Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

Aesthetics in Times of Contagion

edited by
Filippo Fimiani
Andrea Mecacci
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Foreword

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

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

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

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

Thus, there is no room for hesitation in claiming that, in light of this portrait, the COVID-19's pandemic represents a very plausible spot of *punctuational change* in the evolution of the paradigms of aesthetic experience. The *distal* character of interaction, transmission, fruition and creation has risen with enough force to give the ultimate spin to a reorganization of fundamental categories of the aesthetic experience: contact, proximity and distance.

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

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

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

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

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

Andrea Mecacci
Vincenzo Zingaro
Filippo Fimiani

CORONATION

Michel Deguy

« Le coronavirus »… déjà un hémistiche !
L'épigramme peut cadencer !

La contamination descend des Contamines
Tes confins mes confins se confinent
Mais nos confins débordent le confinement
Nousnous se contamine
J'entends l'économie décroître dans les bourses

Dix millions de Chinois auront perdu la face
Masques et vidéos se toisent en chiens de faciès

Le gros Trump a tweeté
"No virus in the States"
Poutine a remis Dieu dans la constitution
Marine avec sa clé rouillée
Verrouille les frontières
Son compère Boris en bouffon Victoria
Repeint sa City en Singapour sur Tamise

Les croisières s'enquarantainent à quai de covi-
rés
Venise sauvée des veaux
Les Verts tout exaucés avant les élections
 Sont décontenancés

Le film passe à l'envers la mondialisation
Le ciel bleu rebleuit à Pékin
Le piéton de Paris bouge son spleen en trotti-
nette

Six millions de Lombards et 631 †
80 929 chez Xi et plus de 3 000 †
1 784 hexagonaux et seulement 33 †

Le mot reconnaissance a perdu le bon sens

 Et quittant Levinas retrace l'ADN
Mondialisation et pandémie font connaissance
Et ne se quitteront plus
Les migrants vont mourir encoronavirés
Les passeurs de Libye font monter les enchères

Mais pas d'souci Raymonde
Tout ça va repartir
L'empereur Xi démasque son sinisme

Michel Deguy, mars 2020

CORONAZIONE

Michel Deguy

«Il coronavirus»… già un emistichio!
    L'epigramma può cadenzare!

La contaminazione scende dalle Contamines
    I tuoi confini i miei confini si confinano
Ma i nostri confini travalicano il confinamento
    Noinoi si contamina
Sento l'economia decrescere nelle borse

Dieci milioni di Cinesi avranno perso la faccia
Maschere e video si squadrano come cani di
faccia

Il grasso Trump ha twittato
    "No virus in the States"
Putin ha rimesso Dio nella costituzione
Marine con la sua chiave arrugginita
    Blocca le frontiere
Il suo compare Boris da buffone Victoria
    Ridipinge la sua City da Singapore sul
Tamigi

Le crociere s'inquarantenano al molo degli scac-
ciati

Venezia salvata dalle vacque
I Verdi tutti soddisfatti prima delle elezioni
    Sono disorientati

Il film proietta al contrario la mondializzazione
    Il cielo blu rimbluisce a Pechino
Il pedone di Parigi porta a spasso il suo spleen
in monopattino

Sei milioni di Lombardi e 631 †
80 929 da Xi e più di 3 000 †
1 784 esagonali e soltanto 33 †

La parola riconoscenza ha perduto il buonsenso
    E lasciando Levinas ritraccia il DNA
Mondializzazione e pandemia fanno conoscenza
    E non si lasceranno più
I migranti moriranno incoronavizzati

    Ma non preoccuparti Raymonde
    Tutto ciò ripartirà
    L'imperatore Xi smaschera il suo xinismo

Marzo 2020 (traduzione italiana di Fabio Scotto)

NOTA DEL TRADUTTORE

Questo "biglietto" poetico di Michel Deguy si propone come una cronaca dolentemente ironica del momento presente. Fin dal titolo, che allude vagamente all'incoronazione/coronamento che pur racchiude *corona* (abbreviazione francese corrente per *coronavirus*), il testo sceglie la modalità del *calembour*, dell'agglutinazione e del poliptoto che non disdegna il neologismo grottesco e la forzatura del vocabolario allo scopo di fare emergere dalla materia verbale stessa i sintomi di una malattia che pare invadere anche il linguaggio e che quindi non può che parlare attraverso il suo corpo (del linguaggio) malato della malattia del presente. E si tratta di un male mondiale, universale, di qui l'ironia dissacratoria su alcuni potenti della terra che ne hanno scioccamente minimizzato la gravità e gli effetti, da Trump a Putin allo stesso Boris (Johnson) e a Marine (Le Pen).

Il testo, che ricorre a una modalità irridente critica del momento storico e delle sue manie, dove la pandemia pare quasi una proiezione ulteriore dell'altrettanto patologica mondializzazione con le sue crisi di Borsa e le oscillazioni dei titoli (le due fanno, in effetti, conoscenza nella penultima stanza del testo), mette in luce, con piglio poetico-sociologico, l'oggi avverso; la quotidiana cronaca freddamente statistica di infetti e morti trova nella gnomica conclusiva sull'odierno "imperatore" del Paese di provenienza del fenomeno virale, mentre altre tragedie quasi passano in secondo piano, come notoriamente quella dei migranti, il suo apice.

Nella mia traduzione ho cercato di conformarmi quanto più possibile, almeno per quanto nell'originale fossero intelligibili e individuabili (non sempre paiono esserlo) ai giochi di parola e ai neologismi del francese, di qui opzioni verbali come «s'inquarantenano», «rimbluisce», o sostantivali, come «vacque» – che cumula per omofonia «acque» e «vacche», derivazione semantica di «veaux» - vitelli –, o ancora «xinismo» – come «cinismo» di Xi, forse forzandone il sema al fine di riprodurne lo scarto che in italiano il calco «sinismo» non avrebbe saputo rendere.

Vi è in ogni *divertissement* una nota grave, il risvolto tragico del comico: qui credo sia un monito di Michel Deguy alla responsabilità civile e alla vigilanza, monito al quale la mia traduzione ha cercato, con tutte le forze e i limiti della nostra lingua, di non sottrarsi.

Fabio Scotto

(La poesia di Michel Deguy è pubblicata per gentile concessione dell'Autore - apparsa in "PO&SIE" Revue trimestrielle fondée par Michel Deguy en 1977, Chronique de la Rédaction, 13 mars 2020 : https://po-et-sie.fr/chroniques/coronation/)

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«The limbs and the wheel»: about Coronation by Michel Deguy

«Les membres et la roue». À propos de *Coronation* de Michel Deguy

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> *Je suis les membres et la roue!*
> (Charles Baudelaire, *L'Heautontimorouménos*)

Si l'on s'en tient à Ferdinand de Saussure il n'y a, à l'origine de toute chose, que le fonctionnement (Meschonnic [2008]: 423). Semblablement, le fait de se demander d'abord «à quoi ça ressemble» (Deguy [1987]: 42) est, selon Deguy, la tâche principale de la poésie. Contrairement à l'attitude la plus courante dans la communication linguistique où la question, déproblématisée, coïncide avec sa réponse, il s'agit de mettre en œuvre, avec Michel Meyer, une constante re-problematisation du procès linguistique et, par conséquent, cognitif (Deguy [1987]: 42). Remonter au mouvement de la parole qui cherche sa chose manipulant son signifiant et le forçant ainsi à secréter sa causalité interne est à notre sens l'un des enjeux les plus marquants de la poétique de Michel Deguy.

La notion d'«hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens» empruntée à Paul Valéry (Valéry [1941]: 636), que Deguy aime souvent à citer, peut être considérée comme l'expression même du statut interrogatif, éminemment suspensif, caractérisant le rapport entre les mots et les choses; rapport sur lequel Foucault bâtit plus tard, comme on sait, une "archéologie des sciences humaines" (Foucault [1966]). Un tel statut est dû, aux yeux de Deguy, au fait que la *contenance*, autrement dit la forme, censée assurer et attester la présence d'un *contenu* donné dans un poème donné, est constamment traversée et décomposée – *décontenancée* – par la poésie, puissance toujours exorbitante par rapport à l'espace confiné du texte:

Ça peut commencer par une figure […], une tournure de la langue qui se met en ses atours, se tournant et contournant et chantournant précieusement. Le sujet vit dans sa langue et de sa langue, porté et emporté dans cette rumeur (Deguy [1987]: 44).

