibility to learn from skilled masters how to properly create works of art. This would be possible by the opportunity to see, through the unfinished, the various passages of art creation – for example, the underdrawing, the *pentimenti* and the intensity and direction of brushstrokes or chisel strokes. The pedagogical potential ascribed to the unfinished by Vasari and Cellini, we have ascertained, can be explained from a neuroscientific perspective, considering primarily the research on mirror neurons.

<sup>31</sup> See Wittgenstein (1953: 265): «Let us imagine a table, something like a dictionary, that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X by a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is to be looked up only in the imagination? – “Well, yes; then it is a subjective justification”. – But justification consists in appealing to an independent authority – “But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don't know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train correctly, and to check it I call to mind how a page of the timetable looked. Isn't this the same sort of case?” – No; for this procedure must now actually call forth the correct memory. If the mental image of the timetable could not itself be tested for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of today's morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true). Looking up a table in the imagination is no more looking up a table than the image of the result of an imagined experiment is the result of an experiment».

In this way, the neuroaesthetic approach allows us not only to illustrate how the unfinished as a rough surface can be perceived by beholders but also to offer, through the concept of imitation learning, a new interpretation of Vasari's and Cellini's passages on Michelangelo's unfinished. In doing so, this study applied for the first time the concept of imitation learning to the embodied simulation of the artist's gestures imagined by beholders of unfinished works of art. Furthermore, it established that, observing the unfinished, we can feel the artwork in ourselves in a particular way, that is, by retracing the dynamic morphology of the chisel strokes in our brain-body system.

Neuroscientific evidence suggests that the mirror neuron system plays a crucial role in a number of functions, including (i) the understanding of the actions performed by others, (ii) the ability to learn by observing and imitating others, (iii) the embodied simulation process, (iv) imagination and (v) empathy – all of which I have considered crucial for the study of the neurological responses to rough surfaces in visual works of art. As we have seen, neuroscientific findings on mirror neurons suggest that the observation of a graphic sign – such as a chisel stroke – leads to an automatic simulation in the embodied mind of the gesture that has produced it. In this type of visual perception, imagination may play an important role because it can allow the beholder to have an understanding of the gestures – and therefore of the creative process – that the artist performed on the block of marble. In this regard, imagination seems to be linked to the concept of imitation learning. Indeed, the imagined actions can function as a model to imitate, enabling the beholder to understand the artist's method of image-making.

To conclude, this essay also proposed that immersion in aesthetic response can occur in at least two different cases: (i) it can be the consequence of the inner simulation of the motions and emotions represented in the figures observed, and this would explain the motor and emotional responses to the work contemplated (as it is demonstrated by previous studies), or (ii) it can be the

result of the simulation of the process of making, and this would explain the pedagogical function of the unfinished and the imaginative response to visual works of art.

Future studies in this field should investigate the neuroaesthetic responses to unfinished works of art with empty spaces, such as the representation of human bodies with missing faces, thus considering the empirical literature on the fusiform face area and neural filling-in.

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**Citation:** A.C. Dalmaso (2020) Things That Matter. Agency and Performativity. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 155-168. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-10704

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Things That Matter. Agency and Performativity

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**Abstract.** In contemporary human and social sciences, it has become almost a commonplace to attribute to objects and artefacts the features of personhood and subjectivity. In the last decades, significant attempts have been made, in different disciplines, to show how things and material realities have the power to act upon the world and to transform human cognition as well as social processes. In order to describe the transformative power of things, scholars have then recurred to the semantic sphere of action and will, to stop seeing agency anthropocentrically as a solely human property, by recognizing to inanimate entities, if not intention and desire, at least the role of social «agents» or «actors». By focusing on the recourse to the notion of «agency», I will single out some of the internal tensions that still inhabit this scientific trend, and, by drawing on the notion of «performativity», introduced by J.L. Austin and developed by Judith Butler, I will suggest a way to develop further the entanglement between material culture and the construction of identity.

**Keywords.** Agency, performativity, animism, anti-anthropocentrism, Judith Butler.

### 1. WHAT THINGS DO (TO US)

In contemporary anthropology and more in general in human and social sciences, it has become almost a commonplace to attribute to objects and artefacts the characteristics of personhood and subjectivity. After all, it is not just in ancestral beliefs and apotropaic rituals that things are addressed as being inhabited by invisible spirits, even in our contemporary technologized culture, we often find ourselves acting and relating to objects – especially props and devices we rely on – as though they were animated. Interrelated to our cultural and social structure, things cannot be understood merely as commodities, as properties of the person, or, as instruments of social exchange, they also mediate social agency and have themselves a social life (Appadurai [1986]). Inanimate objects appear to be endowed with a life of their own, to have a certain ability to act, or, at least, a «secondary agency» (Gell [1992], [1998]). In the last decades, many scholars have insisted on how, in different cultures, things can be perceived as living and animated beings (Severi



[2017]), on the power of human artefacts not just to reflect, but to influence and even engender anthropological and epistemological processes (Freedberg [1989]; Gell [1998]; Elkins [1996]; Malafouris, Renfrew [2010]; Coolidge, Wynn [2016]), and on how non-humans in general can act and participate in the construction of social systems (Latour, Woolgar [1986]; Latour [1991], [1993], [2005]).

Significant attempts have been made to show the entanglement between symbolic cultural practices and materiality, and to demonstrate how objects, technological artefacts and more in general material entities, should never be considered as passive and determinate products of a culture, since they exist only in relation to the intermingling of bodies and society that make them possible and, that, at the same time, they make possible. Things – and especially that particular classes of things that are artworks and technological artefacts – have the power to act upon the world and to transform human cognition, ultimately affecting *who we are* and playing a fundamental role in *how we become ourselves*.

Such an understanding of the assemblages of elements and people, in a transcultural perspective, radically puts into question the way Western thought conceived its own culture and beliefs, its uniqueness and specificity, the way of approaching alterity and subjectivity, or, to put it in a nutshell, describing the fundamental overlapping of nature and culture that characterises the fact of being human.

This scientific trend in the humanities is part of a broader theoretical trajectory that implies the double attempt of accounting for the interactions between humans and things in an anti-anthropocentric or anti-narcissistic way – although anthropocentrism be justified on the basis of the human being's «impropriety», i.e. by relying upon the absence, finitude and lack of being [*manque-à-être*] of the human (de Castro [2009]: 44) – , and, at the same time, developing further the permanent exercise in the decolonization of thought, major concern in contemporary anthropology and global biopolitics. Thus, the effort of describing

the interactions between humans and things in a non-anthropocentric way is driven by the effort to undermine the ontological partitions of our intellectual tradition, namely the dichotomies that oppose nature and culture, subject and object, and especially «humanity» from the «environment» (Ingold [2000]), in search for a different ontology, one that be able to undo, to decentralise or to redesign such dualisms.

For instance, we could reformulate this claim by taking up Philippe Descola's partition of human ontologies and respective ontographies – in which the French anthropologist distinguishes between four different ways of identifying the entities in the world, and forming relations with them, mainly depending on how humans attribute to beings the characters of «interiority» and «physicality» (animism, naturalism, totemism, analogism) (Descola [2005]: 122). In this perspective, what is at stake in the development of the theoretical pattern hitherto presented is the attempt to overcome the dominant tendency of (Euro-American and ethnocentric) «naturalism», with the ultimate goal of undoing the nature-culture binary opposition.

Such a discussion of material animation and anthropomorphism brings about the idea that non-human entities too can be seen as «actors» (Latour [1993]), for they not just incline human thoughts and desires, but rather «interact» with them and do realise «acts» (Bredenkamp [2007], Manovich [2002]). In order to restore this dimension, for a long time largely neglected as regards inanimate beings, scholars have then recurred to the semantic sphere of action and will. The redefinition of the capacity of things, of their transformative power, has been carried out especially through the notion of «agency» (Freedberg [1989]; Gell [1998]; Ingold [2006]; Severi [2017]), aimed at overcoming too narrow a separation between (active) subjects and (passive) objects, by recognizing to inanimate entities, if not intention and desire, at least the features of social «agents».

Now, if we examine more closely the theoretical trajectory that underpins multifarious contemporary scientific endeavours, in fields as diverse as ethnography and computer science, art his-

tory and cognitive archaeology, it appears to be also hindered by certain inherent risks and flaws. In particular, I shall emphasize two opposite problematic outcomes: on the one hand, the risk that the fact of recognizing to things and inanimate entities transformative powers and even the constitutive features of animation and personhood, may result in an empathic *projection* of human properties and faculties on them, in a sort of «communicating vessels» process occurring between subjects and objects or the environment (see Pinotti [2011]; Griffero [2014]). Letting appear imaginary or metaphorical affordances, this one-way movement would leave the primacy of human subjects unchanged, remaining ultimately attached to an anthropocentric view. On the other hand, speaking of agency of things or inorganic entities would entail the risk of accomplishing a simple *inversion* of the two polarities by turning the relationship between objects and subjects upside-down. Such an approach would change Western anthropocentrism into an animism (or panpsychism), accomplishing a monistic turn only in appearance, and ultimately keeping the dualism intact by simply reversing the terms of the relation.

In this regard, relying on the literature devoted to the point at issue, I shall contend that, instead of preaching the abolition of the borders that separate persons and things «by bending every line of division into an infinitely complex curve», we shall rather focus on «folding and thickening them, diffracting and rendering them iridescent» (de Castro [2009]: 45). In what follows, instead of seeking to erase the contours between the two orders or variations of being – humans and non-humans, animate and inanimate – I will try to formulate a way of thinking of the entanglement between material culture and the construction of identity.

Each of the aforementioned approaches, deriving from and developed within multiple disciplinary areas, should deserve an in-depth analysis, that is beyond the scope of this paper. In order to investigate these questions, I will focus in particular on the recourse to the notion of «agency» – as

referred to things and inanimate entities and not to humans<sup>1</sup> – or to the category of «interactivity», as they are particularly symptomatic of the internal tensions that still inhabits the extremely vast and complex question of how things and inanimate entities can exert power on us by influencing our behaviour, our beliefs and intersubjective relationships, and more radically of how they take part in the construction of our bodily functions, cognitive abilities and consciousness.

I will try developing further and overcoming some of the theoretical challenges raised by the term of *agency* and the constellation of its semantic variations (composed by *actor*, *act*, *interactivity*) by drawing on the notion of *performativity*. After situating this concept, as regards its philosophical history and plural theoretical context, with particular reference to the work of J.L. Austin and to Judith Butler's further elaboration, I will single out some of the most relevant aspects for the point at issue, to argue that the notion of performativity would allow us to tackle some of the problems outlined above, and especially the unsolved dichotomy between activity and passivity.

## 2. ANTI-ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND ANIMISM. THE AGENCY OF THINGS AND MATTER

As I suggested, in contemporary social and human sciences it is possible to assess a vigorous trend that can be described as a propensity to emphasize the capacity of inanimate beings to do things, to act upon the world, triggering social and cultural processes. While it is common sense to agree that agency should be understood as an exclusively human subjective experience, in the last few decades, a consistent body of works geared to challenge the dualism inherent in this conception, and to stop seeing agency anthropocentrically as a solely human property.

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<sup>1</sup> Here I will not take into account the agency-structure dichotomy developed in sociology. For an analytic review of the notion as regards human agency see Emirbayer, Mische [1998].

Such an epistemological shift has also been driven by the necessity to deal with software or robotic agents, and, more recently, with artificial intelligence, raising both ethical and theoretical problems as regards the kind of action and responsibility that can be recognized – socially, philosophically, but also legally – to those entities. Nevertheless, the capacity of acting and incline human actions can be extended, and not just limited to artefacts that are specifically designed to be human-like agents – such as robots – or to embody anthropomorphic features – such as statues, puppets or dolls, for instance.

Both in anthropology and archaeology, but also across multifarious disciplines, including computer science, philosophy, cognitive science, and sociology, agency has become something of a buzzword, even though, at the same time, this notion still lacks of a systematic theorization (see Dobres, Robb [2000]; Knappett, Malafouris [2008]).

The tendency to consider agency as a broader situated process in which material culture is entangled, by opposing a human-centred view, can be traced back in the history of social science, especially starting from the influence of ethnographic explorations, such as Marcel Mauss' seminal study on *The Gift* (1925), that significantly prompted researchers to decentralise Western-oriented anthropological conceptions, by getting in touch with cultures that are characterised by a greater fluidity of the boundaries between persons and things, and their capacity to produce social consequences as well as to embody social agency.

In a way, such theoretical movement can also be connected to Leroi-Gourhan's approach to technics, making no essential distinction between the tool as technical organ and the organ as bodily element. For the author of *Gesture and Speech*, a technical instrument, such as a stone tool, emerges from the sensible matter in the same way as the hand, insofar as they both are a «secretion of the body and the brain» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 132). In so doing, Leroi-Gourhan implicitly establishes a fundamental continuity between the organic and the inorganic, between our living body and its

technical prostheses, inseparable from the development and historical evolution of the living body.

However, it has been primarily in the last two decades that «the idea of decentralised agency has gained momentum across the social sciences» (Knappett, Malafouris [2008]: XI). From the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, archaeology and anthropology witnessed the emergence of a *material cultural turn* (Hicks [2010]), catalysed by works such as Ian Hodder's *Symbols in Action: ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture* (1982), Daniel Miller's *Artefacts as Categories* (1985) and *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987). Combining ethnoarchaeology<sup>2</sup> with structuralist approaches to the interpretation of symbols and categories, these works laid the foundations for the vast and interdisciplinary field of *material culture studies*<sup>3</sup>. Rather than simply reflecting cultures as passive by-products of social life, objects were considered in their social implications, in that they are actively and meaningfully used in and, thus, able to mediate social relations and embody social symbolism, an approach that had been later extended in an archaeological approach to present phenomena, extending anthropological ideas into the modern world and especially the culture of consumption.

Taking on this interdisciplinary trend, different studies have called for a new focusing upon things, placing the objects in the centre of culture theory and implying a movement of extension or distribution of human social agency. In this regard, particular attention must be drawn to the great influence of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Callon [1986]; Law [1987]; Latour [1994], [2005]). Conceptualizing agency as variously distributed and possessed in relational networks of persons and things, ANT approach posits a symmetrical participation of human and non-human agents, without accepting any primacy of human

<sup>2</sup> That is, the comparative archaeological study of contemporary human societies to inform the archaeological explanation of the past.

<sup>3</sup> See also the *Journal of Material Culture* (UCL), founded in 1996.

actors – individual or collective – over non-human actors, as they equally are the products or effects of networks. For an entity to be an «actor» in this sense it is not required to have intentions nor mental states, but to be able to perform actions as a kind of behaviour. Therefore, in this perspective, no distinctions between human and non-human entities can be sustained in terms of agency.

Developed further within different methodological approaches, the notion of «agency» has been predominantly informed by Alfred Gell's 1998 *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, largely influenced by ANT, although the British anthropologist does not directly refer to Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's work (Callon [1986]; Latour [1987]). In his posthumously published volume, Gell shows how art objects embody complex intentionalities and can play an extensive role in shaping social agency: an artwork can be seen not just as a locus of agency, and a means through which the agency of others may affect the subject, but it is also the locus of an «'autonomous' agency of its own» (Gell [1998]: 18). Yet, concerned about clarifying his position as regards the intentional nature of agency, Gell establishes a distinction between «primary» agents, that is, «intentional beings who are categorically distinguished from "mere" things or artefacts», and «secondary» agents, «through which primary agents distribute their agency in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective» (Gell [1998]: 20). Despite this classification, the agency attributed to inanimate beings shall not be understood metaphorically as a manner of speaking<sup>4</sup>: what Gell hints at is the possibility to think of agency as «relational and context-dependent» (Gell [1998]: 22), namely the result of a broader interaction of subjects and things, as both an extension of the agency of the subjects and as «embodiment

of the *power or capacity to will their use*» (Gell [1998]: 23). But, unlike ANT, Gell's argument did not aim to extend agency to non-humans, and, instead, retained humans as the proper object of enquiry for anthropology, suggesting that objects could be deployed by social actors as «indexes» of human agency, his perspective remaining ultimately anthropocentric. As I indicated above, despite defining things as «social agents», such an approach risks to reduce the account of the animation of things to a mere *projection* of human properties and faculties on them, without completely accomplishing an ontological turn.

Since then, in the wake of these seminal works and ground-breaking theories, many disciplines have embraced a similar turn, or have developed parallel contributions that can be attributed to the same theoretical trajectory, that has been variously described as a materialist, animist, object or «thingly» turn (Verbeek [2005]).