Le rythme (*rhume* de *rheuma*, «flux»), en tant que principe fondatif du fait poétique, est, de lui-même, douleur et remède, *pathos* et *catharsis*. Étant donné la «coextension, pour ne pas dire la synonymie, du phénoménal et du rythmique» (Deguy [1987]: 44), Deguy considère «le pathos comme une pulsation, un rythme, dont l'*avancée* est la 'pitié' et le *recul* la 'terreur'» (Deguy [1987]: 45). Dans cette alternance, dont le sac et le ressac de la mer nous offrent l'exemple, réside (selon Isocrate) l'*antidosis*: ce «donner contre» qui, obtenu par parthénogénèse de ses composants internes[1], retombe et se fixe dans l'«antidote»:

L'aspect d'une chose? […] l'être du «dedans», ou le-plus-au-dedans du dedans se scinde – et cette oppugnance intime constitue son essence ou valence semantique […] – et réciproquement, «antidotique-ment» (Deguy [1987]: 111).

Dans la revue qu'il a lui-même fondée en 1977, *Po&sie*, Deguy publiait le 13 mars 2020[2], au début de l'ère de la pandémie de Coronavirus, un de ses «billets», sous le titre de *Coronation*. Ce terme, usité en moyen français et aujourd'hui désuet, répond de la manière la plus efficace à ce labeur de re-semantisation et re-fonctionnalisation étymologique du langage qui lui est propre. Au nom de la «langue étymologiquement néologisante» (Deguy [1987]: 35), il s'agit de «disjoindre et de conjoindre […] pour ajointer des choses» (Deguy [1987]: 42); autrement dit, décomposer et recomposer les noms dans leurs constituants morphologiques (morphèmes, syllabes, préfixes, infixes, suffixes), de les *plier* et les *déplier*, selon la tradition mallarméenne. Dans le cadre d'un *va-et-vient* entre «paléonymie» et «néonymie» (selon, cette

fois, la terminologie derridienne désormais entrée dans l'usage courant) le mot thématique *corona-tion*, qui se compose d'un substantif (*corona*) et d'un suffixe d'action (lat. –*atio/-ationis*), est mis en relation de substitution avec son allomorphe «couronnement», valant pour «sacre». Le jeu polyptotique qui se produit entre les deux mots rend compte du combat herméneutique que la poésie performative de Deguy engage avec la tradition: le paléonyme supplante et supplée le néo-nyme, renversant ainsi la relation d'appartenance. L'ancien est, autrement dit, plus nouveau que le nouveau... En tant que «nom d'action», le déver-batif *coronation* atteste, en plus, de la présence concomitante de la *dosis* (le don, le donner) et de l'*antidosis* (le contre-don, ou donner-contre): celui qui gagne le combat nomme l'autre, et le décou-ronne. Face, alors, à ce coronavirus «réel» autant que «royal», il fallait trouver l'antidote: à chaque couronne, son découronnement.

Si le nom est un destin (*nomen-omen*, comme on sait), le fait de varier le nom, d'en manipuler le faste, équivaut à se jouer du destin lui-même; à prendre sa revanche contre le tout-venant. Face à la réalité des choses, qui toujours nous décou-ronne, c'est la réalité du nom qui triomphe: jubila-toire prise de pouvoir, recouronnement du détrô-né. D'ailleurs, la pratique culturelle consistant à dompter l'indomptable est bien connue: tous les cataclysmes ont leur petit nom, ont leur cou-ronne de circonstance. La résection, ou ablation d'une section du mot (ce que la science fait à la chose) dans l'espoir d'en triompher par l'antidote, est, elle aussi, à la une: les anglais nommant, par aphérèse, *rona* le *corona*, lui coupent, sans le vou-loir, la tête. Mais ce n'est pas tout: par une erreur de déglutination assez significative, la censure sociale des anglais puritains s'attache inopinément au faux préfixe *co-*, marquant ainsi la contami-nante compagnie entre l'homme et la chose...

Et pourtant, à plus d'un an de distance de la publication de *Coronation* de Deguy, nous sommes encore encerclés, contaminés, par les variantes morphologiques de la maudite cou-ronne. Au moment où nous divaguons, l'hôte obs-cur se transforme, se déguise incessamment par

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[1] Cf. à ce sujet: Deguy (1981).
[2] https://po-et-sie.fr/chroniques/coronation/. Consulté le 7 avril 2021.

ses menus constituants: l'antidote tarde à s'affirmer, à se donner-contre.

La contamination est, d'ailleurs, le procédé même permettant la création. Si l'on se réclame de la doctrine émanatiste de Plotin, ou procession (*ex uno plures*), Dieu crée le monde à partir de sa propre substance, inépuisable, qui se multiplie et se développe, ainsi que se développent, par parthénogénèse, les organismes vivants. La pensée logique elle-même fonctionne par émanation, ou déduction: c'est de la «couronne» première que descendent les «corollaires». Dans le cadre de la doctrine émanatiste, instituant la chaîne des êtres par supplémentarité, la femme ne serait, selon les *Proverbes* (12, 4-5), que l'émanation de l'homme: émanant de l'émané, «corona viro suo»[3]. *Corona viro?* L'histoire enseigne: la couronne est polytrope, elle contemple autant le don que le contre-don, autant l'actif que le passif, et le couronnement est gloire et martyre à la fois. De même, l'auréole est, selon Saint Bonaventure (*Breviloquium* VII, 7, 5), la marque d'un contre-don: c'est à la suite d'un sacrifice qu'elle confère au corps sa plénitude. Dans le *Livre de Job* (31, 35-36) il est dit que le Livre écrit par celui qui juge doit être porté sur ses épaules, et doit entourer la tête de son témoin tel une couronne. Ainsi, en vertu de sa circularité formelle et symbolique la couronne a, comme le sacré dont elle se fait l'expression, deux faces: celle du mandant et celle du mandataire.

Dans une fresque funèbre du XVe siècle on voit un squelette assis sur un trône d'or qui s'aliène, par des coups de pied, les prédicats positifs qui l'entourent: mitres, couronnes, livres, globe terrestre. Sa tête est appuyée sur sa main desséchée, cherchant à soutenir une couronne vacillante. C'est l'une des nombreuses vanités qui peuplent *Les Fleurs du mal* de Baudelaire. Dans *Le Masque* (Baudelaire [1861]: 23) «chaque trait» du «visage mignard, tout encadré de gaze» invite le poète à prononcer «avec un air vainqueur» ce magnifique alexandrin: «La Volupté m'appelle et l'Amour me couronne!».

Cette autocitation si menaçante, dûment encerclée, isolée, réifiée par les guillemets, est d'elle-même un couronnement ironique de la part du poète. De même, dans *Une gravure fantastique*, le «diadème affreux sentant le carnaval» (Baudelaire [1861]: 69) se reclamerait d'un témoignage de Villeneuve-Bargemont (1424), concernant une danse macabre: «épouvantable divertissement auquel présidait un squelette ceint du diadème royal et assis sur un trône resplendissant de pierreries» (Richter [2003]: 203). Ainsi Baudelaire nous montrerait du doigt, une fois de plus, l'auréole de la gloire poétique souillée, déchue et dégradée, si l'on se souvient de *Perte d'auréole* (Baudelaire [1868]: 352). C'est, justement, de ce poème en prose que se réclame Walter Benjamin pour constater la perte 'auratique' de l'objet suite à son déplacement, à sa mobilité et, finalement, à sa contamination par l'industrie (Benjamin [1936]: 28). Baudelaire aime, d'ailleurs, à se défaire des attributs du poète couronné, en se peignant volontiers comme l'émanation pestilentielle du dessein divin exécuté par la Mère (*Bénédiction*, Baudelaire [1861]: 7-9). Les «boutons empestés» de cette descendance seront tressés néanmoins en de nouvelles couronnes dans *Je te donne ces vers* (Baudelaire [1861]: 40):

> *[...] il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique*
> *Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers.*

Stéphane Mallarmé, tout admiratif qu'il était des épigrammes licencieuses composant la *Couronne* (*stephanos*) de Méléagre de Gadara (l'étymon *stephanos* étant déjà attesté chez Homère: *Iliade*, VIII, v. 597), devait connaître le *Peri stephanon* de Prudence, qui compte parmi les traités les plus célèbres de la martyrologie chrétienne. C'est justement Stéphane, le premier martyr, qui prend, par éponymie, le nom de la «couronne» dont on lui ceint la tête: se repropose en effet, en milieu chrétien, la valeur sacrificielle de la couronne de laurier (Daphné poursuivie par Apollon, s'enfuit en se transfigurant dans la plante qui devient, pour le poète, la marque même de la douleur poétique; thème que Dante et Pétrarque auront repris

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[3] «Mulier diligens corona est viro suo, et quasi putredo in ossibus eius, quae est inhonesta».

à leur compte). La topique médiévale du bois amer avec lequel on tresse la couronne des poètes revient chez Mallarmé: c'est de Dante que se réclame le «laurier amer» de *Contre un poète parisien* (Mallarmé [1862]: 20)[4]. Paul Valéry s'en souviendra dans le *Cimetière marin*, évoquant la mort en tant que «consolatrice affreusement laurée» (Valéry [1920]: 150])[5]. Se rémémorant l'exemple baudelairien, Mallarmé évoque, à titre d'équivalent du nom, l'horrible diadème d'Hérodiade (Mallarmé [1887]: 42) qui se réflète dans son miroir: don contre don, nom contre vie. Ainsi, dans *La chevelure, vol d'une flamme* (Mallarmé [1887]: 53):

> *La chevelure vol d'une flamme à l'extrême*
> *Occident de désirs pour la tout déployer*
> *Se pose (je dirais mourir un diadème)*
> *Vers le front couronné son ancien foyer.*

Le nom «diadème», déverbatif de *diadeo* («ceindre la tête par un fil»), est un mot-thème qui se dissémine dans l'espace du texte par le biais de ses constituants morphologiques, formant ainsi un réseau paragrammatique: le morphème phonolexical *-diade* évoque, à lui seul, le lien à double fil donnant le mot d'*Hérodiade* (héroïne morte-vivante, écrasée par le poids symbolique de son nom) [Mallarmé 1887: 45-46], ou, par anagramme, l'*Idumée* évoqué dans *Don du poème* (Mallarmé [1887]: 40)[6], ou bien encore le thème suffixal déverbatif *–ème* si récurrent chez Mallarmé. Au «diadème», remplaçant du nom du poète, s'associent d'autres prédicats d'identité, tels la «guirlande» d'*Une dentelle s'abolit* (Mallarmé [1887]: 74):

> *Cet unanime blanc conflit*
> *D'une guirlande avec la même,*
> *Enfui contre la vitre blême*
> *Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit.*

Ce quatrain rend compte, autant que faire se peut, du combat herméneutique entre la *dosis* et l'*antidosis*, entre le don et le contre-don qui fait le lot du poète-martyr; on se souvient une fois de plus d'Hérodiade se regardant dans son miroir nocturne. De même, dans *Le Cimetière marin* (Valéry [1920]: 149) Valéry reprend le thème du martyre du poète, «affreusement lauré», dans ces termes:

> *Tête complète et parfait diadème,*
> *Je suis en toi le secret changement.*

Une variante hypocoristique de «couronne», «corolle» (<*coronula*), évoque, par synecdoque, la fleur dont l'effusion peut être, à la fois, baume et poison, dot et antidote. Dans *L'automne* de Lamartine (Lamartine [1820]: 76), la corolle qui se détache de sa tige (qui, autrement dit, abandonne son 'lieu') répand autour d'elle un parfum mortifère, aura pestilentielle:

> *La fleur tombe en livrant ses parfums au zéphire;*
> *[…]*
> *Moi, je meurs; et mon âme, au moment qu'elle expire,*
> *S'exhale comme un son triste et mélodieux.*

Dans un texte successif, *La cloche du village* (Lamartine [1839]: 1161), les cloches sont, par métonymie, autant de corolles attachées à leur tige, le clocher; sauf que la force centrifuge du mouvement provoque le détachement de l'objet de son tronc et la dissémination mortifère de cet appel[7]. C'est donc une fois de plus, semble-t-il, l'abandon du 'lieu', et l'ubiquité 'auratique' de la corolle qui provoque le désastre: l'effet, s'émancipant de sa cause, contamine l'espace circonstant d'une odeur fétide. De même, la guirlande se défait au crépuscule de la vie, pour un festin mortifère:

> *Guirlandes du festin que pour un soir on cueille,*
> *Que la haine empoisonne ou que l'envie effeuille,*

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[4] «Dante, au laurier amer, dans un linceul se drape,/Un linceul fait de nuit et de sérénité»

[5] «Maigre immortalité noire et dorée,/Consolatrice affreusement laurée,/Qui de la mort fais un sein maternel,/Le beau mensonge et la pieuse ruse!/Qui ne connaît, et qui ne les refuse,/Ce crâne vide et ce rire éternel!»

[6] Voir à ce sujet: Saurat (1931).

[7] «Quand du clocher vibrant l'hirondelle habitante/S'envole au vent d'airain qui fait trembler sa tente,/Et de l'étang ridé vient effleurer les bords…»

Dont vingt fois sous les mains la couronne se rompt,
Qui donnent à la vie un moment de vertige,
Mais dont la fleur d'emprunt ne tient pas à la tige,
Et qui sèche en tombant du front.

Des «boutons empestés» de *Bénédiction* (Baudelaire [1861]: 7), à *Harmonie du soir* (Baudelaire [1861: 47] où, on s'en souvient, «Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir», à *Le Jet d'eau* (Baudelaire [1861]: 160), où la «gerbe épanouie/en mille fleurs» est associée à la plainte sanglotante de la fontaine de vie qui «tombe comme une pluie/De larges pleurs», c'est la dissolution du mot-thème, et son expansion-exhalaison qui provoque, chez Baudelaire, le désastre. Semblablement, dans *Les Fleurs* de Mallarmé (Mallarmé [1887]: 33) la terre innocente, encore «vierge de désastres», est fécondée par des fleurs pestilentielles qui, se détachant de leur tige, infestent le monde de leurs néfastes réplications. La corolle, calice sacré dont on s'abreuve dans l'innocence[8], est détachée de sa matrice par la volonté de la Mère qui, *corona viro suo*, exerce fidèlement et dans la même innocence la loi trascendante du Père:

Ô Mère qui créas en ton sein juste et fort,
Calices balançant la future fiole
De grandes fleurs avec la balsamique Mort
Pour le poète las que la vie étiole.

Déversée et répandue sur la terre vierge, la «future fiole» (hommage au *Flacon* baudelairien: Baudelaire [1861]: 47) provoque la calamité:

Jadis tu détachas les grands calices pour
La terre jeune encore et vierge de désastres.

Car l'initié, selon le mot en écho de Valéry (*La Jeune Parque* [1927]: 96), a bien «soif de désastres»…

L'encre est souvent l'équivalent matériel de cette perfide dissémination; efflorescence d'une raison séminale, la plûme sécrète la maladie, en essayant de la «contenir» dans une forme cir-

culaire, couronne ou guirlande: glose autour du nom (selon la tradition, chère aux Grands Rhétoriqueurs, des couronnes serties, ou des chapelets égrénés autour des Noms vénérés). Une fois de plus, la plûme est le mal et le rémède à la fois: elle fait et défait la *definitio nominis*, fait et défait la mort: «Noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur» écrit Mallarmé dans le *Tombeau d'Edgar Poe* (Mallarmé [1887]: 70). Tombant comme de la pluie fécondante sur la page vierge, *tellus inarata*, l'encre, *nominatis rebus destructis*, 'décompose' (*décontenance*, dirait Deguy) ce qui est 'composé' (*contenancé*) pour la mort: le signe hiératique devient erratique. Ainsi, le poème est une couronne de mots incessamment sertie et dessertie…

C'est par une ironie goguenarde que Deguy s'attaque à la menace de la dernière couronne. Dans *Coronation*, le signifiant *coronavirus* est, dès l'incipit, exhibé dans toute sa majesté, dans ses pompes royales: sa stature pentasyllabique est bel et bien entourée de son apparat consonantique: la consonne vélaire d'attaque, /k/; la vibrante et belliqueuse /r/ qui, on le sait, appelle à l'action militaire; la rude consonne fricative labiodentale sonore /v/, et, finalement, la perfide sibilante qui, en position finale, dissémine autour d'elle sa sonorité néfaste. Comment ne pas penser au serpent couronné, qui, venant de très loin, hante l'imaginaire des poètes? Et pourtant le nom royal, le mot-thème, est, comme c'était le cas plus haut à propos de Baudelaire, dûment *contenancé* par de politiques guillemets, qui tentent de préserver l'espace circonstant contre les funestes réplications du mal. Les guillemets ont donc une double fonction antidotique: tout en isolant le mot-thème, elles le défonctionnalisent, et le condamnent à sa pure virtualité sonore, le privant ainsi de son pouvoir de contamination factuelle: *nomina nuda tenemus*. Cette action de *contenance* est doublée par l'article défini qui, entre temps, s'approprie la chose en la nommant (nommer, on le sait, c'est dompter). Ce trophée, ce monstre ainsi apprivoisé par la nomination forme, de par ses six syllabes, une hémistiche facile. Mais voici la seconde hémistiche qui, faisant preuve d'une force rythmique égale et contraire à la première, en contreba-

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[8] Voir aussi, à ce sujet, *Les colchiques* d'Apollinaire dans *Alcools* (Apollinaire [1913]:33)

lance la toute-puissance: *donnant-donnant*, selon une expression chère à Deguy (Deguy [1981]), ou *nommant-nommant*. Les deux ennemis en miroir – *une guirlande avec la même*, dirait Mallarmé – forment, ainsi, l'alexandrin attendu. Le nom-roi, ridiculisé, carnavalisé, va être glosé et «cadencé» (*cadenassé* ?); la satire pactise avec la mort.