Some prominent fields in cognitive science and philosophy have sought to outline a new model in the conception of self, and to redefine the boundaries of the mind, not only by seeing cognition as an embodied and socially embedded process, but also including the role of the material world for the development of consciousness, so establishing a more loose distinction between the individual and the environment, that entails novel ways to understand the agency of artefacts (Hutchins [1995]; Kirsh [1995]; Clark [1997]; Norman [1988]).

In particular, the theory of the *extended mind*, opposing at the same time the classic internalist model of consciousness – according to which cognitive contents depend solely on the individual's intrinsic properties – and a pure externalist conception – considering that contents of mental states are conditioned also by external and historical elements, in relation to which consciousness is passive – , proposes to think of objects and artefacts in the environment as being themselves integral parts of consciousness – thus supporting a form of *active externalism* (Clark [1997], [1999], [2001], [2003]). Discussing the idea of a primacy of the brain over the extended body, in the mate-

<sup>4</sup> «In speaking of artefacts as "secondary agents" I am referring to the fact that the origination and manifestation of agency takes place in a milieu which consists (in large part) of artefacts, and that agents, thus, 'are' and do not merely 'use' the artefacts that connect them to social others», Gell [1998]: 21.

rial mechanisms of cognition, the *extended mind* approach argues that the environment can drive and also partially constitute cognitive processes (see also Clark and Chalmers [1998]; see also Noë, [2004], [2006]). Then, cognitive processes must be understood as including not only the human body, but also objects and human artefacts, which count as «external vehicles» of cognition, that is, «a part of the world [that] functions as a process which, were it done in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process» (Clark and Chalmers [1998]: 8).

Other approaches, mainly grounded and revolving around the field of British anthropology and archaeology, stems from the same scientific material-oriented attitude, and aim to investigate the symbolic power of objects and their impact on human social relations. This view underlies, for instance, *material engagement theory* (Malafouris, Renfrew [2010]; Malafouris [2013]; Parisi [2019]), that carries out an exploration of the relationship between humans and the material world, by focusing upon the use and the status of material objects, in an attempt to join the physical and conceptual aspects of materiality. This approach suggests to conceive «material agency» not just as an alternative to human agency, but to think of it as a relational situated process, also emphasizing the role of archaeology in raising a «wake-up call» for social scientists to consider agency non-anthropocentrically (Knappett, Malafouris [2008]: XII).

A somehow parallel movement underpinned the recent developments in the domain of picture theory and visual culture studies, concerned by a radical epistemological turn – the so-called *iconic* (*ikonische Wende*, Boehm [1994]) or *pictorial turn* (Mitchell [1992], [1995], Burda, Maar [2004]; Paic, Purgar [2016]) – inaugurated, both in the Anglo-Saxon and in the European context, by scholars who sought to reverse the linguistic paradigm that dominated the study of art and more in general of iconic contents, to lay the foundations for an intrinsic and autonomous logic inherent in images. In this context, it took shape and spread the idea that images not only have an impact on the beholder who observes them, but that they

are able to transform them (triggering love, hate, desire or fear) and to act upon the world. In different ways, scholars have sought to highlight the capacity of images to move and to influence human reactions (Elkins [2005]), but also to *stare back* at us (Elkins [1996]; Didi-Huberman [1999]; Boehm [1994]), to perform *acts* (Bredenkamp [2007]), and, thus, tried to outline the specific traits of the agency of images: their *powers* (Freedberg [1989]; Bakewell [1998]; Griffero, Di Monte [2008]), their peculiar modes of *presence* (Gumbrecht [2003]; Van Eck [2015]), and even their *desires* (Mitchell [2006]). Contributions in different fields of image studies have, then, come to share the same effort, affirming the need to no longer classify images as exclusively visual objects of an anthropocentric and subject-centered vision (Sobchack [1991]), but to see them as living beings, «marked with all the stigmata of personhood» and intentionality (Mitchell [1996]: 72).

As Arjun Appadurai argued, in his influential edited collection, the very idea of a social life of things – but also the idea of a «desire» of pictures and that of a «material agency» – requires a degree of «methodological fetishism», or, shall we say «animism» (Perniola [2004]; Harvey [2013]), for «even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with meaning, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context» (Appadurai [1986]: 5).

The different approaches surveyed above – that could be extended to other scientific fields and domains – converge in the attempt to shed light on the intertwined nature of human and material life and to question the a priori distinction between human and non-human actors, between humans and objects or things<sup>5</sup>. Returning our attention to the things themselves by illuminating the concrete, historical circulation of things, all those endeavours have taken on and reformulated the idea of an agency of things, but they have seldom developed systematic analysis of this notion,

<sup>5</sup> About the distinction between objects and things see Ingold [2013].

being more concerned with understanding agency as a situated process rather than debating what is agency and what or who is an agent.

Now, we can first notice that, by encompassing manifold scientific domains, the notion of agency has come to cover a very broad spectrum, ranging from the capacity to influence human social agency, to affect the construction of social systems, on to shaping human consciousness and identity, as well as informing the structure of the brain. To circumscribe our analysis from a philosophical point of view, developing it beyond the specific goals with which the disciplines mentioned above are concerned, we can wonder whether this concept – which has the merit of having called the attention on the necessity to deconstruct a certain anthropocentrism and to set up a decolonization of thought – , actually succeeds in moving away from the dualism it aims to overcome (subjects/objects, nature/culture, activity/passivity, etc.), a risk that I evoked at the beginning of this article, hinting at the possibility of accomplishing a simple projection of human agency over the matter. At the same time, another question arises: is the notion of agency effective in order to bridge over causalist way of thinking, or does it risk to restore a new form of determinism, ending up in a simple inversion of the roles, through the attribution of Durkheimian conception of social agency to objects and inanimate entities? In the perspective of social ontology, this would produce a mere shift from the classic opposition between human agency and social structure to the opposition between human agency and material agency.

Thus far, the concept of agency, as referred to things and inanimate entities, has been contested mainly on the basis of an anthropocentric perspective, to the extent that agency, in the proper sense of the word, is a property of human beings: being coterminous with intentionality, agency has been understood as an attribute of the human individuals, «the only true agents in history» (Giddens and Pierson [1998]: 89). But, for the same and opposite reasons, the notion of agency poses problems also in the attempt to show the permeability of boundaries between humans and

non-humans and to demonstrate how subjects and objects are emergent. In fact, it inherits contradictions and tensions of classical sociological agency-structure dichotomy – which distinguishes subjects who act from the structure in which that action plays itself out – , that sociology has repeatedly tried to mitigate (see Giddens [1984]), moving away from axiological or ontological hierarchical oppositions.

Even from an etymological point of view, the term «agency» from the Latin «àgere», «to do», «to act», essentially linked to the paradigm of action, still implies the reference to the binary opposition between passivity and activity. Hence, the use of this notion, coming from the root *ag-*, connected to the idea of «moving», does not completely solve, but ends up simply postponing the problem of establishing a prime mover of the action, by displacing it, as I suggested above, from the subject to the object, by reversing the opposite attributes of active and passive, which still entails the understanding of the implied notions of nature and culture as a polarity. As a result, the validity of this materialist anti-anthropocentric approach is jeopardized in some respects by a problematic tendency to determinism, that prevents it from successfully developing a non-hierarchical relation between human and non-human entities.

To account for the emergence of world as assemblage of human beings and things, of meaning and matter, we shall illuminate, at the same time, how things act upon the world and how we enact knowledge. As Dan Hicks argues – referring to the disciplinary specific stakes of anthropology and archaeology – to show that things are not just expression or reflection of meaning, but rather production of meaning and action, we should be able to think of things *both as events and effects*. Inspired especially by current thinking in historical archaeology, Hicks suggests, on the one hand, to pay equal attention to the unexpected, apparently non-coherent but far from insignificant changes of which life histories of things at any scale consist of, and, on the other hand, to incorporate the material practices of the researchers as

an object of enquiry in the account of material culture, that is to include the production of theory in the account of things (Hicks [2010]: 81-87).

Taking the cue from this insight (thinking of things both as *events* and *effects*), and considering it beyond the intradisciplinary debate in which it is embedded, I aim to take it a step further and think through the questions raised by the notion of agency by drawing on the concept of performativity.

### 3. PERFORMATIVITY AND THE TEMPORALITY OF IDENTITY

The notion of performativity has to be traced back to J.L. Austin's speech act theory (1975). In his study of ordinary language, the philosopher introduced the term «performative» to define a new category of utterances that cannot be said to be either true or false, since, instead of simply describing reality, they rather *act* upon it. In speech acts and circumstances such as promising, swearing, betting, or the words pronounced in performing a marriage ceremony, the very fact of uttering the sentence *is* «the performing the action» (Austin [1975]: 6). The uttering of the sentence does not *cause* the action in question, but *constitutes* the act of doing itself. In contrast to the logical positivists' focus on the verifiability of statements, Austin's performatives are addressed as they are not constative statements, but express the power of language to effect change in the world, to «do things with words», their successful outcome depending on a number of conditions (*felicity conditions*) that must be met for the utterance to be effective.

In the further elaboration of his theory, Austin rather focussed on the circumstances and conditions that must be provided in order to issue an utterance, and ended up discarding the original distinction between performatives and statements, in favour of a terminology able to describe three different dimensions of speech acts: *locutionary* (the fact of performing a meaningful utterance), *illocutionary* (the communicative intention of an

utterance), and *perlocutionary* (the effect of the locutionary and illocutionary act).

Thus, having been abandoned by Austin in his speech act theory, the term «performative» was taken up and developed in multiple directions, that extended its domain of application far beyond its authentic Austinian meaning, sometimes eventually betraying or diverting its original scope. The notion of performativity has been articulated further and reformulated not only in linguistics and philosophy (see for instance: Searle [1969]; Benveniste [1971]; Derrida [1988]; Lyotard [1979]), but has been transferred within various disciplinary fields, as different as anthropology, economics, gender studies, and law (see for instance: MacKenzie [2006]; MacKenzie et al. [2007]; Appadurai [2015]). In recent years, it has become an extremely productive theoretical tool used in various disciplinary contexts, often overlapping the domain of *performance studies* (Schechner [2002], [2005]; Féral [2013]; Cappelletto [2013]).

Notably, Judith Butler has delved into this direction of research, pushing further her analysis so as to embrace the question of identity. She situates the notion of performativity at the very core of her reflection on gender and her conception of the subject. Butler's approach of performativity draws on Austin's formulation of speech act theory – not without assuming Derrida's critique and interpretation (1972) –, and combines it with the notion of *performance*, deriving from theatre studies and performing arts.

For Butler, it's the very identity of the subject to be *performative*, meaning that the subject is involved in a movement of continuous construction and reconstruction of their identity, that relies on internal mechanisms as much as on the relationship with others, with the social and intersubjective dimension, in terms of gender, race, culture, and so on. It should be highlighted that, by extending this notion to the process that underpins the formation of subjectivity as such, Butler's account significantly includes in performativity not only speech acts, but every form of *bodily discourse*, and even hints at something like a dis-

course of the *matter*, as it contributes to enable and construct identity (Butler [1993]: 7).

The performative theory of gender elaborated by Butler (Butler [1988], [1990], [1993]), developed in the wake of phenomenology, psychoanalysis as well as Foucault's research on the history of sexuality, stems from the feminist debate of the 1980s and 1990s, and aims to describe how the categories of gender and «sex» are socially and culturally constructed, through the social linguistic and bodily dimension.

Deconstructing the idea of gender identity as normality and as the inner (already given) core of the individual, Butler aims to lay bare the normative and historically determined process that allows its fabrication. Gender is not a way of being, but always a doing: it is inseparable from the subject's and society's performing of certain acts and adhering to discursive practices, that conform to a gender norm. Thus, it is the constant reiteration of those performances throughout the course of one's life that constitutes and constantly reinscribes the subject as gendered (Butler [1990]: 25).

Hence, performatives are reinterpreted by the philosopher as the forms of linguistic and embodied behaviour that are «inserted in a citational chain» of conducts, they play as forms of constant interpellation of the subject, that are imposed to them and that the subject is called to re-enact to become socially intelligible as a sexed or gendered individual. In this respect, the dimension of citation and re-iterability of the performative – already emphasized by Austin and particularly by Derrida – are key here, for every speech or bodily act is involved in a temporality that both «precede[s] and exceed[s] the momentary occasion of its enunciation.» (Butler [2015]: 176).

According to Butler, there is not a «real» or primary gender identity that has to be discovered under or beyond gendered conducts that are informed by the dispositive of power. There is no «inner» or «authentic» sexual identity, because identity is itself performative, it is an illusory fabrication manufactured through corporeal signs and discursive means, and so it is every gendered

gesture, act or conduct that concurs to construct it. Gender is what emerges through the reiteration of such performances, not in the sense of a simple assumption of a role to be played, but as a repetition that is «at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established», functioning at the same time as «the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation» (Butler [1990]: 178).

Therefore, to affirm that gender is performative suggests that gender identity it is not separable from its manifestations, this is to say that «it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality» (Butler [1990]: 173). In other words, there is not a «self» that pre-exists the gendered self: the self constitutes through the reiteration and sedimentation of gender performances in the contexts of existing norms, repeatedly performed by others. Thus, for instance, drag performances show, through a parody of gender attributes and stereotypes, the performative nature of gender: in imitating gender, drag, cross-dressing and other stylizations of gender identities implicitly reveal that gender has an imitative structure and depends upon historically determined norms (Butler [1990]: 174-175). In those cultural practices the parody of gender identity becomes a parody of the very idea of an original or primary gender identity. The original is always derived, it reveals to be a copy, a mythical ideal that can never be completely embodied, *never given apart from its contingent articulations*. On the contrary, if we can talk of gender identity, identity here should be understood as «an imitation without an origin» (Butler [1990]: 175), an expression without a pre-existing meaning, a construction without a preliminary foundation.

Through her analysis of gender, Butler comes to put into question the structure of institution and origin, trying to conceive identity not as a stable locus of agency, but as the temporal becoming of a groundless ground. To borrow Merleau-Ponty's terms that Butler seems to take on, we may say that, gender is not just, as she argues, a *stylization of the body* (Butler [1990]: 179), but also the effect of a *stylizing body*, a body that has the power to



stylize the world, gender being understood by Butler as a «style of the flesh» (Butler [1990]: 177).

Through the reference to gender, Butler articulates the relationship between individual identity or agency and the structure of society. The subject's identity is neither an effect nor a cause of the social processes, but an event in formation and gender can be said to be performative in that it participates in the historical and contingent construction of the (social and intersubjective) sense:

*[I]f gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an «I» or a «we» who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of «before.» Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an «I» or a «we» who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the «I» neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves. (Butler [1993]: XVI)*

Throughout her writings, Butler hints at performativity as a powerful way to think of the structure and temporality of institution (Merleau-Ponty [2003]) and more in general of the emergence of sense in the sensible matter. In her later works, the philosopher elaborates further the notion of performativity, that dramatically transforms in the development of her reflection, also in connection to contemporary theories that, as the philosopher points out, often look at performativity as «a way to think about “effects”», and especially to supply an «alternative to causal frameworks», with the goal to counter both metaphysical presumptions and «a certain kind of positivism» that presupposes already delimited understandings of social and cultural structures – in terms of gender, rights, politics and so on (Butler [2010]: 147). Performativity, then, comes into play to think of «effects» as they are anthropological or ontological implications of a certain process or phenomenon.

Thus, for example, in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler intro-

duces a different use of the notion of performativity, aiming to account for the emergence of recent political movements, from the Arab Spring to *occupy* and on to the *indignados* movement. Drawing on her influential theorisations of performativity and precarity, the philosopher brings out the strong connection between these political formations and the physical places of gathering, for protest, encounter or occupation. Butler examines in particular the capacity of these geographic locations to catalyse the togetherness of bodies, so that they have become synecdoches through which we commonly refer to those movements and uprisings (Tahrir Square, Puerta del Sol, Zuccotti Park, Taksim etc.). The philosopher argues that the bodily assembly in public spaces brings together a multitude of different people, often being simply bodies, since, in a post-ideological context, they are united mainly by their collective physical presence, but, in a performative way, the physical assembly has, in turn, the power to hint at and even to enable the prospect of a most inhabitable world.

Meeting the stakes of material culture and material agency, in this context performativity coincides with the poietic capacities of assembly – its agency – but with a significant focus on the way its temporality is articulated, since in fact, performativity is understood as the power to virtually engender the conditions of its own political action, and, through this very process, start to realise it. To put it otherwise, here performativity defines the dynamic structure of co-constitution – of reciprocal institution – of the bodies in the public space, once again a way to elaborate a conception of identity in formation, rather than one that relies or is based upon a pre-existing ground.