Selon la loi de causalité ou motivation interne, la «contamination» provient de «Contamines», toponyme suisse, savoyard: ses habitants sont appelés, par malheur, «contaminards»…; mais l'étymon nous fait remonter plutôt à *condominium* (domaine commun). Bref, le jeu paronymique entre *contaminare* et *condominare* pourrait suggérer que c'est bien la cohabitation globale la cause principale de la co-morbidité… En effet, si ce qui est fait ne cesse de se défaire, les confins ne cessent de se déconfiner: le *dedans* se renverse et se déverse dans son *dehors*. Le dédoublement, ou réplication par parthénogénèse, du pronom inclusif («nousnous») rend ce dernier réflexif attestant que nous, miroirs de nous-mêmes, ou nous-mêmes au miroir comme Hérodiade, nous ne faisons que nous entregloser (Montaigne), à savoir, nous contaminer… car nous sommes, de chaque phénomène, la cause et l'effet à la fois. En même temps que la perte sonore du mot mortifère est associée (thème très mallarméen) à la perte boursière, la «perte de face» des asiatiques en tant qu'«infecteurs» du monde peut soit s'étendre, par métonymie, au monde entier, soit se décliner, par syllepse, au sens propre et au sens figuré: une fois de plus, nous avons la *dosis* et l'*antidosis*, car le masque protégeant le visage contre l'atteinte du virus n'est que le revers de l'écran contre lequel ce visage même s'écrase: simulacre contre simulacre, museau contre museau, le masque et l'écran s'affrontent comme dans les combats de chiens si vantés par la Chine. D'ailleurs, d'une telle éthologie font preuve les souverains noms gouvernant (couronnant) le monde: du négationnisme mis en avant par le molosse trumpien jusqu'à la régression putinienne vers une religiosité fondée sur la superstition, ou la clôture lépénienne des confins nationaux, alors que le premier ministre anglais fait de sa *Victoria* (par syllepse: la gare de Londres

par antonomase, et son succès politique) une gloire postiche, nouvelle Singapour… l'impérialisme, dans les deux sens, serait une contamination parmi d'autres.

Par la même loi, la consommation touristique («croisières») porte en elle-même sa croix: le dénominatif néologique «s'enquarantainer», à valeur causative et réflexive, atteste la coïncidence entre le moment actif et le moment passif de l'action, entre sujet couronnant et sujet couronné, entre mandant et mandataire…du virus: c'est par un autre néologisme sylleptique, «covirés» (indiquant à la fois le partage de la maladie et le confinement dont les malades ont fait l'objet), que le *dehors* est maintenant renversé dans son *dedans*. C'est grâce à ce confinement – la quarantaine dans les ports («à quai») – que Venise, destination touristique de masse, contaminée de toutes parts et contaminante elle aussi en raison de ses eaux, est finalement – par une métaphore empruntée à la tradition biblique, et notamment musaïque – «sauvée des eaux». Une coïncidence temporelle avec l'avancée du virus justifie cette syllepse: le barrage connu sous le nom de MOSE (acronyme pour: «Module expérimental électromécanique») est soulevé pour la première fois suite à un débordement, préservant ainsi la ville de l'énième inondation. Venise connaît ainsi le même destin que Moïse, son paronyme: elle est «sauvée des eaux». À noter ensuite le fait que la labiodentale sonore /v/ initiale de *virus* et de *Venise*, se trouvant en position prosthétique, transforme l'«eau» de Venise en «veau» de Venise: la ville, veau d'or du tourisme (en raison, souvent, de l'imaginaire décadent l'associant à la maladie) est, tout à la fois, la cause et l'effet du virus et du barrage qui l'en préserve.

La référence à l'actualité se repropose par d'autres concomitances spatio-temporelles: le premier tour des «Municipales» de 2020 en France a eu lieu le 15 mars, en plein essor du virus. Cinq jours avant la date vraie ou présumée de rédaction de ce texte, le 20 mars 2020, le mouvement Europe Ecologie-Les Verts (EELV) obtient un succès inattendu, confirmé au second tour; le virus y était-il pour quelque chose? D'où, en tout cas, l'occurrence du verbe programmatique, «décontenan-

cer» qui prend, une fois de plus, deux acceptions: au sens courant, il évoque la surprise de cette affirmation politique après des décennies d'insuccès; au sens figuré, le débordement des voix qui, confinées d'abord à un espace très restreint, vont déferler, comme le virus, dans l'espace politique: de nouveau, le *dedans* se déverse dans le *dehors*. Par une métaphore cinématographique, on accuse le monde de marcher à rebours: c'est un film projeté à l'envers, *antidosis*. Alors que le ciel de Pékin, se déversant *au dehors*, régénère son *dedans* (son bleu, sa santé: le verbe «bleuir», causatif et dénominal, atteste l'action de régénération interne au verbe lui-même, tautologie et auto-référentialité), Paris, par contre, renouvelle sa tradition, *spleen* et *flânerie* – deux postures poétiques stéréotypées, réifiées par l'habitude – en roulant en trottinette, selon la dernière mode écolo qui vient de s'affirmer. Ici, deux poètes de la ville sont convoqués à la fois – sylleptiquement – à titre emblématique: Léon-Paul Fargue avec son *Piéton de Paris* (Fargue [1939]), et Deguy lui-même, auteur autonymique d'un *Spleen de Paris* (Deguy [2001]). À noter que l'hommage de Deguy au recueil de poèmes en prose baudelairien, *Le Spleen de Paris* (Baudelaire [1868]), est un acte de lèse-majesté aux conséquences salutaires: là où Baudelaire n'avait pas pu choisir le titre en question – trouvé par ses éditeurs en vue de l'édition posthume de ces poèmes épars – Deguy supprime l'article défini en coupant, à ce titre, la tête. Cette suppression, cette perte d'auréole, toute salvifique qu'elle est, ne porte pas moins en elle un effet secondaire: si, comme on l'a vu, l'article isole le nom dans l'espace, le contourne en le protégeant contre les assauts du factuel, le *spleen*, de fictif (de textuel) qu'il était, devient réel et royal: il se répand partout en ville en conséquence de la diffusion de l'épidémie. Car voici que défilent, sur écran (le texte faisant ici fonction d'écran) les chiffres comparés des contagions qui accompagnent, dans une sorte de match global, la vie quotidienne des «co-virés» (ceci se poursuit, entre parenthèses, au moment même où nous écrivons ce texte). La Lombardie et la Chine, ces deux antonomases de la co-viralité à son état naissant, sont citées ici à titre de comparants de

circonstance; pour faire triompher l'Héxagone (qui, par concession rhétorique vient le dernier dans le texte), un seul couple adverbial antonymique: «plus/seulement», suffira pour apaiser l'opinion publique quant au bon positionnement de la France dans ce défi mondial.

Le *coronavirus* a occasionné tout aussi bien une mutation sémantique, voire épistémique: la «reconnaissance», substantif prédicatif multivoque en français (à valeur cognitive et morale à la fois) a délaissé le champ de la philosophie morale où il avait trouvé sa raison d'être avec, par exemple, un Lévinas (Lévinas [1961], [1991]) pour passer du côté de la médecine. Il ne s'agit plus, maintenant, que de retracer, de détecter le ADN du virus en vue de la mise à point du vaccin. Là où pandémie et mondialisation ne sont que le côté gagnant, envahissant, actif, couronnant, du monde, voici son revers: le sacrifice, le martyre. Celui-ci survient à propos des migrants qui, en dépit des confinements auxquels ils sont depuis longtemps soumis, n'arrêtent de se déconfiner et de déferler comme la vague sur nos rives: victimes du virus, et, selon quelques-uns, virus eux-mêmes, ils se répandent partout comme la maladie. Et pourtant, par la loi de l'antidote, ils sont les plus exposés à la maladie elle-même: «encoronavirés» (par syllepse: couronnés, atteints par le virus, et chassés) ils portent, en Christ «des obscures espérances» (Apollinaire [1913]: 14), la couronne du sacrifice global. Une fois de plus, selon une topique bien connue, l'argent (et nommément la "couronne", devise émanant du pouvoir royal) circule à l'aune de la maladie: semblablement au virus, qui se propage d'homme à homme atteignant des chiffres exorbitants, les 'passeurs' de Libye vers les côtes d'Europe font monter les prix: vente aux enchères au dépens des passagers.

La conclusion, provocatoire, est résolument *je m'en foutiste*: contre le providentialisme ambiant, tout sera comme avant. L'empereur chinois Xi Jinping, ayant déjà nié toute responsabilité face au virus, ôte enfin son masque. Libéré du virus qu'il est censé avoir provoqué, et le donnant en héritage au reste du monde, il met à nu son visage: le mot *sinisme* unit dans le même signifiant, par syllepse,

le cynisme (dont témoigne également, *nomen omen*, le combat de chiens évoqué plus haut), et le nom du peuple (l'archaïque *Sina*, donnant le préfixe *sino-*) que l'empereur représente par sa couronne.

Il nous reste, note Deguy dans *La Poésie n'est pas seule*, «cet autovaccin homéopathique, cette catalyse et apocalypse qui ajoute au monde sa fin, qui 'précipite' sa fin, c'est la possibilité de l'art» (Deguy [1987]: 119). L'art, ajoutant toujours une fin à la fin, dévie la vie, en change le cours. Une telle restitution, par rapport à ce qui nous a été donné, est notre seul salut: «Donataires nous redonnons aux dieux par antidosis les dons échus pour notre déchéance» (Deguy [1987]: 138).

Le 15 septembre 2020 sortait un docufilm clandestin d'Ai Weiwei, chinois dissident, sur le confinement à Wuhan, portant le titre de *Coronation*.

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Temporary Blended: Why Ethics of Stasis Still Matters

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Abstract. The etymon στάσις goes back to the Greek word ἵστημι, which means "to stay": this ancient Greek verb denotes presence, spatiality, permanence. In these pages, *stasis* is the perfect word to describe the unusual dimension built all around us by the advent of the Covid pandemic during the lockdown months in our nation. Our daily movements and activities were stopped, we were forced to stay at home as a form of social distancing, or there were those who had the obligation to remain enclosed in healthcare facilities. This paper will describe three hermeneutic figures for the *stasis*, using suggestions that literature, visual arts and philosophy have been offering for centuries: the *night*, the *threshold* and *distance*. They all converge to define the outlines of an ethics that should be reaffirmed in the present, as little pieces of a mosaic brought to light.

Keywords: Pandemic, Ethics, Identity, Hermeneutics, Temporality.

Tu sola sapevi che il moto non è diverso dalla stasi,
che il vuoto è il pieno, e il sereno è la più diffusa delle nubi.
Eugenio Montale, *Satura, Xenia, I, 14*

INTRODUCTION

The third phase of temporary lockdown, decided by governments, has been reached.

People are all engaged in understanding how to protect themselves, how to face fears and risks, keep commitments and make decisions that will have personal consequences for us as well as for others. Established rules must be relied on and so too the opportunities offered by common sense. Will there be a return to mediating between obligations and freedom? Will moral scholars go back to doing what they are supposed to? Considerations will be written by philosophers regarding questions about the human condition in

the dark shadows of a crisis that is not only bio-medical, but also social, economic, and ultimately existential. However, it will be gradually found that the usual actvity of adapting ideas to new circumstances may not be enough; that the old and new paradigms can coexist in a blended format only until the breakthrough comes. It is still possible to delay for a while by grabbing at a capacity for synthesis and being determined to resolve or exasperate conflicts, but everything will come to an end: simply because it will not be enough. The truth is that people are temporary blended, and a conceptual stop needs to be made.

In the period of the pandemic, all people have the time to open a dictionary and study the etymology of words: the realization that time to leaf through a dictionary is actually one of those luxuries of the past that has been lost because of the increasing speed of the years leading up to Covid-19.

When looking for the meaning of the word stasis, three definitions come up: a medical one, as an abnormal state in which the normal flow of a liquid (such as blood) is slowed or stopped; in the laws of physics as inactivity resulting from a static balance between opposing forces; in a figurative sense, the meaning of stagnation, stop, stay, interruption, motionlessness, inaction, standstill.

The etymon στάσις goes back to the ancient Greek word ἵστημι, which means "to stay": this Greek verb denotes presence, spatiality, permanence. By translating ἵστημι, many facets of a meaning are rendered in relation to reality, to something that remains in a stable position. Especially, verbs in the aorist tense, may be rendered in a variety of ways according to their context: ἐστάθην is the passive aorist of ἵστημι and it is rendered into "remained", or "I stood" in the first person singular.

In these pages, stasis will be understood as the perfect word to describe the unusual dimension constructed all around us by the advent of the epidemic, during the lockdown months in our nations. We stopped our daily movements and activities, we were forced to stay at home as a form of social distancing, and some even had the obligation to remain inside emergency health facilities, as what happened to medical and para-medical staff, to operators of services essential for the social welfare of the country, but also like those many ill patients unable to leave hospitalization, which have been salvific in many cases, but fatal in tens of thousands of others.

It is not possible to unilaterally describe this dimension of stopping and pausing in terms of inaction or opportunity to rest, and not even in terms of the unfortunate limitation, misfortune, harmful and pathological constraint, either because of the seriousness of the effects of the contagion or because of the economic and financial problems caused by the delay.

There is a long segment that could be drawn between these two extremes and that is represented by the fruitful work of all the social categories that have continued to maintain their identity and to exercise their skills, despite the blockade. Aspects of public discourse that have affected the political and journalist debates of recent months will not be discussed: instead, what will be looked at is stasis and to be examined by it, recognizing, firstly, its attribute of necessity. Suggestions provided by literature, visual arts and philosophy for centuries will be our work tools.

Three hermeneutic figures for the stasis will be described: the *night*, the *threshold* and *distance*. All three converge to define the outlines of an ethics that should be reaffirmed in the present, as little pieces of a mosaic brought to light.

The language of ethics may seem to be almost disconnected from reality, little functional, even more so in emergencies and crises that call into question biological and economic subsistence. But the philosopher Gabriel Marcel has already replied to those who persist in reasoning like this, lamenting the suffocating sadness of a world organized around the idea of function (Marcel [1955]).

1. GIVING IN TO THE NIGHT

In order not to abandon the references to classicism, one should stop and remember the bat-

tlefields in Homer's *Iliad*. The film version of those epic clashes helps in the visualization of the strength, the violence, the excitement of thoese bodies thrown against each other, in assaults of blood, blades and shields. Achaeans and Trojans faced each other on the fields of Ilius, and the gods encouraged and assisted them from Mount Olympus.

The *Iliad* evokes the power of war, hence the power of action and decisions to be taken, the fast and breathless clash with death, in which one cannot stop, otherwise one falls and loses: the moral imperative is to win, defeat the enemy, go forward, conquer the future. The vital and heroic memory of the *Iliad* should be kept in mind.

Yet, passages in the poem tell something more. They describe moments in which nothing seems to happen, moments that are not of silence, but exposed, sometimes even repeated. They are no less important than the others, just because they do not describe the daily enterprises, the fervor of work. Below is a passage, from Book VII, dedicated to the clash between the Trojan protagonist Hector and the bravest and most faithful of the Achaeans, Ajax Telamonius. The herald Idaeus, with wise words, keeps begging the two heroes to stop the fight.