Thus, to think of the transformative power of things and of the relationship between human and non-human entities in terms of performativity – instead of agency – would help us: 1) overcoming the passive/active opposition still implied by the notion of agency and its reference to action; 2) affirming the primacy of the relationship, rather than of the identities of the terms involved in it; 3) thinking the production or the emergence of

meaning and identity as a process of reciprocal constitution, without establishing a hierarchical opposition.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

What agency sought to describe is an action that does not entail an actual intentionality and volition, that is, a way of acting that corresponds to the very movement of sense in its making, a sense that is made without us making it, in the attempt to overcome the dominant anthropocentrism in Western thought and the dichotomy between subjects and objects it tends to reaffirm. In particular, what the notion of agency, and its derivatives, points at is a non-discursive production of meaning that constitutes in the dimension of historicity and that can only be accounted by observing the fallouts and consequences it produces. Nevertheless, we can argue that, because of the vast spectrum it covers and the reason of its connection to the sphere of activity – traditionally uniquely referred to humans as subjects – the notion of agency still lends itself to misunderstanding and ultimately risks to keep the dualism undone.

Now, what is at stake in the notion of performativity, as it is outlined and creatively reinterpreted by Butler, is the possibility to think of the relationship between identity and facticity. Beyond the reference to gender theory, Butler's analysis sheds light on the way in which discourses and conducts, as «techniques of the body» – to borrow Marcel Mauss' expression (1936) – produce *effects* of identity, that exceed both the intentions of the subjects that are involved by them, and the manifold socially enacted meanings that are already contained by those reiterated practices and conducts.

Thus, to think of the power of things and the matter to act upon the world and to affect human identity and consciousness through the notion of performativity would allow us to avoid to conceive agency ontologically as a property or faculty of things and never consider it unless in connection

to its effects – also from a methodological and epistemological point of view. Performativity aims to grasp the reciprocal movement of co-implication between humans and non-human entities, and seeks to outline their temporal process of codetermination, without affirming any chronological, hierarchical or axiological primacy. Identity then emerges in the envelopment of material situated processes as assemblage of sensible and symbolic, in which a part of the sensible world turns back upon itself, regrasps, and expresses itself.

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**Citation:** D. Pacauskas, O. Naukkarinen (2020) Finnish Aesthetics in Academic Databases. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 169-180. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11567

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Finnish Aesthetics in Academic Databases

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**Abstract.** The academic databases such as Scopus or Web of Science are commonly used to measure performance of universities, departments, and even single researchers. However, to what extent such databases can represent real outcomes of aforementioned units especially in the field of art and humanities where local languages and cultural phenomena play an important role is not clear. This article focuses on understanding how research in this field, as seen through the case of aesthetics in non-English speaking countries, Finland in particular, is represented through major academic databases. This question is tackled by applying a data mining approach. First, we identify major academic databases, and afterwards test what is the proportion of Finnish aesthetics presented in those databases. Our approach allows us to critically look into representation of local art or humanities related research in general academic databases, and understand to what extent we can trust those sources in representing real pictures of the field. Results strengthen the well-known fact that most common academic databases draw a rather poor picture. In more particular this article shows that there are certain factors that influence analysis of the field: (1) spread data, (2) multilingual content, (3) non-standard categorization, (4) variability of venues, (5) different publishing patterns, and (6) unsuitable impact metrics. However, our results propose that alternative databases can be formed from university or meta-data databases. We also provide further directions for designing of such databases.

**Keywords.** Academic databases, aesthetics, Finnish aesthetics, publishing.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

If you are an aesthetician who is based in Finland (or Italy, Slovenia, Greece, France or any other non-English speaking country), most probably you are aware of the major actors, their works, and philosophies defining the field. But if you are an outsider to the field and you want to get an understanding of it, or of any other area in humanities that is not purely in English, what kind of view you would get using common search venues – academic databases?

Researchers are interested in the academic databases due to the impressive amount of well-structured and easy to access data they can offer. Such combination lays a very promising environment for the research. As academic database such as Scopus, Web of Science,

or ProQuest contains huge amount of records, researchers treat them as they would combine all, or close to that amount, academic or otherwise relevant publications. However, that is not always the case in reality. For instance research shows that only majority of humanities research is indexed in academic databases (Franssen, Wouters [2017]). Therefore, the question arises – Is the situation the same in aesthetics and elsewhere in arts and humanities?

In the worst case, such performance evaluations that diminish the real research output can drastically affect funding allocation of research organizations. Moreover, academic databases are not only used for identifying relevant publications for evaluation purposes or literature reviews, but also for delivering research output (e.g. Muñoz-Muñoz, Mirón-Valdivieso [2017]). Thus, if a database misrepresents a particular subject area, can trust the results provided by it?

This leads to the aim of this project – to critically look into research representation through academic databases while using the case of Finnish aesthetics. To what extent correct or wrong picture, we can get if we will base our understanding on academic databases. That brings an important question to tackle – *how Finnish aesthetics is represented in academic databases and what kind of view we can get by trying to perceive Finnish aesthetics through these sources?*

For tackling this question, we collected data from 10 different databases including and major Worldwide databases and Finnish ones (please look at table 1 for databases and their descriptions). We firstly created citation map based by the countries to understand how research is spreading across the countries based on an academic database and citations gathered from it. Afterwards, we've selected Finnish aestheticians and analyzed how their works are represented in Worldwide and Finnish databases.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary advantage of academic databases is coverage. They cover all research fields, giving a

ready access to aggregated data. Unlike a number of other databases, which may cover some journals only in part, these databases systematically index all articles and other items in the selected journals (Archambault, Vignola-Gagné, Côté, Larivière, Gingrasb [2006]). Additionally, they offer an easy system to use, and even API access to the data, that allows for researcher to perform analysis with ease and include into analysis such metadata as research authors, titles, abstracts, references, institutions, countries of institutions, etc. or even full-texts to some extent.

There is much what to like such approaches. Such databases are creating a wanted environment for bibliometricians to perform their research, where one could implement performance metrics, compare fields, researchers, get bigger views of the area, or even implements gamification type system to track oneself performance and create higher engagement. However, such adopted perspective on the databases influences researchers' choices for publication venues, and directs them to publish in indexed in academic databases venues if they aim to make their publications more visible. This means that the databases are becoming as *de facto* standard for researchers not only to perform a literature review, but also as directions for publishing research results.

There were lot of attention from researchers directed in studying academic databases. Some studies have compared major databases – Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest – to understand which has advantage over the others. Researchers have compared academic databases in various fields, but often concentrating on medicine and information research (Bar-Ilan [2008]; Falagas, Pitsouni, Malietzis, Pappas [2008]; Meho, Yang [2007]). Furthermore, the core databases in the researchers' eyesight became Web of Science, and Scopus, which were compared based on coverage (Aghaei Chadegani et al. [2013]) or even additional features offered (Meho, Rogers [2008]).

There has been research done arguing that humanities and social sciences do not have the same coverage as natural sciences and engineering. For example in terms of citations (Nwagwu,

Egbon [2011]), altmetrics (Hammarfelt [2014]), or bibliometric analysis studies found in the area (Larivière, Gingras, Archambault [2006]). Quite common approach is to treat humanities and social sciences as a single unit and compare it to the Natural Science and Engineering (NSE) research, while in fact, collaborative activities of researchers in the social sciences are more comparable to those of researchers in the NSE than in the humanities (Larivière et al. [2006]).

Although contradicting evidences exists, the peer-reviewed publication in a WoS-or Scopus indexed journal are still the norm with which humanities scholars are compared (Franssen, Wouters [2017]). These bibliometric studies deliver descriptive measures that might not have a clear relation to our understanding of research and publication practices in humanities. This implies that bibliometricians involved in the humanities should not rely on a theoretical framework built around the natural sciences, but rather develop an understanding of the way the humanities “work”, independent of other scientific domains (Franssen, Wouters [2017]).

To tackle this issue we used an example of Finnish aesthetics. In general, aesthetics has often been defined as philosophy of art, art criticism (in the broad sense) and/or beauty. Some version of this trio can be found in many introductory books (e.g., Eaton 1988, Sheppard 1987, Stecker 2007). However, it is debatable whether aesthetics is necessarily only a branch of philosophy or can there be empirical, scientific versions of aesthetics; whether the three areas mentioned above (and their possible sub-fields) really cover all relevant issues of aesthetics; and where are the differences between aesthetics and disciplines such as art history, musicology and sociology of art. Moreover, does aesthetics always refer to an academic discipline or does it also cover non-academic publications and forums? In other words, the identity and borderlines of aesthetics are not easy to define. This also means that it is not self-evident what kinds of publications should be covered when we try to form an understanding of the field and its core issues through various databases.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

We followed Velasquez and Evans (2018) as an example to form a rough guidelines for our research methodology. This study adopted a quantitative approach. We selected the works that related to Finnish aesthetics, and afterwards coded them. Coding was done based on the indexing in academic databases of selected works. To analyze and summarize the results we developed a web-based tools, which are accessible at <http://dhoa.aalto.fi/citemap/> and <http://dhoa.aalto.fi/finnish/>.

#### 3.1 Citations tracking

To map countries we’ve collected research publications that refers to the word “aesthetics” from Scopus database. Further we’ve each publication references list. Then we grouped citations in two groups - the ones that could be found in Scopus database and the overall ones. We’ve calculated most common citations by the country in each of the group. We’ve tracked which countries are citing which ones, by analyzing every publication produced in that country, and its citations that could be found in Scopus database. If citation from reference list could be found in the database and has publication countries names in as a metadata – it was stored as country relationship. Further, all incoming citations for each of the country was summed, and map created where one could which countries are citing which ones the most.

#### 3.2 Database comparison

To understand how Finnish aesthetics is presented in the databases, firstly we mapped Finnish aesthetics through the works of six Finnish aestheticians. (Table 1). The selection was done by the authors of this project and was based on idea to capture diversified profiles. We didn’t aim to cover the biggest share of Finnish aesthetics works, nor the most influential works. Instead, we aimed to see how different profiles could be represented in different databases. For instance Yrjö Sepänmaa is an experienced researcher



**Table 1:** Selected Finnish Aestheticians in databased analyzed for this article

Scholar	Publications	Books	Articles	Others
Max Rynnänen	25	15	10	0
Arto Haapala	73	47	23	3
Jyri Vuorinen	6	6	0	0
Ossi Naukkarinen	82	27	50	5
Sanna Lehtinen	10	4	3	3
Yrjö Sepänmaa	267	150	110	7

who has close to 300 publications, while Sanna Lehtinen just recently received her Ph.D and is only at the beginning of her career. While professors Ossi Naukkarinen often publishes in international peer-reviewed journals, Max Rynnänen for instance has plenty of publications in books as book chapters. Therefore, selection was done with the assumption that publications of some of the researchers are represented well in one type of databases, and other researchers' works in other ones.

Later we searched for each of the works from the selected researchers in various databases and counted how many of them are indexed in them. For this, we employed data from Scopus, Google Scholar, Elektra, Arto, Helka, and internal university databases - Tuhat, Acris, and CRIS. We've selected the biggest academic databases worldwide and in Finland. While worldwide academic databases - Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar was a straightforward choice due to their already established recognition, Finnish academic databases were selected based on the authors' knowledge as well as librarians' of a host institution recommendations. Which of the universities' databases were chosen was depending on researcher's affiliation. Ossi Naukkarinen and Max Rynnänen are affiliated with Aalto University, while Aaro Haapala, Jyri Vuorinen, and Sanna Lehtinen with University of Helsinki, and Yrjö Sepänmaa with University of Eastern Finland. Each of the researchers was contacted, and they either sent us their list of publications by themselves, or directed us to their internal university databases from where the list could be obtained. Publications were grouped to 3 groups - Books, Articles, and Other (Table 1). "Books" relates to

**Table 2:** Databases used for the research

Database	Description
Scopus	Scopus is Elsevier's abstract and citation database. Scopus covers over 69 million records, around 22.000 peer-reviewed journals and more than 150.000 books. <a href="http://www.scopus.com">www.scopus.com</a>
Web of Science	Web of Science is an online subscription-based scientific citation indexing service maintained by Clarivate Analytics that provides a comprehensive citation search. It covers 151 million records from around 34.200 journals and 94.000 books. <a href="http://www.webofknowledge.com">www.webofknowledge.com</a>
Elektra	Elektra collects, publishes and archives the articles of the leading Finnish scientific journals in electronic form. <a href="http://elektra.helsinki.fi">elektra.helsinki.fi</a>
Helka	Helka is Helka-libraries' shared collection and circulation service. The Helka catalogue includes collections of Helsinki University Library, National Library, Institute for the Languages of Finland, The Finnish Heritage Agency Library, Finnish Literature Society, Library of the Labour Movement and Baltia-kirjasto. It has 3.2 million references. <a href="http://helka.finna.fi/">helka.finna.fi/</a>
Arto	ARTO is the reference database and metadata reserve of Finnish periodical and monograph articles. <a href="http://arto.linneanet.fi">arto.linneanet.fi</a>
Google Scholar	Is a freely accessible web search engine that indexes the full text or metadata of scholarly literature across an array of publishing formats and disciplines. <a href="http://scholar.google.com">scholar.google.com</a>
Acris	Database for scholar affiliated with Aalto university <a href="http://acris.aalto.fi">acris.aalto.fi</a>
Tuhat	Database for scholar affiliated with University of Helsinki <a href="http://tuhat.helsinki.fi">tuhat.helsinki.fi</a>
CRIS	Database for scholar affiliated with University of Eastern Finland <a href="http://wiivi.uef.fi/crisyp/disp/_/en/welcome/nop?kieli=1&amp;menuid=0">wiivi.uef.fi/crisyp/disp/_/en/welcome/nop?kieli=1&amp;menuid=0</a>

monograph, chapters in the book, or books translations where scholar is one of the authors for them, "Articles" - to research reports published in peer reviewed academic journals, and "Other" - to conference proceeding, and articles in non-academic journals.

From the gathered list we took one by one entry and tested it whether its indexed in each of our selected academic databases in two ways. Firstly, it was checked whether that publication could be found by authors name or its title, if that was the case then this entry got "Direct" indexing label. Secondly, it was checked whether the publication can be found by its collection title - book title, journal title and volume, or conference proceedings title. If the publication could be found by its collection title, but not publication itself then this entry received "Indirect" indexing label. The process can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The process of searching indexed publications

### 3.3 Language detection

Furthermore we've taken the collected Finnish aesthetics related titles and references lists from Scopus and Elektra databases, and titles only from our selected aestheticians works, and analyzed what languages were used in Finland based publications. Such procedure was done by feeding the collected list to program that auto detects language.

## 4. RESULTS

If we look at academic databases (and try to understand Finnish aesthetics through them), we will see that most of the publications covered by the main academic databases are written in English, and dominated by Anglo-American scholars. To showcase this phenomenon, we collected all entries that refer to aesthetics from one of the biggest academic database – Scopus, and visualize that in the map (Figure 1). This figure represents, which works are cited from a particular country – in this case Finland. As you can see, the color for Finland is rather bright and colors for United States, United Kingdom and Germany are much darker. The darker the color, the more citations

country receives from Finland. Thus, scholars tend to cite Anglo-American literature.

Another important point is that 96% of articles in Scopus for the area of Aesthetics are written in English. Moreover, there are only 76 works in Scopus that are made in Finland and related to aesthetics. If we take Scopus data as information for granted this could raise a point that Finnish researchers are not interested in this area. However, if you ask any Finnish aesthetician, she or he will acknowledge that it's not the case. In Finland, there is a long history in this field (see Naukkarinen and Immonen 1995; Kuisma 2006), one can study aesthetics as a major in the University of Helsinki and plenty of courses are available in other universities, and there is an active learned society for it, Finnish Society for Aesthetics. Additionally, there are Finnish journals such as *Synteesi*, *Taide* and *Niin & Näin* that are partly covering topics relevant for aesthetics, and also anthologies and monographs are regularly published. Scopus simply does not have much of this in its radar.

Scopus and Web of Science databases are among the largest in the world. However, these databases have the least indexed works of our selected scholars. Overall there were 10 works indexed in both databases combined. And most of them (8) were published within the last decade.



**Figure 2:** Most cited countries by Aestheticians from Finland based on Scopus data. Dynamic version of the map can be seen here <http://dhoa.aalto.fi/citemap/><sup>1</sup>

Based on this we can make an assumption that some researchers started to publish in indexed journals recently. However, only 3 out of 6 selected researchers have any of the publications in these databases.

Similar results occurred related to Elektra database. It is the largest academic database in Finland that provides downloadable full-texts. Few of explanation's can be that Elektra's offering full-text access for all its entries, and that might be one of the reason for its lower number. On the

other hand, we haven't noticed any of Finnish aesthetics related journals that are indexed in Elektra, although some of them offering open access articles. One of the reasons, that this database is more concentrated on natural or social science, instead of humanities and arts. Finnish aesthetics is a narrow field, and the Elektra database managers haven't thought about all possible subjects of research, that could lead to identifying publication venues for them.