And now had they been smiting with their swords in close fight, but that the heralds, messengers of Zeus and men, came, one from the Trojans and one from the brazen-coated Achaeans, even Talthybius and Idaeus, men of prudence both. Between the two they held forth their staves, and the herald Idaeus, skilled in prudent counsel, spake, saying: «Fight ye no more, dear sons, neither do battle; both ye twain are loved of Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, and both are spearmen; that verily know we all. Moreover night is now upon us, and it is well to yield obedience to night's behest». Then in answer to him spake Telamonian Aias: «Idaeus, bid ye Hector speak these words, for it was he who of himself challenged to combat all our best. Let him be first and I verily will hearken even as he shall say». Then spake unto him great Hector of the flashing helm: «Aias, seeing God gave thee stature and might, aye, and wisdom, and with thy spear thou art pre-eminent above all the Achaeans, let us

now cease from battle and strife for this day; hereafter shall we fight again until God judge between us, and give victory to one side or the other. Howbeit night is now upon us, and it is well to yield obedience to night's behest». (Iliad, VII)

The admonition has a sacredness such that it no longer falls within the sphere of the higher orders to obey, but in the ethical one of nature, with its mystery of greater things which cannot be disregarded. We must stop because night falls, and as night exists, we must let it take its course, performing its role of transition, darkness and rest, but also bringing forth its figure of fear, nightmares, in wait for the following day to come.

Thus, other scenes of the *Iliad* come to mind, describing the battlefields abandoned after the brutal struggle: those are moments of stasis and silence in which the clouds of dust still encase the bodies of the fallen, all scattered on the earth, between the sea and the setting sun. Everything is grounded where there used to be only running and fighting. These are eternal pages in which the question arises on the meaning of man on earth, on the meaning of short and precarious physical life, on the ethical evaluation of actions for good and for evil. «The peace of the evening», we could say using a phrase that particularly impressed Jacques Lacan: it could be a feeling of panic, for example, against the presence of the world – it is Lacan's poetic idea – or that particolar anguish we attribute to the primitives, before sunset, when they fear that the sun will not return, which is not then something unthinkable, in short «a restlessness, a search» (Lacan [1981]: 155-156).

«It is well to yield obedience to night's behest» is an ethical warning indeed, it draws to mind justice based on the alternation of day and night established from before man appeared on earth. That justice demands respect; there is the day to make war and to work; there is the night to stop, to rest body and mind, but also to wait for the dawn, perhaps to be afraid of the shadows and to be alone, to fear the defeat of tomorrow, to hope for victory, or simply to recover a distance from facts.

In the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted […]. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said «Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart». Then my spirit made a diligent search. (The Holy Bible, Psalms, 76-77)

Meditate, remember, wonder: the night of this *Psalm* is not of unquiet stasis, but rather, restlessness. It is a search and a wait for answers that will be found ready at dawn only if how to pass that night and that stasis, to which it is good to yield, would be known. «Notte troppo vasta, / […] immobile mare ove il grido / è rottame inutile. / […] mia notte, spazio non di vita / non di morte, / ove non è dato sapere / se una qualsiasi speranza d'approdo / sia ancora possibile (*Night too vast, / […] motionless sea where a scream / is a useless wreck. / […] my night, space not of life / not of death, / where it is not known / if any hope of landing / is still possible*)»: the poet, David Maria Turoldo, reminds us that night means not knowing and not holding still (Turoldo [1990]: 115)[1].

The night should not be viewed merely as factor of disorder, but as the main place of an indeterminacy, where potential metamorphoses open up new possibilities for different lives and identities. Stasis is what is found within the edge of the night.

One should not think an edge as a limit and a separation: the night just before dawn is almost, but not yet, day, just as the city borders are not yet countryside, and the outlines of an artistic work are not yet the theme of that work (Saint Girons [2006]).

Reclusion and anguish during the unfamiliar pandemic also bring to mind a statement by Susan Sontag:

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the Kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. (Sontag [1978]: 3)

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[1] The previous translation is unofficial.

2. HOLDING BACK ON THE THRESHOLD

The metaphor used to define the *ethics of stasis* was *giving in to the night*, which means the recognition of a natural limit for the time of acting and doing. Now, a second image: staying on the threshold. In this case, paintings should be used as an aid.

One of the cultural events which opening was delayed by the epidemic was the exhibition on Edward Hopper organized by the Fondation Beyeler in Basel. In addition to the beauty of the paintings, a short film in 3D can be admired, which was made by the German director Wim Wenders and who transformed the American spirit of the painter and the mood of the scenes represented in the paintings into film. «In front of Edward Hopper's paintings - Wenders says in the short film - I always get this feeling that they're frames from movies that were never made». So, this is why the director tried to imagine the stories of the characters portrayed (Wenders [2020]).

If the following three important paintings are considered, *Morning Sun* of 1952, *Room in New York* of 1932 and *Night Windows* of 1928[2], they all have in common two elements: a window, through which the interior of an apartment can be seen, and solitary characters encapsulated in domestic environments. But one thing is striking us: in those clean geometries and rarefied spaces, Hopper seems to represet a suspension of time, the stasis in which those figures are immersed.

The woman sitting on the bed has her gaze fixed on the wide open window, as the morning sun fills the silence in the room; the two characters in the New York room are next to the window through which they can be seen, one reading the newspaper and the other staring at keys of a piano, they are not looking at each other nor are they speaking to each other; the three windows on the top floor of a curved building are views of

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[2] E. Hopper, *Morning Sun* (1952), oil on canvas, 71, 5 x 101,9 cm, Columbus, Columbus Museum of Art; *Room in New York* (1932), oil on canvas, 73,7 x 91,4 cm, Lincoln (Nebraska), Sheldon Museum of Art; *Night Windows* (1928), oil on canvas, 73.7 x 86.4 cm, New York, MoMA.

a home environment too, a red cloth and a woman bending to do something; a sense of city solitude is perceived, of separation and isolation, but also, on the contrary, of communication with the outside, which existence those windows indicate (Laing [2016]).

Not to dwell on the psychology of Hopper's creations, in which a parallel can be drawn for the representation of citizens confined in their houses during the pandemic, but to continue in search of an ethics of stasis: in the trailer Wenders asks - «What's the story that is beginning here?» - referring to the stillness of the painted scene - «What will happen to these characters in the next moment?». He perceives that stasis is the first frame of possible courses of action, of a story that will start after the motionless situation. Wenders gives a key to read those scenes of reclusion neither punctually nor in claustrophobic manner, because he does not see them as simply firm, but already virtually projected forward into a story to tell. It's as though those characters stand on the threshold of the future, the threshold of the story to which they belong.

Michail Bachtin theorizes about the *chronotope* of the *Threshold* in his writings. The Russian philosopher speaks of real historical time and space that find their moment of reflection in the literary genres that take possession of that reality and historicity. It is not by chance that Bachtin gives the name of *chronotope* to this operation of narrative speculation (κρόνος and τόπος), and makes it an expression of the evolution of human identity in narrative plots. For example, Greek literature uses the chronotope of the *Road*, Medieval literature the chronotope of the *Castle*, and the early bourgeois literature of Flaubert focuses on the chronotope of the *Parlour*.

With the nineteenth-century novel, the evaluative-emotional chronotope of the *Threshold* arises, that is the chronotope of the *Crisis*, of all those decisions that change the course of life: it means being on the threshold of a change. In Hopper's work, it is the metaphor for looking at the interior of the rooms while the viewer remains on the threshold. The space and time on the thresh-

old are that of suspension before the events. Fedor Dostoevskji uses this chronotope in his novels: the long scenes in *Crime and punishment* set on the stairs, in the corridors, in the anterooms. It is as if all the anguish of the protagonist, Raskol'nikov, is expressed on those thresholds from which he looks and waits for life, and that he manages to cross only after having sought and waited for the answers from his deep conscience (Bachtin [1982]).

Hopper's windows are the threshold on which all his characters stand: what will they do next? What course of action will they decide to take? What will their initiatives be?

All these questions call to mind the issues addressed by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur regarding human subjectivity. A part of identity is composed of permanence in time, and Ricoeur calls it *idem* identity. *Sameness* is «a concept of relationship and a relationship of relations»: it is the numerical identity, for example, which allows identification and the recognition of a thing or a person as the same numerous times; it is the qualitative identity, that *extreme similarity* for which it is possible to replace one thing with the other, because it is precisely the same. It is still what Ricoeur calls «uninterrupted continuity» between the first and the last stage of a process: we can see it in human development for example because its fundamental criterion is the continuity of identity despite variations such as growth or ageing, which work to destroy similarity.

In simple terms, we are still the same at five years old and at fifty, despite the differences; what really constitutes this concept of equality is precisely the permanence in spite of the differences, the distance, the discrepancy of time.

Our genetic code, for example, or our blood type, are an aspect of identity *idem* that characterizes us and accompanies us throughout life. Our biological identity is in fact the same. Sameness is also the basis of our character, its immutability in the form of the dispositions acquired and settled, so that «by character – Ricoeur writes – I understand the set of distintive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as

being the same» and he later qualifies this: «character designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized»: habits, as well as acquired values and lifestyles (Ricoeur [1990]: 119-121).

But there can be no identity outside of time.

The other identity, *ipse*, is grafted onto this fund of permanence. Selfhood is not the perseverance of the same (which others see of us and recognize), but it is the belonging to ourselves, to that same as well as to the variations of that same, at every moment. *Ipseity* is the punctual identity of us with ourselves, the connection with what we are and do, the ability to take on what we are (character, habits, stratified values) and to see ourselves as the same, even when we find ourselves in front of time that produces events, changes, or fractures. The inestimable value of the *promise* relies on this dimension of identity as *selfness*.

We promise to keep our word, to uphold our commitments not because nothing will change or time will not leave its mark on us: we promise precisely because everything changes, precisely because time will pass and will affect characters, values and habits. We commit ourselves to remain the same in our given word, in a coincidence of us with ourselves despite change.

Finally, Paul Ricoeur proposes *narrative identity* as a synthesis of these two identities: this *fragile offshoot* is the story of oneself, the capability of configuring life experiences in a narrative structure.

So, what does *stasis* mean for us in view of these considerations? Stasis is the threshold on which we stop to regain possession of ourselves and to finally be able to take the initiative to say something, to do something, to promise, to commit. Just what we expect Hopper's characters to do after that moment when we see them stationary.

What is one called to do now after the pandemic's lesson of *sameness*? Now is the time to commit oneself anew, to give life to new initiatives. «Commit yourself with all your heart!» is an exhortation often heard. But if one never stops to strenghten oneself, what kind of commitment

and responsibility will ever be possible to achieve? This «responsibility of suspension» is tested in terms of distance from events and offers a direction to one's expectations (Miano [2020]: 90).

3. RECOVERING THE DISTANCE

The time during the epidemic was opportune to naturally hone in on the *ethics of stasis*. The long forgotten wisdom that there is a day to do things and, nonetheless, a night to which it is good to yield; it should have been relearned not to go running into the rooms of everyday life, but to stay on the threshold, to see what is beyond, to wait before taking initiatives. The third figure of this ethics of stasis is as equally important as the others: it shall be called *distance*, and it is linked to temporality and lived reality. «Recovering the distance» does not mean to speed up the pace, but it means to achieve a long perspective, managing to free oneself from a blinding proximity (Marconi, Pastori [1991]: 75)[3].

«Abitare la distanza» (which can be translated as "inhabiting the distance"[4]), was the oxymoron used by the Italian philosopher Pier Aldo Rovatti in the early nineties to understand this gap between the stability of living and the elusiveness of distance (Rovatti [1994]).

La frase «abitare la distanza» suggerisce qualcosa come un'instabilità? Uno scarto tra l'essere da qualche parte, presso qualcosa o qualcuno, e il non esserci davvero? Suggerisce, forse, che il dimorare è proprio il riuscire a stare in tale scarto e che solo in questo modo – una specie di esilio da casa propria – possiamo ospitare l'altro? Oppure, ancora, il bisogno che abbiamo di far coabitare la presenza e l'assenza? (Does the phrase «inhabit the distance» suggest any-

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[3] In these considerations written by the Biblical scholar Gilberto Marconi on the Gospel according to Luke, distance is the key to the aesthetic and ethical relationship between man and the mystery of faith and revelation: distance is necessary to keep alive what is Sacred and the value of human finitude.

[4] An official translation of the book is not available; the following is an unofficial one.

thing like instability? A gap between being somewhere and not really being there? Does it suggest, perhaps, that the concept of dwelling is precisely to be able to stay in such a gap? That only in this sort of exile from one's own home can one host others? Or, does it suggest that presence and absence need to coexist?). (Rovatti [1994]: 24-25)

In Rovatti's book, the concept of inhabiting alludes to a fixed point, ultimately to the *habitus*, the habit, the repetition, something that reassures. Distance instead describes an estended temporality, which reveals the surprise of an unpredictable world.

In the alternative between «alienating distanciation» and «participatory belonging», using Ricoeur's words once again, the capability of making up the distance can be found in the middle ground: being too deep into something may imply losing contours and profiles, to separate existence and meanings into little fragments (at the expense of everything else), lacking balance and equidistance. Selfishness, antagonisms, contradictions originate from a space within that area which imposes decisions and solutions always disproportionate, paroxysmal sometimes, even wrong and dangerous in the medium and long term. The meaning of many ethical challenges lies in this capability.

For example, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas wrote to be very worried regarding the possible ethical challenge during the crucial days of this pandemic. The number of patients to be admitted to hospital was higher than the number of intensive care beds available in treatment departments; so, doctors, on many occasions, were forced to make tragic decisions on the spot between young people that could have been saved or the elderly and frail with chronic illness.

After the fury of events, an ethics of stasis must be recovered, in order to preserve an adequate distance appropriate enough to judge as immoral those choices, owing to the «abdication to the principle of fair treatment of citizens», as Habermas affirms (Habermas [2020]). What doctor would replace the value of one man over the

value of another, thus establishing himself as master of life and death?

The urgency of acting entraps one in a circle of utilitarian justifications from which, when one manages to free oneself, one has become lost and embittered, without feelings, as it happens to the protagonists of the story described by Josè Saramago in the novel *Blindness*:

Before, when we could still see, there were also blind people, few in comparison, and their feelings where of someone who could see, therefore the blind felt with the feelings of others, and not as the blind people they were. Now, certainly, what is emerging are the real feelings of the blind, and we're still only at the beginning; for the moment we still live on the memory of what we have felt, eyes are not needed to know what life has become today, and if anyone were to tell me that one day I should kill, I'd take it as an insult, and yet I've killed. (Saramago [1995]: 252-253)

In order not to lose the ability to feel, it is necessary to preserve the memory of what makes us human and, like all memories, distance is required, oblivion and setting.

After all, the ethics of stasis necessarily deals with time, the greatest of allies and the worst enemy: an ally when it is «opportune time», the καιρός χρόνος of the Greeks, the ancient idea that there is a right time for things to happen; an enemy when it reveals the radical limit of death, this uncomfortable thought which has been renounced so as to be prepared, removing it from our busy days, preventing it from being present in our inner life.

«The disintegration of the consciousness of mortality involves the disintegration of the sense of belonging», the consciousness of mortality is decisive in keeping together social and emotional bonds that constitute human existence (Manicardi [2016]: 76-77). Freedom is awareness of those ties, insofar as they are lived as essential by subjectivity that is not enough for itself, because it knows and remembers its finitude.

The pandemic has brought back the very uncomfortable position that we had been in for millennia: poised between two worlds, the one we

left, with its emergency, its lockdowns and conceptual tools, and the new one that awaits us at a return to normality, which will require a change of mindset.

New technologies, powerful screens, the digital and robotics revolution, as well as the return to working in presence, the reorganization of health care and economic systems, are all the practical challenges for those who walk on the edge; but, to cross it, an ethics of stasis is needed more than everything else, because it gives identity and audacity, without which no time will ever be *opportune*.

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Rethinking contact: the haptic in the viral era

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Abstract. The current pandemic emergency due to Covid-19 has profoundly changed our sensory habits. What role can be assigned to a synaesthetic perceptive modality like the haptic in this no touching pandemic period (Žižek 2020)? This paper argues that the haptic specificity could go beyond the dialectic between touch and vision to focus on its phantasmagorical potentiality. In an attempt to grasp the relevance of this perceptive modality in the pandemic and post-pandemic scenario, this contribution will proceed in two directions. First, starting from an etymological premise and an iconographic excursus, it will highlight the motility and the potential *in absentia* as the proprium of haptic perception. Secondly, we will hypothesize the configuration of a synaesthetic and intermedial "haptic feeling" shaped by the accumulation of images of everyday pandemic life — *phantasmata*, *eidolons* and pictures — can disclose an infra-subtle space, substantially affective, which precedes and exceeds the contact itself.

Keywords: Haptic Perception, Digital Age, Covid-19, Sensory Studies, Iconography.