Scopus and Web of Science databases might have another reason for such low score. Journals to be indexed in these databases must undergo specific procedures and follow particular rules, where for aesthetics related venues the main aim is not necessarily to comply with them. Although journals such as the US based *Contemporary Aesthetics* is well-known among aestheticians worldwide and offering content in English, it is not indexed in any of the databases.

Out of the worldwide known databases only Google Scholar indexed quite an amount of the researchers work. Google Scholar uses partly voluntarily indexing. Robots crawl trusted websites

<sup>1</sup> Figure 2. Has several available functions and it was done by getting data from Scopus academic database. In particular we tracked works and their references, in order to a) indicate what countries are most cited by particular countries, and b) works that are cited the most in that country. For instance if there is an author in the article that is affiliated with Finnish university, from which other countries publications are cited in that author's work, and what are the most cited publications among that country's researchers. Most cited works, can be two types, the ones that are only in Scopus database (Scopus cross-refs) and the overall ones (All refs). Also there is an ability to see, from which countries works received the most citations overall (For All countries).

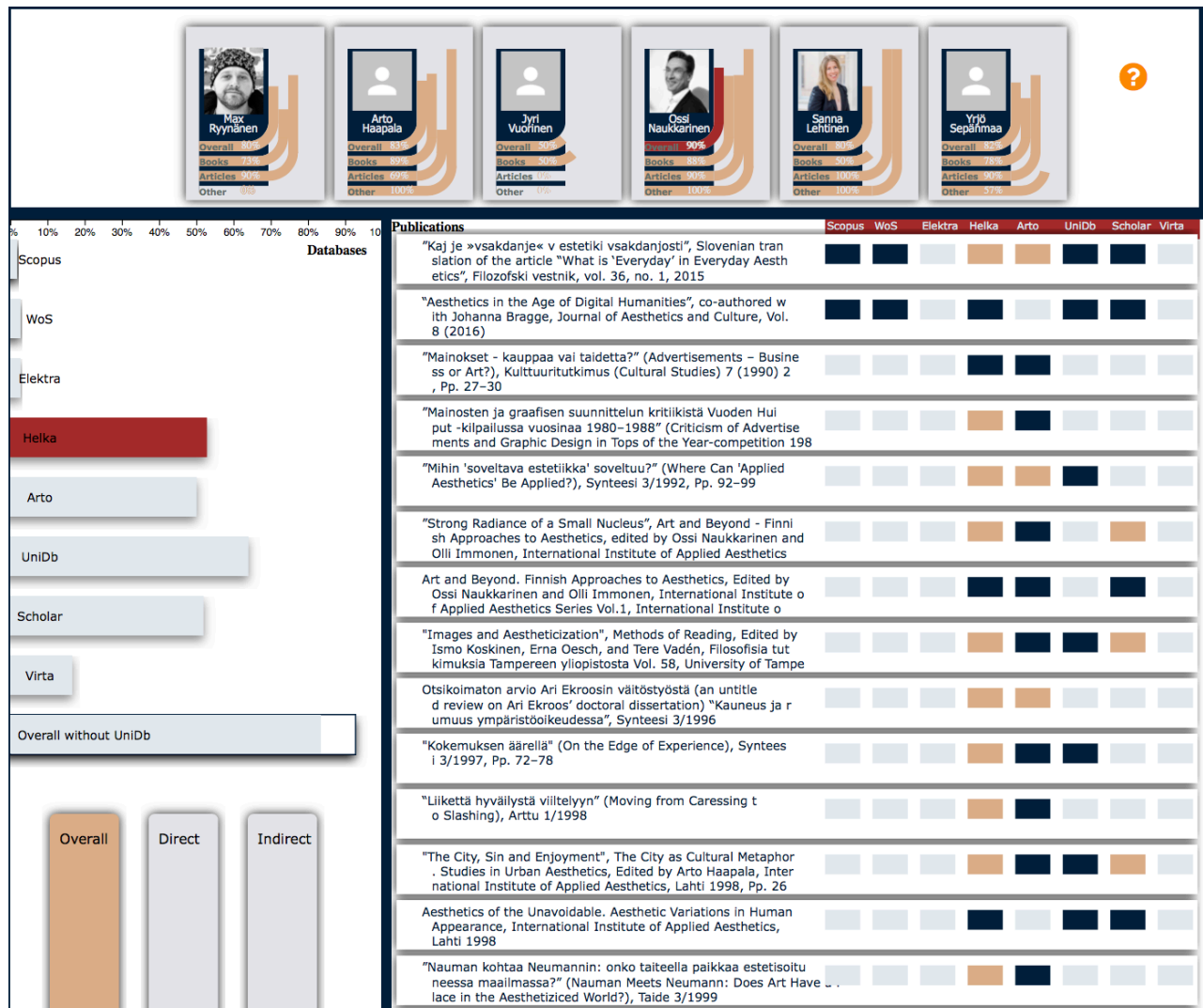


Figure 3: Selected aestheticians publication indexing in academic databases. Dynamic version can be seen here: <http://dhoa.aalto.fi/finnish/><sup>2</sup>

- the databases that supposed to be academic, and takes a list of publications for Google Scholar database. Google increases amount of publication by snowballing – taking the articles that are cited

<sup>2</sup> Figure 3. shows how works of selected Finnish aestheticians are indexed across different academic databases. It has two type of results – (a) amount of works indexed in various academic databases, and (b) and titles of those works. The image has several selections, where combination of them manipulates those results. (1) The choice among authors defines which works will be used and scores on which will be presented. (2) Choice on author’s type of publications, e.g. Books, Articles, etc. limits the results to only those particular publications. (3) Selec-

tion of different databases, e.g. Helka, Arto, Scopus, limits works indexed only in selected database. (4) Selection on type of indexing – Direct, Indirect or Overall, presents works that has particular index.

by already indexed articles in the Scholar database. One also can recommend its own database/webpage, and if the system decides that its academic, by Google decided standard, they can be included into the database.

Other Finnish databases – Helka and Arto don’t have much differences in indexing the works. One indexes more contributions to books for one researcher, while another for other schol-

ar. Same can be said about indexing articles. But these databases except few cases indexing around half of the works.

The biggest share of works is indexed in university databases. Except in Jyri Vuorinen's case, these databases are always the highest among all other databases with regards to amount of indexed publications. The reasons are straightforward. Scholars usually add publication entries to these databases by themselves. And motivation can be various, ranging from seeking recognition towards university policies implying researchers to frequently update their publication lists. Another reason due to such results, that the "real" publication list for some scholars was taken from these systems – Arto Haapala's and Sanna Lehtinen's from "Tuhat" system, and Yrjö Sepänmaa's from "CRIS". When contacted these scholars confirmed that full list of their publications is in these databases and there is no need for forwarding another list. However, there is still the questions how scholars categorize their own and other scholars' publications. For example, Rynnänen is doubtful whether all his publications can be considered to belong to the group of aesthetics. There is no simple answer to this, and there will always be borderline cases. This is why all descriptions of any academic fields, based on publication metadata, are approximations with fuzzy borderlines.

While analyzing results we've noticed that aesthetics researcher's publications can have very untraditional type or venues, compared to natural or social sciences, or publications in exhibition journals, translations. It was also common to have more books publications in the form of monographs or book chapters, than academic articles. Only one scholar – Ossi Naukkarinen, have more journal articles than contributions to books (Table 2).

Looking at the different languages, we noticed that the further we are going towards the "real" Finnish aesthetics, the higher extent of local language is used. Most of the publications (97%) related to aesthetics in Scopus database are in English, however references that used in these articles have slight trace of Finnish language, which would indicate that there are important

works on aesthetics in Finland that could be a beginning point of the study. If we go to the biggest academic database in Finland that allows access to full-texts -Elektra, we can notice that 44% of publications (articles and books) that relates to Aesthetics are in Finnish. Now if we have a look at selected Finnish aestheticians publishing patterns, we can notice that there are more material in Finnish than in English language. Other interesting point - Elektra has 1056 publications that relates to aesthetics while our 6 selected scholars have 453 alone. And we can guess that there are way more of publications coming from other Finnish aestheticians. We can also see that only small amount of works are indexed in Elektra, thus we can speculate that if we could combine all aesthetics works produced in Finland it could easily reach 5 to 10 thousands.

## 5. CHALLENGES OF REPRESENTING AESTHETICS

We can summarize outcomes of our analysis, in several statements, that can describe issues that are hindering current identification of the field of Finnish aesthetics:

(1) *Spread data* - There are multiple data sources across which data is spread, and each of the sources can have unique entries, which other databases don't possess. Therefore, none of the single database could be used to represent research on Finnish aesthetics.

(2) *Multilingual content* - There are several language used in representing the works – Finnish, English, Swedish and most probably occasionally others such as German and French. Therefore, identification of works, such as category name, or search keywords, must be designed accordingly for multiple languages. If AI systems are used to process information from the database, the systems must be trained to various languages. In other countries relevant languages might be Chinese, Korean, Polish, Italian, Slovenian, Spanish, etc.

(3) *Non-standard categorization* - There are high varieties of different kind of publications

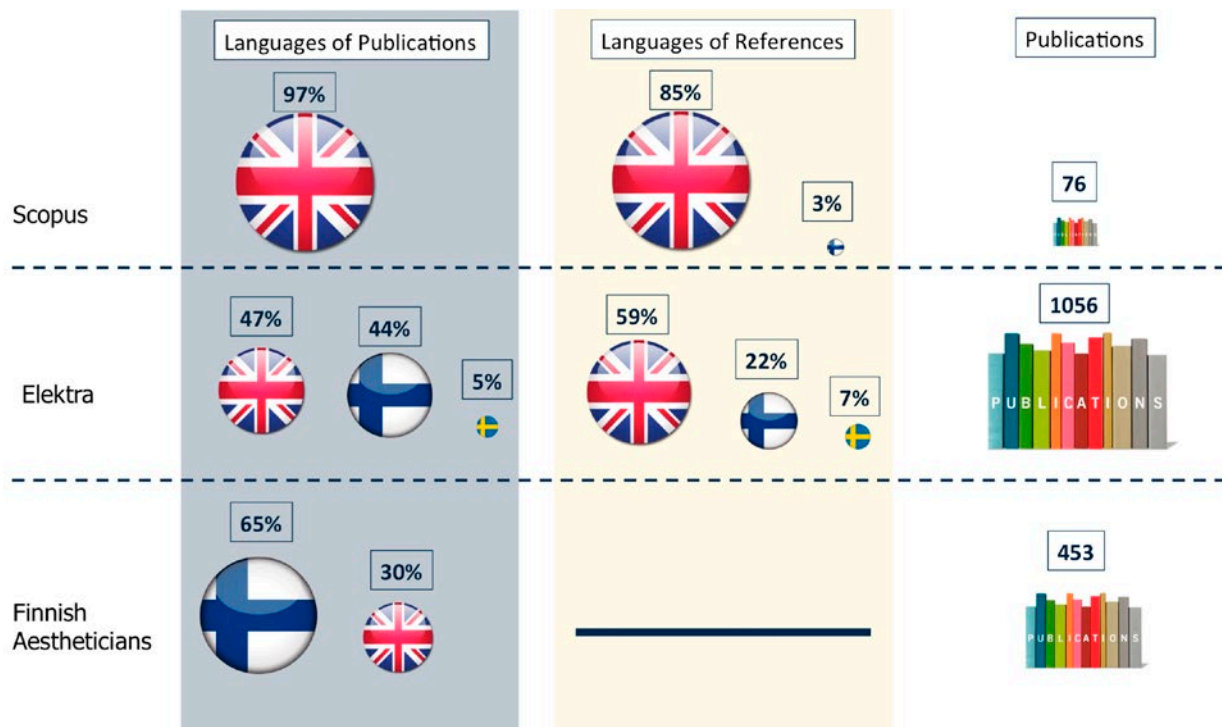


Figure 4: Languages from different sources of Finnish publications<sup>3</sup>

e.g. book translations, book reviews, articles in art exhibition journal; which cannot be found in more traditional sciences. Categorizations to group various kinds of publications should be developed.

(4) *Variability of venues* - There are none of predefined journal lists where most of the important works to aesthetics would be published, compared to, e.g. Financial Times 50 for Business and Management fields or Top 8 Information Systems basket for Management of Information Systems area. This issue doesn't allow tracking possible venues from which most of the publications could be integrated into one source.

(5) *Different publishing patterns* - The potential sources for the publications cannot be predicted, as most of the publications are published in the

type of books or book chapters. Its challenging to determine the source and to gather timely updates as with journal articles for instance.

(6) *Unsuitable impact metrics* - There is a need for a different research metrics than traditionally has been used. In Arts and Humanities area citations are less frequent than in Natural or Social Sciences. Scholars using lower amount of references in the field, and those are usually directed towards grounding, well known works and theoreticians, e.g. Niche, Bourdieu, rather than to the recent works related for the research question at stake. Thus, applying such as h-index, won't show the real impact the author's publications have made.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If we would trust the biggest academic databases worldwide – WoS and Scopus, the picture of Finnish aesthetics would be rather narrow, as only few percent of our selected aestheticians works are indexed there. Same can be said about Elektra

<sup>3</sup> Figure 4. For detecting languages we fed titles of the articles and used citations in them from different sources to “langdetect” python library. However, it was not possible to check languages of citations of selected Finnish aestheticians.



– the largest access to publications offering database in Finland. Thus, results indicate that major academic databases – WoS and Scopus, are very limited in representing the field. Similar results were presented by other research that was understanding the difference in representation between humanities and natural sciences areas (Franssen, Wouters [2017]).

There are several views on this phenomenon. One of them is that humanities field can be described as «relatively young, and scarcely organized as coherent disciplines» (Line [2000]), which may not relate to the age of the whole field, considering the long humanities traditions since Antiquity, but rather to variety of subjects and fluid structure. Anyhow, this statement implies that with the time the field will be structured and adopt natural sciences publication practices. Our research results suggest that there are some evidences to support this notion, as it showed that some researchers have already started to publish in the indexed journals in recent years. However, the opposite view proposed by other recently published research have strong grounds (Franssen, Wouters [2017]; Sivertsen [2016]), and our research also shows that only half of selected scholars engaged in publishing in the indexed journals at all. We can see that although scholars tend to engage into publishing research in the indexed journals, still the amount of these publications are minor compared to all research output produced by them. This perspective suggests that it is highly unlikely that humanities publication practices in a near future will, eventually, become the same as the ideal-typical monolithic publication profile of the natural sciences.

Aesthetics, as well as other arts and humanities related researchers, are more keen to publish in local language, due to the reason that the research is oriented to the audience to that particular region or country (Larivière et al. [2006]). The concepts and subjects covered in the art and humanities research can be expressed and understood only in the culture that is shaping them (Line [2000]). For inclusion to academic databases journals must operate to high extent in English,

and only in rare cases indexed articles are written in another language. However, while English language could be the reason for lack of content in international databases, humanities research case in Canada (Larivière et al. [2006]) showing that the indexing of English humanities works are not that different from the work written in other languages. These findings imply that research publications in English language are facing same issue – only small amount of works can be found in Academic databases, as research written in other languages.

Different patterns of research dissemination are one of the key arguments as well. Our research, as well as other ones related to general humanities (Huang, Chang [2008]; Larivière et al. [2006]; Sivertsen [2016]) indicate that researchers' are more keen to publish books rather than journal articles. Moreover, publication forms could be extended to newspaper articles or articles for in exhibition galleries journals as our research shows. And publication in books could be as monograph, book chapter or even book translation. The academic databases usually don't cover these other forms of publication as systematically and exhaustively as databases such Web of Science or Scopus do for journal articles (Larivière et al. [2006]; Nederhof [2006]). However, we've found that some databases in Finland such as Helka or Arto, offers coverage of books and articles and around half of all the works we selected for analysis could be found in these databases.

The main contribution of this research is showcasing existence of alternative sources to counter the well-known academic databases. University databases are the most promising venues for creating publication search tools among them. They are updated by scholars themselves, which includes various type of journals without mediators selecting them. Combination of these databases could lead to the biggest source of academic reports. However, they have few important flaws that restricts usage of them as general academic research catalog. Not all databases are fully accessible by public users. For instance "Acris" is internal Aalto University system, and

to see full content of the system one must login with credentials given by the university. The design in which systems are developed can differ widely, for instance in “Tuhat” and “Cris” it’s much easier to locate full publication list of an author, than in aforementioned “Acris”. The same challenge applies for integrating information, if we would aim to combine different sources for the universal one. Meta-data used by university systems differs widely, and details that one system can provide as well. Publications are differently described, has different type of categories, it has varying number of features. Moreover, same research can be named in slightly different way – author names can be missing, or instead of full first name, it can be written only with first letter, or words in title misspelled. These, issues create challenges for automatically integrating works into one single database. Thus, in the current situation this assumption just asks for more research to be done in order to develop unified database that could be suitable for arts and humanities researchers.

The other direction should tackle agreements and decisions made on developing structure and standards for accepting and distributing publications into the right categories. The role also could be played by associations of aesthetics, which most of the countries that have strong grounds in this field have. For instance Finnish aesthetics has its own society gathering local aestheticians and having knowledge on important venues, topics, and authors of the field, could periodically issue list of aesthetics publications and thus create a database. Similar groups can exist in other place, or departments, which would take responsibility in defining the sources of the knowledge. Here challenges for research are coming from separate institutions involved in the process, where its own has different motivations and restrictions. For instance, scholars might have their personal lobbying intentions in pushing their own research into public attention. Thus, who and how will decide, on what venues should be right and what must be included into databases, and how that decision will be approved by that local areas, in this case all Finnish univer-

sities that are researching aesthetics. While in first option we have rather technical restrictions to handle the integration of the right information, in the second option we might deal human related restrictions, as there are at least 3 different actors involved – database owners, publishers, and scholars.

## 7. CONCLUSION

There is no final answer to this but at least it seems clear that the main academic databases are seriously incomplete. Our research identifies that humanities scholars, and in our case aesthetics, tend not to publish in indexed journals, due to the audience for which the knowledge is created. However, that might lead to the disagreement between scholars and institutions that tend to evaluate research performance based on the data from recognized academic databases. The issue relates to the direction towards which authorities and arts and humanities research institutions tend to head. The policy makers demand publishing in the specialized journals on the international level in order to be confronted with and inspired by the scholarly standards, critical discussions and new developments among other experts in the field. But that would mean that arts and humanities would lose their uniqueness by disconnecting from the surrounding culture and society and mainly communicating in international journals that are targeting peers abroad. With this research we are proposing that there are other sources of data based on which, databases could be formed, or research performance evaluated, and which would allow to secure traditional practices.

The study found that combination of university databases – self-reported publication lists, could lead to sufficient database to evaluate research performance. This would allow for national agencies to (1) avoid using privately own database, and (2) use national related publication patterns instead of worldwide ones.

Further studies could investigate unanswered question of this study – do humanities fields need to change in order to adopt to academic databases



structure or different approaches must be developed for quantifying fields performance without disturbing its identity.

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**Citation:** N. Perullo, M. Iofrida, G. Fava (2020) Focus su *Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente* di Nicola Perullo. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 181-192. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11805

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Focus

**Nicola Perullo, Manlio Iofrida, Giovanni Fava**  
*Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente* di Nicola Perullo, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2020.

NICOLA PERULLO

### LA PROPOSTA DI UN'ESTETICA ECOLOGICA

I. Alla base del progetto di *Estetica ecologica* c'è innanzitutto un aspetto procedurale che, però, si basa su motivazioni filosofiche e epistemologiche e che con esse si intreccia costantemente, risultando dunque essenziale. È ciò che viene in parte descritto nei primi due saggi del libro, *Conoscenza ecologica e percezione estetica* e *Linee, piedi, tempo, labirinto. Per un'estetica ecologica*, e che vorrei innanzitutto riassumere qui, in modo parzialmente diverso. Si potrebbe dire che lo spunto che dà l'avvio a tale aspetto procedurale/filosofico è quella concezione, da me raccolta ed elaborata, per mia formazione accademica, dal secondo Wittgenstein ma anche da Dewey (non solo *Arte come esperienza*, ma anche il Dewey logico e filosofo dell'educazione), da Merleau-Ponty e, più recentemente, dalle teorie della mente estesa (in particolare da Alva Noë), secondo la quale i concetti, tutti i concetti, "sono" in quanto sono creati, crescono e si evolvono, con, e nella, *prassi* umana. Ovviamente, ciò vale anche per i concetti di mente, mondo, sensazione, percezione, pensiero etc. Non si tratta, ovviamente (i nomi che ho ricordato finora dovrebbero bastare a fugare ogni fraintendimento), di relativismo né di contestualismo, tanto meno di storicismo; ciò che emerge da questa concezione è, piuttosto, un radicale *relazionismo*. Il relazionismo, nella versione che ne propongo, vede la realtà – tanto quella "naturale" che quella "sociale" – come esito di incontri e di movimenti, di scambi, di oscillazioni e di risonanze. Questo relazionismo è il cuore della nozione di *corrispondenza*, centrale nel libro; corrispondenza non come relazione ilomorfa, come adeguazione tra intelletto e mondo ma, appunto, come gioco tra agire e patire, tra domande e risposte.

Nella mia proposta, prendere sul serio questa idea significa passare a un ordine di discorso che si trasferisce dalla logica formale a una logica non trascendentale ma, piuttosto, *ecologica*. Nello specifico di un discorso estetico, quindi, segue che il “sentire/pensare”, il “percepire” di un corpo vivente sono eventi che accadono e che si sviluppano *con e nella* prassi. Una prassi comprende tanto gli aspetti linguistici che prelinguistici (nel libro si insiste molto, peraltro, sul valore della conoscenza e dell’espressività non verbale, che non è però “tacita” e implicita, come spesso si dice, ma tanto rumorosa ed esplicita quanto quella verbale). Tale convinzione e tale atteggiamento producono, *ipso facto*, un dissolvimento dell’opposizione natura/cultura. Infatti, se ogni concetto, così come ogni entità del mondo, non solo esiste, ma *accade nella prassi* – nel libro si utilizza il termine di “esperienza”, per simpatia con il vocabolario di Dewey e di Ingold ma anche per tenere lo spettro più ampio rispetto a quello, solitamente più determinato e specifico, di prassi – allora questo significherà che non è dunque più “naturale” di quanto non sia “culturale” perché tutto emerge, cresce, si sviluppa e decade.

Cosa vuol dire allora, nel concreto di una ricerca che si vuole di ordine estetico, procedere secondo tale logica ecologica? Innanzitutto, significa che *questo stesso* processo di ricerca – quindi la stessa estetica ecologica che si descrive, si propone e si scrive – è sempre situato ed in evoluzione, in senso morfogenetico e olistico. In altri termini: non è possibile, per rigore logico presupposto dalla concezione sopra richiamata, procedere isolando elementi e frammentando parti da analizzare singolarmente. Si passa quindi da un’analisi degli elementi a un’*analisi delle unità* (un termine che viene ancora da Dewey ma anche da Vygotsky). Questo ha alcune conseguenze, che sono presentate nel corso dei capitoli del libro ma che si dichiarano soprattutto nei primi due. Le riassumo:

a) ogni processo di osservazione, descrizione e analisi è anche, *ipso facto*, un processo di auto-osservazione e auto-descrizione – ecco il tema della “conoscenza partecipativa” richiamato fin nel primo capitolo, nel senso che l’osservatore è

immerso nell’*environment* che (lo) osserva, in un rapporto di (asimmetrica) mutualità;

b) l’estetica ecologica non ha un “oggetto” tematico quale che sia, proprio perché risulta impossibile, a rigore, isolare oggetti tematici. Passare dall’analisi degli elementi (quella propria della “teoria dei mattoni”, la *Building Blocks Theory*) all’analisi dell’unità significa, in altri termini, passare dalla percezione di oggetti alla percezione di processi, alla sensibilizzazione per una percezione *con* l’esperienza, una percezione immersa nel flusso di cui partecipa. A questo punto, la mia proposta incontra, riprende ed elabora la nozione di *meshwork* avanzata da Tim Ingold. Percepire ecologicamente significa percepire processi, i quali possono essere descritti come fasci di linee che formano annodature; ogni percepire è un’annodatura, cioè un fascio di relazioni costituenti e costitutive di ogni sentire/pensare. Questa estetica ecologica pone la relazione – intesa come intreccio di linee, laddove questa linealogia esprime l’ontologia fluida del *meshwork* – quale “principio fondamentale della coerenza” (Ingold), in un mondo inteso non come contenitore di oggetti ma come ciò che accade; un mondo in cui le cose hanno continuamente origine attraverso processi di crescita e di movimento.

Tale intreccio è tanto ciò che si percepisce, osservando/descrivendo/giudicando, sia lo sfondo nel quale si è immersi, l’*environment* in cui la percezione nasce, cresce ed evolve. Anche la tradizionale compartimentazione del sapere non sfugge a tale realtà. Per questo, tale approccio ecologico dissolve ogni rigido confine, ogni *distinzione* rigida tra ontologia, epistemologia ed estetica. Nel libro, per chiarire questo punto, utilizzo “distinzione” in senso ontologico forte (qualcosa di dato all’inizio, in un presunto ordine classificatorio); “differenziazione”, invece, per riferirmi alla continua produzione di interstizi *funzionali e posizionali*, che sono appunto tutte le differenze prodotte in seno alla corrente dell’esperienza, della prassi e della vita; differenze pienamente legittime e utili rispetto a progetti ed esigenze specifiche ma non giustificabili come distinzioni a priori, secondo la logica ecologica che il libro propone. L’estetica

ecologica opera in un mondo di relazioni, non in un mondo di oggetti; non perché gli oggetti siano nella mente dei soggetti, ma perché tanto gli oggetti che i soggetti non “sono” semplicemente, ma *vivono*. Se la vita è movimento (un movimento a cui riporta anche, seguendo l’etimologia che rimanda al ritmo della respirazione - inspiro/espriro/pausa - l’*aisthesis* originaria), allora la vita è relazione. E così ogni concetto e idea che si crea con e nella prassi.

c) Una diversa concezione del “valore” e della validità del percepire, quel che nell’estetica moderna classica è il tema del giudizio, tema ancora oggi molto dibattuto e messo in discussione anche da proposte estetiche recentissime. Nell’estetica ecologica proposta da questo libro, la questione viene proposta attraverso due nozioni chiave: quella, che ho già ricordato, di *corrispondenza* e quella di *saggezza*. L’estetica è sempre ecologica, per i presupposti chiariti; ma è *compiutamente* ecologica, cioè consapevolmente tale, se si orienta a un approccio che ho chiamato “percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente” e che, nel libro, emerge con la rielaborazione del tema dell’aptico.

II. Il titolo originale con cui avevo immaginato questo libro era, in effetti, *Dell’aptico*. A questo si è rinunciato per ragioni editoriali, ma è evidente che, almeno sotto il profilo quantitativo, la percezione aptica è il soggetto principale di questa ricerca. Essa viene discussa direttamente nel terzo e nel quarto saggio del libro (*Dal tatto all’aptico. Un altro approccio all’autentico e L’aptico come tempo, temperatura e alimento*) ma è presente lungo tutto il testo.

Il termine “aptico” ha una lunga storia, ma è soprattutto a partire dalla fine del XIX secolo che viene proposto in modo peculiare, cioè non come mero equivalente o generico sinonimo del senso del tatto ma, anzi, come un’alternativa che consente di superarne alcune aporie. Questa nozione è stata usata, in significati e in contesti diversi, soprattutto da psicologi, designer, tecnici informatici ma anche da filosofi (da Weber a Révész fino a Gibson e Giuliana Bruno). L’estetica, in particolare, inizia ad occuparsi dell’aptico all’inizio del XX

secolo, in riferimento all’arte e soprattutto sulla scia di Riegl, che lo utilizza per evidenziare, da un lato, che c’è un vedere tattile e ravvicinato, dall’altro, che il tatto non è limitato alla mano. Attualmente, le applicazioni dell’aptico – campo di studi in grande espansione – riguardano soprattutto la tecnologia digitale, il rapporto uomo/computer, la robotica in vari ambiti (dalle protesi mediche ai giochi), le teorie mediali e l’antropologia.

C’è però anche una storia più direttamente filosofica a cui si può far rimontare lo spettro semantico del termine “aptico”, che in questo libro viene discussa soprattutto nel terzo capitolo, attraverso alcuni autori (Deleuze e Guattari da un lato, Derrida e Nancy dall’altro, ma anche Carolyn Korsmeyer, Jullien, Glissant e, naturalmente, Ingold). Ciò che è stato sopra chiarito nei termini di un’ontologia fluida, implicativa e relazionale – quella che alcuni (come la filosofa Lisa Heldke) hanno chiamato *with-y ontology* – assume, nell’estetica ecologica proposta da questo libro, la “definizione” di atteggiamento aptico o di percezione aptica. Questo atteggiamento, trans-sensoriale, unificato e processuale, a differenza di quello che possiamo chiamare, per contrasto esplicitivo, modo ottico o percezione ottica, non *intenziona* gli oggetti ma *attenziona* il flusso dell’esperienza di cui la percezione è parte. L’aptico è una modalità di sentire/pensare che chiede una certa postura, una certa disposizione ma che non chiede di fare nulla di speciale. L’estetica ecologica qui proposta non è un’estetica dell’eccezionale ma, potremmo dire riprendendo un filone che nel libro è anche esplicitamente richiamato (con i lavori di Yuriko Saito e di Arnold Berleant), del quotidiano. Si tratta di sentire/pensare il quotidiano in modo *diverso*, il che significa: percependone la vita che vi scorre attraverso. Da qui, la questione del tempo come temperatura, affrontata nel quarto capitolo: se l’estetica è sensibilità e percezione, essa è sempre temporale, quindi temperata. Per questo, dico che essa è sempre – che lo sappia o no – ecologica.

Ora, è importante chiarire che l’esperienza dell’aptico come percepire *con* non è più “vera” della conoscenza ottica. Se intendiamo la verità come una corrispondenza tra la realtà e la sua

descrizione, infatti, secondo la logica ecologica che sorregge tutto questo progetto, ottico e aptico sono due aspetti dello stesso fluire, percepito in due momenti distinti: quello del suo procedere “come tale” e quello della continua produzione, nel medesimo processo, di differenze che si cristallizzano, provvisoriamente, come “posizioni” e come identità, come “oggetti”. Si tratta, perciò di aprirsi alla potenzialità di un sentire/pensare aperto e dis-posto, fluido e flessibile, dove si è *consapevoli* di tale relazionalità radicale. È un punto centrale del libro, ed è discusso attraverso la questione dell'autenticità e della qualità, nel terzo, nel quarto ma anche nel quinto capitolo. Nel quinto, *Il gusto non è un senso ma un compito*, per esempio, cerco di chiarire che il gusto aptico consiste nella consapevolezza dell'autenticità di ogni esperienza, non perché esso colga l'autenticità degli oggetti e delle loro caratteristiche ma perché queste emergono e si creano lungo il continuo flusso della poetica della relazione impura e meticcia. L'aptico, così, non esprime affatto una metafisica del contatto puntuale e immediato con *qualcosa*, non è strumento dell'epifania di un presunto, permanente e stabile autentico da riconoscere; ma è una disposizione allo scorrimento lungo l'esperienza nella quale si è parte, insieme subita ed agita, della co-creazione del mondo. La percezione aptica è allo stesso tempo attiva e passiva, quindi: non è più vitalistica di quanto non sia remissiva ed esposta.

Ho trovato, nelle risorse dell'aptico così inteso, una via che consente di esprimere e di praticare l'idea secondo cui l'estetica non sia *sapere di* ma *sapere con*, e quindi un sentire/pensare, all'unisono il mondo e se stessi. Per questo, l'estetica ecologica qui proposta risuona tanto con le teorie occidentali della conoscenza ecologica e sistemica quanto con l'atteggiamento non dualistico proprio del pensiero orientale, che nel libro è richiamato più volte come contrappunto delle idee suggerite (nel testo c'è la presenza esplicita di Zolla e anche quella di un maestro francese di tantrismo kash-miro, Eric Baret).

**III.** La percezione aptica non è solo implicata ma anche impegnata, ovvero chiama in causa il

ricorso continuo alla questione della responsabilità. Il percepire aptico è un impegno ed un compito perché, a differenza dell'ottico, *fa la verità* della qualità – il valore di qualcosa – nell'incontro. La qualità è una relazione, cui si giunge non con la mera applicazione di una regola pregressa ma attraverso il suo continuo, al contempo provvisorio, costituirsi e farsi valore comune. In questo paradigma, a ogni passo, per dirlo con Wittgenstein, si reclama una nuova decisione. Il modello ottico, per contro, pone l'oggetto di fronte a sé, studiandolo e valutandolo come se esso non avesse possibilità di parola. Ciò non significa giustificare ogni incontro; significa invece che il non apprezzamento, il disgusto o il rifiuto emergono in base a motivi che non sono predicibili, che le qualità non si danno a priori, che l'esperienza è sempre unica e singolare, processuale e sottoposta a un numero potenzialmente illimitato di variazioni e di differenze. A partire da questa considerazione, emerge un altro aspetto del libro, che è trattato nei due saggi finali (*Per una dietetica della cura: sul mangiare animali* e *Educarsi senza istruzioni: l'estetica ecologica come “imparare a imparare”*) e che mi pare centrale. Esso è racchiuso nelle parole *saggezza, cura ed educazione*.

Se questa estetica ecologica, in definitiva, ha un'ambizione, essa consiste nel suggerire e nel promuovere un modo di vivere, riportando la filosofia alla sua dimensione di *scuola* nel significato originario del termine. Una *scuola di vita* che non ha alcuna pretesa di dottrina, un'educazione che è assolutamente povera di contenuti pedagogici e di istruzioni, suggerendo, al contrario, che sia proprio nella specificità dell'esperienza che si attraversa, nella situazione, che si producono di volta in volta quelle possibilità e potenzialità da seguire. L'estetica ecologica qui proposta, come procede da una logica e da una conoscenza ecologiche, così corrisponde a una *diet-etica situazionale*, che non si basa su principi prestabiliti. Nel sesto capitolo l'argomento è sviluppato attraverso una critica al vegetarianismo ontologico e assoluto, mentre nel settimo, più in generale, si propone una concezione dell'educazione che intende dismettere il modello vigente, basato sull'istruzione come tra-

smissione di conoscenza prestabilita in cui s'in-cunea un certo modo di intendere il rapporto maestro-allievo, a favore di un'educazione estetica che muove dai presupposti ecologici e aptici già affrontati; un'educazione cioè basata su cura, attenzione, esposizione e ascolto, al fine di affinare il sentire/pensare all'apprendimento costante e infinito attraverso il fare esperienza col mondo. Questo si intende con "imparare a imparare". Si tratta di una libertà non legata all'approccio tipicamente individualistico proprio dell'idea del soggetto isolato; ma di una libertà dentro il flusso, una libertà come continua emancipazione e "messa in comune" (nel capitolo sono presenti anche eco di Rancière e di Paulo Freire) che, a sua volta, richiama quella responsabilità nata dalla consapevolezza dell'interdipendenza: ciò che ho azzardato a chiamare *corrispondenza risonante*. Da questo punto di vista, l'estetica ecologica cerca a sua volta di corrispondere alla globale e crescente insoddisfazione nei confronti dell'impalcatura teorica e socio-politica tipica di diversi temi della modernità occidentale; un'impalcatura che chiede una profonda revisione se non una rifondazione completa, in coerenza con la logica ecologica da cui siamo partiti, che non è mai una logica distruttiva.

MANLIO IOFRIDA

SU *ESTETICA ECOLOGICA*: PARADIGMA  
ECOLOGICO E LOGOS GRECO-LATINO

I. Nell'itinerario di Nicola Perullo, ormai lungo e costellato di molti e impegnativi lavori, quello presente rappresenta insieme una sintesi e un nuovo slancio in avanti, una nuova tappa del suo itinerario intellettuale: essa può essere dunque compresa solo a partire da quell'itinerario, e a sua volta getta una nuova luce su di esso. Innanzitutto, mi dedicherò dunque a una sintetica ricostruzione del suo lavoro precedente.

La formazione e i primi lavori di Perullo vanno sotto l'egida di tre nomi: Gargani, Wittgenstein e Derrida. Negli anni Novanta, quando tale formazione è avvenuta, solo il nome di Gargani poteva autorizzare una associazione – che per Nicola

fu da subito una penetrazione profonda, non una mera giustapposizione – fra Wittgenstein e Derrida, che altrimenti rimandavano a tradizioni filosofiche fra loro inconciliabili. Dal maestro genovese-pisano Nicola ha mutuato innanzitutto la postura esistenzialistica nel senso di una filosofia del concreto (dando al termine il suo significato specificamente wahliano): tale postura, nonché escludere, sottende un'esigenza stretta di rigore e un'apertura (solo in questo senso) alla filosofia analitica. Come quello di Gargani, il Wittgenstein di Nicola è soprattutto quello delle *Ricerche*, segnato da una tematica pragmatistica; Derrida inseriva nel suo orizzonte problematico le questioni più autenticamente metafisiche della filosofia, ma nel suo stile decostruttivo; in questo senso, a Perullo (ed è questo il senso dell'utilizzo di questo filosofo nel suo lavoro più importante di carattere decostruttivo, quello su Vico, cfr. Perullo [2002]) interessa il Derrida dell'aporeticità, dell'impossibilità dell'uscita dalla metafisica, del margine come luogo in cui si può tentare qualche (inesorabilmente votata alla sconfitta) fuga verso un "esterno": è soprattutto la compresenza degli opposti nelle anfibolie che anima la rilettura in stile derridiano che Perullo opera di diversi momenti della storia della filosofia.

Rispetto a questo solido impianto di partenza, il successivo approdo alla questione del cibo, che è anche l'approdo al continente dell'estetica, significa già un notevole spostamento di baricentro: la filosofia del concreto diventa una filosofia del corpo e del sensibile; il misurarsi con le problematiche legate a un'estetica del cibo comporta un maggior avvicinamento alla ricerca scientifica, alla fenomenologia e a quello che non si dovrebbe esitare a definire un vero e proprio materialismo. Se la fenomenologia va soprattutto sotto il nome di Merleau-Ponty, la questione del materialismo va valutata in tutto il suo peso: esso va inteso in un senso rigorosamente fenomenologico e potrebbe anche definirsi un *sensualismo* – la rivalutazione di un senso come l'olfatto, ad esempio, va proprio in questa direzione – ma va vista anche come un momento di rottura con la centralità del pensiero di Derrida nella posizione precedente. In questo

sensu, bisogna tener conto che Perullo appartiene alla generazione cresciuta negli anni Novanta: una generazione “difficile”, *hantée* dalla questione del postmoderno e della riduzione del mondo a immagine, linguaggio e simulacro, terremotata dalla caduta del Muro di Berlino, per la quale Derrida fu una delle poche ancore di salvezza per chi volesse sfuggire alle derive verso gli “immateriali”, i tecnogismi, le fini della storia e della filosofia... L'approdo all'estetica del cibo non ha rappresentato per Nicola un abbandono totale della lezione di Derrida, ma certo ha significato una presa di distanza da certe movenze postmoderne (certo proprie più del derridismo che di Derrida) e la presa di consapevolezza che l'ingresso nel nuovo secolo richiedeva nuovi strumenti con cui rinnovare e arricchire quella lezione. Gusto, corpo, fenomenologia, materialismo dei sensi non significavano rinnegare Derrida, ma implicavano che l'istanza del concreto, presente fin dall'inizio, assumesse una maggior centralità. Ma bisogna anche insistere su un'altra angolatura: le istanze, ben presenti nella filosofia di Derrida, volte a una critica della filosofia tradizionale – il Derrida delle pagine pari e dispari con due testi di autori differenti (Derrida [1981]) o quello di *Timpano*, il saggio che apre *Margini della filosofia* (Derrida [1997]) – venivano reinterpretate come una critica al sapere occidentale e al suo vizio di idealismo, che aveva sempre relegato la questione del gusto e del cibo a questione secondaria; cibo e gusto diventavano un modo per proporre quel rinnovamento profondo, integrale del pensiero filosofico che tanta parte della riflessione novecentesca aveva tentato di mettere in atto: si trattava, attraverso quei nuovi temi, di aprire la filosofia alla non filosofia, per dir la cosa nei termini di Merleau-Ponty. Per questa via, molte ricerche di carattere scientifico – fisiologia, neurofisiologia, ad esempio Gibson – entravano a far parte del discorso di Nicola; e acquistava maggior peso la componente pragmatistica, che confluiva nella nuova valorizzazione dell'esperienza concreta e puntuale.

II. È su questa strada che questo ultimo libro segna una nuova tappa e una nuova rottura: per-

ché torna ad essere un libro di filosofia generale; perché lo fa nel segno dell'ecologia (un tema già presente, ma assai più implicito nel lavoro di Nicola finora); perché porta avanti un discorso di rinnovamento integrale del discorso filosofico – è una nuova tappa nella dialettica fra filosofia e non filosofia che l'autore sviluppa.

Innanzitutto l'ecologia. È chiaro che l'approdo a questo tema costituisce una forte novità, perché Perullo decide ora di collegare la sua riflessione a una questione storico-politica attuale e trova un nesso fra il proprio percorso e quella che potremmo definire *la problematica della terra* che egli individua come orizzonte problematico comune alla filosofia e alla politica oggi (anche se, giustamente, Perullo avverte di non confondere la propria ecologia filosofica con quella politica).

Poi, *un'estetica ecologica*, che rappresenta un allargamento e una generalizzazione della questione del cibo a problema filosofico e teoretico generale.

Qual è il centro di tale estetica ecologica e quindi dell'ecologia proposta da Perullo? Si tratta della categoria dell'*aptico*. Non si tratta del tattile, ma, caso mai, del modo in cui questa categoria è stata rielaborata e ampliata da Aloïs Riegl; in realtà, però, bisogna qui far riferimento al nuovo personaggio che ha assunto centralità nella cassetta degli attrezzi di Perullo, cioè a Tim Ingold (a cui non a caso il libro è dedicato); e non solo e non tanto all'Ingold de *The perception of the Environment* (Ingold [2000]), quanto a quello, più recente, di *Making* (Ingold [2013]) e *The Life of Lines* (Ingold [2015]). In questa prospettiva l'*aptico* assume il significato del concetto più generale di esperienza, di un nuovo modo di caratterizzare il rapporto soggetto/oggetto, che si attua non secondo la separazione dualistica, ma attraverso la mescolanza, il reciproco sconfinamento, il *meshwork*.

È ancora da sottolineare come sia l'*aptico* a strutturare il concetto di ecologia di Perullo, che si basa su questo specifico rapporto di *co-costruzione col mondo e con l'ambiente*, grazie al quale non esistono entità separate né fra loro né dal soggetto percipiente, ma esiste un fitto intreccio relazionale,

all'interno del quale quel che conta è *l'incontro* che volta a volta si attua fra soggetto e oggetto. Tale incontro significa la passività del soggetto, il suo essere soggetto a eventi esterni, da lui altri, da lui incontrollabili, ma significa anche la sua attività: non esiste mondo all'infuori della prassi del soggetto, del suo attivo ricercare un incontro con ciò che lo circonda. Questa prassi – il rinvio al pragmatismo e a Dewey è esplicito – non ha il significato di un attivismo unilaterale: per poter incontrare l'altro (oggetto o soggetto che sia) devo certo agire, ma in questa prassi è implicito quello che Gibson chiamava, con riferimento agli organi di senso, *l'attunement*, che implica anche la dimensione dell'ascolto, della pazienza e dell'attesa.

L'aptico è per Perullo la base per un discorso ecologico anche perché si contrappone (anche se, fedele a Derrida, Perullo sa bene che non si tratta di ricadere in antitesi duali, polari), in quanto globale, relazionale e dinamico, al discorsivo e al logico, al logos occidentale come pratica della separazione, del meccanico e della staticità; in questa prospettiva sistemica ecologica anche il capitalismo, come logica del dominio attraverso l'isolamento, è criticato da Perullo (cfr. ad es. Perullo [2020]: 33). La natura non è l'oggetto a disposizione dell'uomo che, a partire da Robinson Crusoe, ha caratterizzato l'esperienza e la prassi della società borghese: irriducibile alla dimensione dell'oggetto, essa è un'alterità inesauribile (in questo senso Perullo è ben lontano dall'idea di una fine della natura che è esplicita e implicita in tanta filosofia contemporanea, da Heidegger al *posthuman*); essa, soprattutto, nella visione dell'autore, è *incontro*, dimensione istantanea che può essere colta solo volta per volta e sempre diversamente – questa è un'altra sfumatura semantica dell'aptico che è essenziale sottolineare. E qui, dietro a Ingold, non si può notare come spunti e anzi campeggi la lezione di Bergson – un Bergson ripulito di tutti i suoi intimismi, ma, insomma, che attraverso questa riattualizzazione ci si presenta di nuovo inconfondibilmente come Bergson.

Anche la dimensione dell'autentico, oltre quella della natura, viene quindi riabilitata da Perullo: come la natura, l'autenticità (qui la lezione di Gar-

gani, insieme a quella fenomenologica, è inconfondibile) non è un ritorno all'origine, non è l'idoleggiamento di una qualche verginità: è nell'istante dell'incontro e della relazione che noi *facciamo, creiamo* un autentico che pure non viene dal nulla, ma, per dirla con Nietzsche, *diventa quello che è*. È in occasione di questa trattazione del tema dell'autentico che la presa di distanza di Perullo da Derrida, che abbiamo visto provenire da lontano, si precisa e approfondisce. Come era prevedibile, è uno dei testi più problematici del filosofo francese ad essere convocato a questo proposito: quel *Le toucher* (Nancy, [2000]) dove più chiara è la distanza di Derrida da Merleau-Ponty, la sua profonda incomprensione dell'ontologia del secondo, accusata di intuizionismo e panteismo. Perullo è molto chiaro: in questo punto Derrida rimane «dentro il paradigma filosofico occidentale e specificamente moderno la cui architrave è il dualismo» (Perullo [2020]: 68); e quindi «[...] a differenza di Derrida, crediamo che la decostruzione teorica di un pensiero dell'intuizione immediata non elimini affatto la possibilità di un sentire/pensare che sappia *vivere in modo corrispondente a un esperire autentico*. Non si tratta di fusione, ma di corrispondenza» (Perullo [2020]: 70). Insomma, criticare l'intuizione non è eliminare l'esigenza di mantenere un rapporto con l'autentico, il naturale, il selvaggio (sull'autentico come esperienza del tutto, del grado zero, dell'insieme del possibile, in nesso all'idea merleau-pontyana di una natura sempre al primo giorno cfr. anche Perullo [2020]: 72).

Attraverso la categoria dell'aptico, vengono quindi ripensati alcuni snodi essenziali della nostra contemporaneità, come il rapporto con l'animalità, il problema di una nuova politica, la questione dell'educazione e il libro si presenta a tutti gli effetti come l'organica proposta di un nuovo paradigma filosofico.

Termino qui la parte analitica del mio discorso e vengo a qualche osservazione di carattere più apertamente valutativo e critico.

**III.** Dal punto di vista di un paradigma ecologico, a me pare che il discorso di Perullo converga con l'idea dell'inerenza, tipica della fenomenologia



di Merleau-Ponty (in proposito mi permetto di rimandare al mio *Per un paradigma del corpo. Una rifondazione filosofica dell'ecologia*, Iofrida [2019]): il paradigma aptico non è né un attualismo gentiliano né un pragmatismo in senso deteriore; la sottolineatura dell'istante (ripeto che questo momento temporale è fondamentale per capire la prospettiva dell'autore) nulla toglie al fatto che la prassi del soggetto debba *aprirsi* a un'alterità irriducibile: una dimensione della passività e del limite è dunque sottesa al discorso di Perullo ed è ciò che conta per un discorso autenticamente ecologico. Su qualche altro punto, esplicherò invece non dei dissensi veri e propri (salvo che su uno), ma una sensibilità diversa, che nulla toglie alla sostanziale convergenza con la sua posizione.

Si tratta innanzitutto delle questioni del logos, dell'istituzione e della storia, questioni che sono naturalmente fra loro legate. Qual è il rapporto del paradigma aptico con quello occidentale del logos? So bene che Nicola, conformemente alla lezione di Derrida, non postula né esclusioni né contrapposizioni; in proposito numerosi sono i passi che si potrebbero citare; mi limito a questo, che mi sembra il più significativo: «Certo, la rappresentazione concettuale non si può abolire; non appena sorge un pensiero, anch'essa compare. Tuttavia, la si può vivere secondo approcci diversi, e anche parzialmente aggirarla, disponendosi nei confronti della corrente e del fluire presente in modo più o meno aperto, più o meno attento. Questo è ciò che suggerisce la percezione estetica corrispondente alla conoscenza ecologica. Da un lato, dunque, essa è quasi rappresentazionale appoggiandosi alle necessità espressive del linguaggio concettuale, anche solo per indicare una via di aggiramento (come stiamo facendo in questo stesso momento, scrivendo e leggendo). Dall'altro, proprio per questo, essa sottrae continuamente potenza al dominio del linguaggio e dei concetti, ribadendo continuamente la loro produzione funzionale dentro il flusso dell'istante presente che viene attraversato vivendo, cioè nell'esperienza» (Perullo [2020]: 32-33). Tuttavia, il problema di un'articolazione fra i due paradigmi sussiste e non può essere risolto senza un approfondi-

mento analitico attento. Il momento logico inteso come separazione, come dualismo soggetto/oggetto è certo da rifiutare: ma, una volta chiarito che tale separazione e dualismo sono un mito, non si dovrebbe parlare piuttosto di una trasformazione e riconfigurazione del logos che di una sua sostituzione integrale con un paradigma dell'immersione e del *meshwork*? In altri termini: il logos, il concetto non possono essere trasformati (magari anche attraverso il ricorso via via a un paradigma aptico)? Perché pongo questa esigenza? Perché a me pare che il momento della trasparenza, della separazione, della coscienza critica – il momento tipicamente greco-latino della filosofia come *presa di coscienza*, come riflessione e autoriflessione – sono un contributo della filosofia occidentale a cui difficilmente si può rinunciare; la filosofia occidentale deve “curare” il suo dualismo, allargarsi, trasformarsi, deve rendere il suo logos più ospitale: ma in quale medium può svolgersi quel momento della presa di coscienza che è condizione della messa a punto di ogni paradigma alternativo? Voglio dire: se non ci fosse il medium di lucidità e trasparenza *relative* di cui siamo debitori alla Grecia e a Roma, come farebbero Ingold e Perullo a mettere a fuoco il paradigma aptico? Anche il linguaggio rigorosamente e lucidamente argomentativo di Nicola non è figlio della tradizione greco-romana a cui vuole contrapporsi? Poiché egli non segue la strada di Bataille, e nemmeno di Heidegger: l'invito (pienamente già nello spirito di quello che egli dice ripetutamente, come sopra ho documentato) è allora ad approfondire ulteriormente l'articolazione del suo paradigma aptico con quello “logico” o occidentale; che è come dire, per converso, a concepire quest'ultimo in una versione più larga e tollerante, che non si riveli esclusiva del precedente. Che tutto questo sia nella scia della dialettica del riflesso e dell'irriflesso dell'ultimo Merleau-Ponty, ovvero di quella che questi definisce *iper-dialettica*, mi sembra ovvio; ma appunto, si trattava di un programma di lavoro incompiuto: credo che il discorso di Perullo possa essere utile proprio per portar avanti, su nuove basi, quel programma. Credo anche che l'ultimo Foucault, quello del commento al testo kantiano sull'Illuminismo, con

la sua insistenza sulla critica e sul gioco fra eterno e divenire, vada nello stesso senso.

Vengo allora alle questioni dell'istituzione e della storia: la temporalità di Nicola, lo si è visto, è quella dell'istante *e a questo, in un certo senso, non c'è nulla da obiettare*. Ma non dobbiamo porci il problema di dar conto anche di concetti come istituzione e storia? Scontato che il momento della discontinuità è assolutamente fondamentale, che ne facciamo della continuità, della ripetizione? La continuità è da intendersi solo nel senso della linearità occidentale o esiste una continuità orizzontale, della coesistenza, invece che della successione, che inflette spazialmente il tempo e che però, più che farci negare il concetto di storia, ci induce a una sua riconfigurazione? Si noti che si tratta ancora dell'istante e del presente, solo che si tratta di riscoprirne, non una profondità, ma quelli che possiamo chiamare dei contorni, una lateralità. Per esplicitare la cosa con un esempio: nel mio presente e a partire dal mio presente io riscopro delle falde di passato, mi trovo a ridar vita a un *istituto* a cui certo do un nuovo senso, ma che pure è un presupposto (il parallelo col concetto di natura e di autentico è lampante). In campo artistico ci si può riferire a come Morandi riprenda Masaccio e Piero della Francesca o a come Bacon riattivi la lezione di Velázquez; in campo storico, possiamo pensare a come il Rinascimento ha riattivato la tradizione antica o, sulla scia di Hegel e di Marx, a come la Rivoluzione francese riattivasse alcuni aspetti della tradizione romana. In linea generale, tutto ciò può infine riportarsi a un autore molto caro a Nicola, cioè a Vico: che ne è dei *ricorsi* vichiani? Dell'istanza di ripresa-rinnovamento che Vico ha sentito come fondamentale nella storia? Che ne è del gioco fra eterno e divenire che accomunano le concezioni di Vico, Merleau-Ponty e Foucault? Dell'idea che l'istante si apre a una prospettiva di infinita ripetizione e ripresa, così come, per altro verso, esso è (cosa che abbiamo visto esser ben presente a Perullo) *un qualcosa di sempre di nuovo*?

Insomma, la domanda a Nicola è: che ne è del *sedimentato* nella prospettiva dell'aptico, che è nello stesso tempo un domandare: che ne del futuro e del nuovo? Verso il logos, verso la storia, verso

la *Stiftung* (l'istituzione) mi piacerebbe che il paradigma dell'aptico operasse un lavoro di approfondimento e anche di inclusione – con l'ovvia conseguenza della trasformazione di quei concetti nella nuova prospettiva.

Un ultimo punto, strettamente connesso ai precedenti, ma con ricadute politiche immediate anche più importanti riguarda la questione dell'autonomia e dell'eteronomia, in sostanza il problema della libertà e dell'illuminismo (in senso kantiano) come raggiungimento della maggior età. Perullo lo affronta nell'ultimo capitolo, dedicato al problema educativo e al rapporto maestro-allievo. Dopo aver criticato la nozione di autonomia in campo pedagogico in quanto essa prediligerebbe l'idea di isolabilità della vita – in sostanza, in quanto rimanderebbe a un paradigma meccanicistico e robinsoniano – Perullo afferma decisamente che «bisogna destituire di merito e valore assoluti l'idea di autonomia» (Perullo [2020]: 154) e prosegue affermando: «[...] l'esistenza è sempre eteronoma [...] Se tutto è interdipendente, "libertà" non è espressione di autonomia ma di condivisione e compartecipazione a una comunità di destino» (Perullo [2020]: 155). Alle sacrosante affermazioni secondo cui la vita va pensata come «una relazione originariamente partecipata e intrecciata» seguono altre che vanno meno da sé: «[...] il senso di libertà, allora, non si caratterizzerà più tanto come agire individuale e volontà personale quanto, piuttosto, come la consapevolezza stessa del movimento della vita nel suo complesso»; la proposta è allora di configurare «un tipo di "libertà ecologica" che è prima, o oltre, la distinzione tra libertà e necessità» (Perullo [2020]: *ibid.*), mettendo capo a un dispossessamento di sé. Condivido certamente l'idea di Perullo secondo cui un paradigma ecologico imponga anche la riformulazione del concetto di libertà, così legato alla vicenda moderna e a un modello di rapporto con la natura in cui quest'ultima è ridotta a mero oggetto (in proposito mi permetto di rimandare a quello che dico in proposito in Iofrida [2019]: 239 e ss.); non mi spingerei però fino al punto di affermare un primato assoluto dell'eteronomia e una destituzione dell'autonomia: mi sembrerebbe più oppor-

tuno parlare di gioco fra autonomia e eteronomia. Il primato della relazione sull'isolamento robinsoniano non deve significare che ci si butti dalla parte del comunitarismo; e più che di identificazione spinoziana di libertà e necessità io parlerei di una *passività* che deve essere l'altro lato dell'attività, o di libertà che agisce *all'interno e grazie ai suoi vincoli* e non contro di essi. Non si tratta, in questo caso, di sfumature semantiche, ma di problemi politici fondamentali: che ne è dell'individuo, della sua irriducibilità e dei suoi diritti all'interno del nuovo paradigma ecologico? Il primato della relazione non significa che venga meno quel momento dell'autonomia individuale che è emerso, storicamente e sistematicamente, con la Rivoluzione francese: piuttosto, deve essere pensata una comunità basata sulla relazione che, proprio per questo, non può configurare l'assorbimento dell'individuo nella totalità – una terza via fra individualismo e totalitarismo comunitario che, in fondo, è un percorso aperto dalla tradizione esistenzialistica nelle sue correnti più diverse. Ma anche il Foucault dell'*Illuminismo* e gli Adorno e Horkheimer della *Dialettica dell'illuminismo* su questo punto sono univoci: non si può trattare di regredire rispetto all'Illuminismo né rispetto ai valori dell'Occidente, si tratta solo di trovarne un significato più ampio, che li sottragga alla logica del dominio. In fondo, le perplessità sul rapporto logos-apticità che prima sollevavo convergono e si acuiscono in questo ultimo punto: il problema di come articolare il nuovo paradigma ecologico con quello della ragione greco-latina e della tradizione greco-latina (e quindi, anche, con la questione della storia) è, come dimostra anche questo libro di Nicola Perullo, il compito filosofico e politico più urgente che abbiamo davanti.

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GIOVANNI FAVA

#### ESTETICA ECOLOGICA ED ECOLOGIA

Sono molti i problemi sollevati dal saggio *Estetica ecologica: Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente*, pubblicato recentemente per Mimesis (2020) da Nicola Perullo. I lavori di Perullo occupano un posto centrale all'interno delle più recenti discussioni filosofiche intorno alla filosofia del cibo, all'etica dell'alimentazione e all'ecologia. Questo suo ultimo contributo si rivela di grande interesse, giacché inquadra e sviluppa problemi che erano stati centrali nel corso della ricerca precedente di Perullo entro una prospettiva che si aggancia a una tradizione di studi recente e ancora nuova, ovvero quella dell'estetica ambientale.

A questo proposito, un primo punto che meriterebbe di essere sviluppato, proprio a partire dalla prospettiva elaborata da Perullo, è la relazione che intercorre tra l'estetica ecologica e l'ecologia vera e propria. Certo, dal punto di vista del percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente, ossia dal punto di vista di quel tipo di esperienza ecologica che Perullo chiama "aptica", e che costituisce il cardine teorico dell'intero saggio, non è pensabile un uomo che sia separato dal suo ambiente, costituendo essi, uomo e ambiente, l'incrocio, il chiasma, l'intreccio di due correnti processuali in sé non isolabili. L'ipotesi di Perullo è che ogni cesura, teorica o pratica che sia, tra soggetto e oggetto tolga consistenza all'esperienza percettiva che ci lega al mondo. Per dirla con G. Simondon, quello di Perullo è cioè un "realismo delle relazioni", che

reinterpreta l'esperienza percettiva non attraverso gli estremi che la compongono, ma insistendo sulla relazionalità intrinseca a essi. Tuttavia, proprio a partire da questo punto, la proposta di Perullo sembra potersi ricondurre, sia negli intenti sia nei fondamenti teorici, a quella di almeno due pensatori tanto fondamentali nella storia dell'ecologia quanto poco studiati: Aldo Leopold e Arne Næss.

Senza che ci si attardi ora nell'esposizione del pensiero di Leopold e di Næss, e senza nemmeno sostenere che l'estetica ecologica possa assimilarsi a una forma più o meno implicita di *deep ecology* (cosa che, a ben vedere, smonterebbe l'intera proposta di Perullo), ci si può limitare a suggerire un'analogia di fondo tra il percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente e la formula che così bene sintetizza il pensiero di Leopold e che dà il titolo all'edizione italiana della sua opera più importante: «pensare come una montagna» (Leopold [1949]). A ben vedere, infatti, anche nella prospettiva di Leopold, l'ecologia ha poco o niente a che fare con l'ambientalismo e si presenta piuttosto come un'"estetica della conservazione", termine, quest'ultimo, da intendersi nel senso di un'esperienza percettiva olistica. Ed è questa la coscienza ecologica di cui discute Leopold: un'educazione alla percezione, un impegno alla formazione del sentire in correlazione coll'ambiente. Secondo Leopold esiste un senso della natura come esiste un senso artistico o un senso dell'umorismo e, di qui, un *gusto* per la *wilderness*, che va esercitato come un'arte, un'arte di vedere, ascoltare e toccare la natura – apticamente, si direbbe con Perullo. Proprio per questo: «pensare come una montagna equivale quindi ad importare nelle pratiche quotidiane il punto di vista olistico, o sistemico, dell'ecologia scientifica e quindi a rivestirla di una dimensione etica: sapere contemplare significa immediatamente sapere imporsi delle regole, dei limiti ma anche delle forme positive di interazione con l'ambiente» (Leopold [1949]: 10).

Il pensiero corre subito a Spinoza, o meglio, allo Spinoza di Næss – Næss che intitola proprio una delle sue più importanti raccolte di saggi *The Ecology of Wisdom* (2008). In effetti, è proprio attraverso Spinoza che quest'ultimo ripensa in

chiave "ecologica" quello che nell'*Etica* era il terzo genere di conoscenza, e la filosofia spinoziana più in generale, interpretandola nel senso di una tensione del soggetto tutta rivolta all'acquisizione della consapevolezza profonda dell'interconnessione, per dirla in termini gestaltici, di figura e sfondo, di sé e altro, della rete che connette e unisce insieme gli elementi che la compongono. Si tratta, anche nel caso di Næss, di un'educazione alla percezione che mira alla costruzione di un soggetto consapevole e saggio. Convieni, a questo proposito, citare un passo tratto dal saggio di Næss menzionato in precedenza: «In the ecosophy I feel at home with, a fundamental norm can be formulated using one word, "self-realization!" The nearest term in the terminology of the *Ethics*, to persevere in one's self, can be interpreted in the direction of "express one's self" [...]. The self can be said to comprise that with which one identifies. The identification may be superficial or deep, the scope of identification narrow or broad. The person, I suggest, who is "all-round" mature cannot avoid identifying with every living being – seeing himself or herself in every being. If the two persons are Anne and Tom Taylor, clearly they do not see Anne and Tom in every being. There is something they see in themselves and in any other being. What something? It is tempting to mention one particular metaphysical theory specifying the x. I refer to the Bhagavad Gita's announcement: "Those who are equipped with yoga look on all with an impartial eye, seeing Atman (the Self) in all beings and all beings in Atman"» (Næss [2008]: 248-249).

E questo non è, in fondo, lo stesso di quanto sostenuto da Perullo, che sovente si richiama al pensiero orientale, così vicino alla prospettiva di Næss? La saggezza, come suggerito dal suo testo, è proprio quest'educazione ad una percezione che possa corrispondere alla processualità dell'incontro, che si faccia essa stessa incontro, nel senso di apertura consapevole e disponibile ad accogliere la singolarità dell'esperienza.

Allora, se ciò è vero, così come Perullo propone nel sesto capitolo del testo, dedicato al gusto e all'alimentazione carnivora, di sostituire a una *dietetica della scelta* una *dietetica della cura* - ovvero,

di nuovo seguendo il paradigma aptico, un'educazione al gusto occasionata dalla singolarità dell'esperienza percettiva - allo stesso modo si potrebbe sviluppare in direzione di una "saggezza ecologica" tutta la sua proposta estetica. In che modo ciò potrebbe sostituire o ampliare un'etica ambientalista che, come nota Perullo nelle prime pagine del libro, ricade inevitabilmente nel dualismo? In che modo, poi, rendere quest'etica operativa?

Queste sono solo alcune delle questioni ricavabili da un testo assai ricco, e che perciò merita una discussione più approfondita di quella svolta pocanzi. Tuttavia, a mio parere, è proprio questo il punto più urgente sul quale riflettere, e ciò sia per ragioni storiche sia più squisitamente filosofiche. Queste domande, infatti, sollevano il problema che mi sembra centrale per qualsiasi filosofia che voglia confrontarsi seriamente con gli attuali problemi generati dalla crisi ecologica: in che modo deve porsi la filosofia nei confronti dell'ecologia?

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**Citation:** AA.VV. (2020) Recensioni. *Aisthesis* 13(1): 193-199. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-11806

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Recensioni

**Otávio Bueno, George Darby, Steven French and Dean Rickles (eds.), *Thinking about Science, Reflecting on Art*, Abingdon (UK) and New York (NY), Routledge 2018, pp. 192, ISBN 978-1-138-68732-5.**

This collected volume discusses relationships between topics in philosophy of science, on the one hand, and aesthetics and philosophy of art, on the other hand.

In the first essay, Julia Sánchez-Dorado argues for the benefits of bringing those disciplines together, considering Bas C. van Fraassen's (Van Fraassen [2008]) discussion of the analogies between the practice of perspectival drawing and the practice of representing the world through scientific representations and Catherine Elgin's view that both scientific and artistic representation have cognitive value (illustrated in the essay by Elgin collected in the volume). At the same time, Sánchez-Dorado shows some methodological difficulties raised by other philosophical attempts at building bridges between science and art, discussing cases in which artworks are used to illustrate features of scientific representations, art theoretical concepts are used to argue about representation in science, and links between representation in art and science are established.

Catherine Elgin's key thesis is that «art, like science, embodies, conveys, and often constitutes understanding» (Elgin [1983]: 27) in particular because «epistemically rewarding works of art reorient us, enabling us to see things differently from the ways we saw them before» (Elgin [1983]: 28). In a nutshell, she argues that experiments, thought experiments, scientific models, caricatures and works of fiction all employ the mechanism of exemplification, which consists in both instantiating and referring to certain properties. In particular, they «contrive artificial situations to exemplify features that otherwise are likely to be epistemically inaccessible or overlooked» (Elgin [1983]: 38).

Roman Frigg and James Nguyen develop on the topic of exemplification in art and science, focusing on cases in which objects *non-literally* instantiate certain properties and, nevertheless, exemplify them. They explain non-literal instantiation without appealing to

the vague and problematic notion of “metaphorical instantiation” introduced by Goodman (Goodman [1976]) and Elgin (Elgin [1983]).

Ann-Sophie Barwich’s contribution is concerned with the interpretation of ambiguous elements in scientific models. Just as we cannot infer from the text of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* how many children Lady Macbeth had, «the chemical formulas of Berzelius, for example, give information about proportions but not about mechanical features of atoms, such as their size or shape» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 68). Barwich discusses in detail the case of a protein model built through X-ray crystallography, showing that in science, unlike literary fiction, this kind of ambiguities are addressed by integrating one scientific model with other methods.

Otávio Bueno argues that «in many instances involving visual evidence in the sciences, the particular form of imagination that is required is precisely the one that is in place in order to make sense of key aspects of one’s experience in the arts» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 80). He draws a parallel between imagining fictional characters based on the perceptual content given by a film and imagining seeing an acid based on the perceptual content given by images of a cell generated by an electron microscope, with reference to the experiments conducted by George Palade in the 1950s.

George Darby, Martin Pickup and Jon Robson return to the topic of indeterminacy in fiction and science, examining what they call “deep indeterminacy” in both metaphysics and fiction. Deep indeterminacy arises not as a consequence of the vagueness of our representations of the world (as when e.g. *Macbeth* doesn’t tell us how many children Lady Macbeth had), but as a consequence of the fact that the world itself is indeterminate – as implied by quantum mechanics, according to the authors of the essay (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 106-108), as well as by works of fiction such as Henry James’ *The Turn of The Screw*, where it is not clear whether the author is telling a ghost story or a story about a troubled soul and thus the indeterminacy «is not merely a matter of

what the storyteller neglects to specify but, rather, it is essential to the nature and value of the work that no such specification is provided» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 108). Darby, Pickup and Robson propose to model deep indeterminacy in both quantum mechanics and fiction by using the notion of *situations* (understood as *parts* of possible worlds).

Dean Rickles concentrates on the tension between accounts of music qua objective structure and accounts of music qua objective experience and submits that Arthur Eddington’s (Eddington [1921]; [1936]) “selective subjectivism” – a view developed in the realm of philosophy of science – can successfully deal with such tension.

Alix Cohen puts forward an original interpretation of Kant’s views on beauty and cognition. Criticizing alternative readings, she claims that, according to Kant, cognition can be beautiful and in particular that in §5 of KU Kant implicitly suggests that «the same representation can be related to the subject in a number of ways, and which way obtains is defined by the determining ground of the judgement that ensues: it is a cognitive judgement if it is grounded on a concept, and it is an aesthetic judgement if it is grounded on a feeling of disinterested pleasure. Hence, even when we are judging a representation that is fully conceptualized and determined (“rational”), as long as our judgement is based on disinterested pleasure, it is a judgement of taste» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 142). Finally, Cohen argues that, within the Kantian framework, aesthetic feelings are not irrelevant or even detrimental to cognition, but instead always boost cognition: «experiencing a particular cognition as beautiful is good for my cognition of it. This is due to the fact that there is an intrinsic connection between the feeling of beauty and the efficiency of my cognitive activity. The experience of a cognition as beautiful stimulates the activity of the imagination and understanding, and thus stimulates our cognitive activity as it occurs» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 149). Cohen stresses that the link is merely between beauty and the state of the cognitive faculties, and not between beauty and epis-

temic credence or beauty and truth (in this, her proposal differs from Breitenbach [2013]).

Adam Toon explores “mental factionalism” – the view (inspired by Kendall Walton’s views on fiction, among others) that it is *useful* to talk about psychological states as if they existed, even if it might be the case that they don’t exist (as eliminativists like Paul Churchland have argued). According to Toon, folk psychological states talk is useful because it allows to «capture complex interactions between our brains, bodies and external devices – some linguistic, others not» (Bueno, Darby, French, Rickles [2018]: 164).

In the last essay, Steven French considers the pros and cons of applying Amie Thomasson’s ontological view of artworks as created abstract artifacts to the ontology of scientific theories, describing analogies and disanalogies between artworks and models. In his concluding remarks, he suggests that eliminativism about both artworks and scientific theories might be a view worthy of investigation.

This is a remarkable collection providing insights on methodological links between philosophy of science and of art, on the cognitive goals of both science and art, on the role of fiction in both fields of research, on how research in philosophy of science can illuminate issues in philosophy of art and aesthetics and vice-versa, and on the ontology of artworks and scientific theories. It is a wide variety of topics, each worthy of a monograph or a specific collection of essays. For instance, the questions raised by Bueno about the role of imagination for scrutinizing visual scientific evidence deserve to be discussed within the larger debate on perceptual imagination (including e.g. works by Fabian Dorsch and Bence Nanay), Cohen’s interpretation of Kant intersects with e.g. work by Breitenbach (e.g. Breitenbach [2018]), Costello (Costello, [2007]) and Schellekens (Schellekens [2007]), and French’s ontological investigation would benefit from dialogue with e.g. David Davies (e.g. 2017) and Julian Dodd (e.g. Dodd [2013]). I hope more collaborative work between philosophers of science and aestheticians will be conducted in the future.

Contents: Notes on Contributors – Introduction – Methodological lessons for the integration of philosophy of science and aesthetics: The case of representation (Julia Sánchez-Dorado) – Nature’s handmaid, art (Catherine Z. Elgin) – Of barrels and pipes: Representation-as in art and science (Roman Frigg and James Nguyen) – Is Captain Kirk a natural blonde? Do X-ray crystallographers dream of electron clouds? Comparing model-based inferences in science with fiction (Ann-Sophie Barwich) – Interpreting the sciences, interpreting the arts (Otávio Bueno) – Deep indeterminacy in physics and fiction (George Darby, Martin Pickup and Jon Robson) – Some philosophical problems of music theory (and some music-theoretic problem of philosophy) (Dean Rickles) – Kant on beauty and cognition (Alix Cohen) – Epistemology as fiction (Adam Toon) – Art, science and abstract artefacts (Steven French).

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[by Elisa Caldarola]

**Susan Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2018, pp. 392, ISBN: 9780300222685.**

Issued in 2018, Susan Lanzoni's book *Empathy: A History* has, quite rightly, drawn the attention of the ever-growing number of academics working on the cross-disciplinary concept of empathy who were eager to finally have available, in English, a significant historical study on the question. In her nearly 400-page volume, the author analyzes the evolution of scientific ideas and practices about empathy, as well as its social and political representations, over a time span that runs from the late 19th century to the present. She shows how, from the pioneering aesthetic and psychological investigations that were carried out before WWI, empathology developed and diversified in the interwar period by spreading to other domains such as psychiatry, psychotherapy, and sociology and came to pervade, after WWII, the collective psyche and the ideological discourse before becoming, in the last few decades, a major matter of debate in neuroscience. The title does not

indicate that the book is almost entirely devoted to the fate of empathy within the American context, although Lanzoni insists, in the first chapter, on the seminality of German studies on *Einführung* and strives, in the last chapter, to place current debates on empathy within the framework of international research. The author chooses to treat empathy as a multifaceted historical object that deserves to be considered in its scientific as well as in its extra-scientific aspects, so that her study has more to do with the history of ideas than with the history of science. Lanzoni's approach, which basically consists of discussing, over various time periods, the significance of a psychological concept in a variety of intellectual, cultural, and social contexts, is clearly in keeping with the currently prevailing methodology in the history of knowledge. It is worth noting that the author tends to move, over the chapters, from conceptual history to social and cultural history. This methodological shift directly echoes the gradual change of status undergone, according to Lanzoni, by the issue of empathy during the 20th century.

The developments proposed in the second chapter in regard to the question of how, in the early 20th century, *Einführung* terminologically and conceptually became "empathy" within the English-speaking context, are undoubtedly the greatest achievement of the whole book. Here Lanzoni succeeds in clarifying the origins of the term "empathy" and its uses by carrying out a philological inquiry that nobody had seriously undertaken before her (see also: Lanzoni [2017]). Against the prevailing historiographical dogma, she demonstrates that the expression appeared, not in 1909, but as early as 1908, and that it was proposed, not by Edward B. Titchener alone, but simultaneously by Titchener and James Ward. As she points out, the emergence and recognition of the term should be placed within the broader framework of the contemporary British/American debate about the most adequate way of rendering *Einführung* in English. As she nicely shows, "empathy" was only one of several terminological possibilities that were proposed during that period. Interestingly, Lanzoni also insists on the semantic

dimension of this terminological debate by highlighting that the various scholars who took part in it each had their own way of defining the corresponding concept. By doing so, she sketches out the conditions underlying the acculturation of the research tradition on *Einfühlung* within the English-speaking context. Regarding the spreading of the term, she shows that, after a period of uncertainty between 1908 and 1913, “empathy” came to be commonly used in the specialized literature, although the expression was subject to severe criticisms until the late 1920s.

Lanzoni’s depiction of the landscape of empathological research in the interwar period constitutes a further significant contribution to the history of empathy. Here, too, by showing that, far from being on the wane, empathy studies flourished during this time span, she convincingly challenges the prevailing historiography. As she demonstrates in chapters three, four, five, and six, not only did empathy continue to foil aesthetics and art theory until WWII, but it became, in the 1920-1940s, a major focus of interest for American psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and sociology. According to the author, while remaining a subject of theoretical concerns, it established itself as a core concept of a number of applied disciplines and social/therapeutic practices. Reading her book, one is also surprised to learn that, as a theorist of *Einfühlung*, Lipps remained a major source of inspiration for American aestheticians, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists until WWII and beyond. Here, too, by significantly revisiting the Lipps scholarship, the author helps shed new light on the history of empathy. Finally, Lanzoni should be praised for having systematically addressed, for the first time, the question of how the term “empathy” and the empathological discourse were popularized outside intellectual and specialized circles. Here we are dealing with an issue that runs all the way through the book, but that is specifically discussed in chapter seven («Popular Empathy») in which the author analyzes the growing interest in empathy in American society of the post-war years. She demonstrates how, during that period, «empathy became», in the media,

as well as in counseling, cinema, theater, literature, etc., «the term of choice for an emotional and reasoned understanding of others» (Lanzoni [2018]: 213) and how deeply and enduringly it became rooted in the collective psyche.

Despite these remarkably innovative achievements, *Empathy: A History* is far from being above criticism, and some developments, especially those expounded in the first and in the last chapters, prove to be highly questionable.

The first chapter, which is supposed to explore the origins of the concept of empathy in the 19th and early 20th centuries, far from fulfills its objectives. Not only is the historical survey proposed by Lanzoni incomplete and inaccurate, but it also provides a distorted view of the beginnings of empathology. Here she misses two essential points: (a) the term *Einfühlung*, while having emerged within the framework of the German psychoaesthetic tradition, was not exclusive to aesthetics and art theory, but was also in common use, in the early 20th century, among psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, etc.; (b) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many scholars worked on empathy-related issues without using the term “*Einfühlung*”, and the fact is that empathological studies emerged before the expression was coined and popularized (Romand [2015]). In addition to wondering about the variety of meanings and uses of “*Einfühlung*”, she should have considered the genealogy of the concept independently from the history of the term. Although the history of empathy can be contemplated in the very long term (Pinotti [2011]), the birth of modern empathology has to do with the rise, from the mid-19th century onward, of cross-disciplinary concerns about *social cognition* in the wake of the emergence of affective psychology (Romand [2015]). It is only by revisiting this research program, which developed mostly in German-speaking countries at the intersection of psychology, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, that one can hope to correctly address the issue of the origins of empathy studies. Here Lanzoni, who exclusively focuses on the psychoaesthetic tradition of *Einfühlung* and who favors English-speaking

scholars to the detriment of German-speaking scholars, clearly misses the point. Another flaw of the first chapter lies in the author's misconception of aesthetic empathy. What Lanzoni refers to as "aesthetic empathy" corresponds in reality to what Lipps called "aesthetic mechanics" (*ästhetische Mechanik*), that is, the view that one's aesthetic appraisal of spatial forms results from one's capacity to "interpret" them by feeling, acting, striving, moving, etc. in them. Although the issue of aesthetic mechanics was an important aspect of the theory of aesthetic empathy and proved to be instrumental in its emergence in the late 19th century, it can in no way be identified with *Einfühlungsästhetik*, as it established itself at the turning point of the 20th century. In its "canonical" acceptance, "*ästhetische Einfühlung*" refers to a universal and ubiquitous psychological power that, far from being restricted to space aesthetics, is involved in all aspects and all forms of aesthetic experience (Romand [2020]). Lanzoni's first chapter is also open to criticism because she deals only superficially with Theodor Lipps, the great theorist of *Einfühlung*, who contributed, in the early 20th century, to making famous both the term and the concept. Not only does she devote surprisingly little space to the Lippsian theory of empathy, but she also gives the impression of having only second-hand knowledge of the author and his *oeuvre*. Among other things, she seems to ignore that Lipps's *Einfühlung* is an umbrella term that does not refer simply to the fact of "putting oneself into someone's shoes", but also to a variety of functions such as the perception of animacy, the expression of emotions, the sense of agency, and the perception of causality and physical forces (Romand [2020]), and that the corresponding concept, far from being restricted to his aesthetics and psychology, is also found in his ethics, epistemology, philosophy of science, theory of language, and metaphysics (Fabbianelli [2018]). Moreover, Lanzoni does not discuss Lipps per se, but simply *en passant* through her developments on the British writer and amateur aesthete Vernon Lee, to whom most of the first chapter is devoted. Her propensity to grossly underevaluate Lipps's contri-

bution while overemphasizing that of Lee and other second-rank scholars constitutes, in my view, a major methodological flaw.

Devoted to the fate of empathology in current neuroscience, the last chapter proves to be largely unconvincing as well. Lanzoni fails to correctly place the concept of empathy within the scientific and philosophical context of social cognition studies and to discuss it in light of cognate notions such as theory of mind, sense of agency, perception of animacy, etc. Against all expectations, she addresses neither the question of the polysemousness of the term "empathy", nor that of the variety of the expressions used by current scholars to refer to empathy-related issues. Another serious flaw of the last chapter is that the author almost totally disregards the issue of the revived interest in empathy in aesthetics, a crucial event of modern empathology to which the author devotes only a few lines (Lanzoni [2018]: 264-265) and that should have deserved much greater emphasis. Apparently, Lanzoni is unaware of the fact that current empathy-related studies, as they established themselves in the last decades of the 20th century, correspond, to a large extent, to the resurgence of the cross-disciplinary empathological paradigm that developed mostly in Germany between the mid-19th century and WWI. If she had correctly analyzed both the origins of empathology and its most recent developments, she could have easily highlighted that modern research on empathy and, more broadly speaking, social cognition, nicely fits with Lipps's overarching concept of *Einfühlung*.

More general criticisms can be addressed relative to the content and the organization of the book. For instance, the author demonstrates, throughout her book, a strong US-centered tropism that leads her to almost totally overlook other research traditions on empathy, especially the German-speaking tradition, which was, however, hegemonic until at least WWI. Moreover, one is forced to admit that, as a psychological concept, empathy is not satisfyingly placed in its intellectual context, the author, in addition to being often too descriptive, preferring to study-

ing empathology in light of its broader socio-cultural environment. Finally, it is regrettable that Lanzoni remains completely silent on the fruitful philosophical empathological tradition, which dates back to the second half of the 19th century. Besides Lipps's contribution, she might have highlighted the importance of empathy and related concepts in immanentist positivism (Mach, Avenarius, Gomperz), the phenomenological movement (Husserl, Scheler, Stein), and, more recently, in Quine, while saying a word about current philosophers of empathy such as Dan Zahavi. Such an oversight is all the less excusable because there exists a rich secondary literature on the topic (e.g. Zahavi [2009]; Russo Krauss [2013]; Baghrmian [2016]; Depraz [2017]; Fabbianelli [2018]).

Table of contents: Preface; Acknowledgments; Introduction; Part I: Empathy as the Art of Movement; 1. The Roots of *Einfühlung* or Empathy in the Arts; 2. From *Einfühlung* to Empathy; 3. Empathy in Art and Modern Dance; Part II: Making Empathy Scientific; 4. The Limits of Empathy in Schizophrenia; 5. Empathy in Social Work and Psychotherapy; 6. Measuring Empathy; Part III: Empathy in Culture and Politics; 7. Popular Empathy; 8. Empathy, Race, and Politics; 9. Empathic Brains; Conclusion; Notes; Index.

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[by David Romand]

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