The state of emergency determined by the global spread of Covid-19 seems to have challenged the supremacy of «haptocentric intuitionism» (Derrida [2000]: 300).

In the ultra-visible era, dominated by the viral proliferation of screens, the syncretic flow of images and audio-visual contents (Montani [2020]: 17) consumed in a slippery mechanism of endless scrolls, and frequently experienced in virtual form, the sense of touch seems to suffer an additional offensive by the visual. Its denial acquires an extremely immunological and biopolitical quality in such circumstances, far from being confined to the centuries-old aesthetic *querelle*. The "invisible enemy", an epithet that has come into vogue in the pandemic syntax, imposes the configuration of a new gestural alphabet of the living body (*Leib*) for the survival of the individual and the community. Thus, the body must unlearn to touch itself, monitoring behaviours internalized since Prehistory (Rosen [2020]) and scrupulously supervising the work of the hands. Nevertheless, such peculiar species of literacy possesses a markedly techno-media character: the hand, an organ traditionally surged to tactile synecdo-

che, no longer grasps the Other or grasps it only exceptionally (the limbs of the loved ones).

In a prosthetic relationship with screens and devices, the fingers brush against an impermanent body, virtualized into the two-dimensional limits of a display, and made paradoxically manipulable, even if substantially untouchable.

In front of the increasing predominance of the visual aptitude, both in private and public life — in the viral era, professional and affective communications occour in Teams rooms and Zoom channels, in a strictly remote vision —, what role can be assigned to a border sense like the haptic?

In an attempt to gather the relevance of this perceptual modality in the pandemic and post-pandemic scenario, this paper will proceed in three directions. First, starting from an etymological premise and an iconographic *excursus*, it will highlight as proprium of haptic perception its motility and potential *in absentia*, between tangibility and intangibility.

Second, it will hypothesize the configuration of a synaesthetic and intermedial "haptic feeling" shaped by the accumulation of images of the everyday pandemic — more specifically *phantasmata*, *eidolons* and pictures. Third and consequent to the other points, it will try to demonstrate how haptic feeling can disclose an infra-subtle space, essentially affective, which precedes and exceeds the contact itself.

ETYMOLOGICAL PREMISE: HÁPTEIN, APTYCHUS, HAPTICS

An etymological foreword about the multifaceted meanings of the term haptic could be helpful both to understand the specificity of this perceptive modality and propose a possible "pandemic iconography". In this regard, it is necessary to point out a few issues that make the investigation on the haptic remarkably layered.

They could be enucleated as follows: the polysemic nature of this noun/adjective, relevant to a transversal disciplinary spectrum; the polyse-

mic configuration, in turn, of the sense of touch, often equalized with the haptic as if the latter represented its exotic counterpart; finally, the historically dominant tendency to absorb the haptic perception into the orbit of the visual, testified by the syncretic emblem of the touching eye and by the substantially panoptic orientation of German *Kunstwissenschaft* (Pinotti [2001]: 153-167; [2007]: 486; [2009]: 187-189). Lingering briefly on haptic etymology, therefore, allows us to identify those foundational characters for which the haptic becomes a synesthetic modality of perception, both familiar to the humanistic and techno-informatic investigation. The perspective that will be traced appears not necessarily organoleptic but rather «interoceptive» (Craig [2003]: 500).

The Greek etymon *haptō*, hence the term *haptos* (tangible, sensitive), the predicate *háptein*, and the adjective *haptikós*, from which derived, in turn, the French *haptique*, the German *haptisch/ Haptik*, and the English *haptic*, signifies, among other meanings, «to bind, join, knot, attach, knot for oneself, touch, adhere, take, embrace, have intimate relations, reach, strike (…)» (La Magna [1960]: 191, trad.). Reflecting on the etymon and not, as more frequently happens, on the expressions derived from it, usually translated as «able to come in contact with» (*haptikós*) (Bruno [2002]: 6) and «tighten, grasp, lace» (*háptein*)[1], allows to highlight a fundamental quality of the haptic even in a psycho-physiological environment (Fulkerston [2020]). While the noun *haphē* describes the peculiar gesture of touching and squeezing, the qualities that combine the predicates mentioned above turn out to be motility (Active Touch) and the dynamism that precedes the experiences of contact (Gibson [1962]: 477-478). Since its early enunciation, the haptic is the sense of a body tirelessly acting. It discloses an *inframince* space that corresponds to an equally interstitial distance, which includes the longing for possible contact. Concerning this etymologi-

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[1] "Haptics." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/haptics. Accessed 10 Mar. 2021

Figure 1: Henriette Sabroe Ebbesen, *Genesis. Still 1*, 2020. Digital print on textile, 78 7/10 × 57 1/10 in 200 × 145 cm, Editions 1-3 of 3.

Figure 2: Aptico Monte Subasio, Courtesy Gruppo Umbro Mineralogico Paleontologico.

cal variant, entered the lexicon of aesthetics and visual culture through the German studies of applied psychology of the late nineteenth century (Grunwald [2008]: 15-39), it seems appropriate to underline how the "haptic movement" includes affective-emotional elements related to the variant of the etymology *haptō*, in the biblical meaning of lighting and burning. It is in the wake of this suggestion that the motility of the haptic, as Giuliana Bruno said, *com-moves*, generating an emotional movement (Bruno [2002]: 6; [2014]: 19) grounded on «entropathy», the visceral resonance into the joints of the Other body (Nancy [2003]: 11, trad.) (Figure 1). However, a second and eccentric meaning of the term haptic exists and is pertinent to palaeontology. At this juncture, hap-

tic, a masculine noun derived from the scientific Latin *aptychus* (comp. of a- priv), and the Greek *fold* (πτυχή)[2] is actualized in a fossil interface that connects — or should be said, ties? — the interior with the exterior (Figure 2). As a pelagic and liminal entity, it echoes the dual nature of a device that connects and protects, distinctive of the transhistorical principle of the arch-screen (Carbone [2018]: 4, trad.; [2016]: 168). Finally, a third variant of the term haptic derived from the feminine of the Greek word *haptikós* and the Neo-Latin word *hapticē*, coined in 1685 by Isaac Barrow in *Lectiones Mathematicae XXIII* and translatable as «the science of touch».

Haptics, a word of cogent modernity, pertains to the science of touch in a techno-media perspective (Parisi [2018]: passim). It denotes the tactile feedback (*force feedback*) generated by those devices that, by sending artificial stimuli to the proprioceptive and muscular level, simulate the sensation of actual contact (Grunwald [2008]: 355).

According to the etymological discussion, it can therefore be said that the haptic, far from endorsing a synonymous relationship with the

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[2] Ibidem.

tactile, focuses on motility — to borrow from Micla Petrelli, the haptic collects the «ulteriority» of the sense of touch, representing «its extension, its substrate» (Petrelli [2015]: 4, trad.). Such motility results interceptive — «the haptic, (...) enacts the feeling or rather is itself, in fruition, feeling» (Mazzocut-Mis [2001]: 139, trad.) — as well as exteroceptive, aimed at grasping the «noetic dimension» rather than the mere «passionate contact with the projecting body of things» (Petrelli [2015]: 9, trad.).

The interstitial space of the haptic, the prehensility that it implies and of which it becomes a supporter, realizes itself in a non-material «grasp» (Franzini [2017]: 85-86, trad). More precisely, it results in an analytical and phantasmatic grasping. This fleeting space promises access to knowledge that is «obscure» and denied to a «regulated and categorized vision» (ivi: 86).

PANDEMIC ICONOGRAPHY: CONTACT
BETWEEN ABSENCE AND DESIRE

In order to recognize an iconographic exemplum that reveals haptic etymological polysemy in the pandemic scenario, a cinematic sequence frequently mentioned (Gallese [2015]: 209-2013; Barker [2009]: 28-29), paradigmatic for the detachment between disembodied touching and affection, results in the prologue of *Persona* (1966) by Ingmar Bergman (Figure 3). In the roughness of black and white, what the moving images vividly render coincides with the phenomenon of

Figure 3: I. Bergman, *Persona*, 1966.

splitting between display and screen already highlighted by Wanda Strauven, although in a different context ([2018]: 70). This rupture, whose consequences have dramatically reemerged in lockdown everyday life, exhibits the paradox in which the object of touching coincides with the screen surface and not with the images flowing through the display (ibidem). Furthermore, the camera movement placed us in the frustrating condition of the anonymous young boy in *Persona*, concentrating on caressing the screen images of two female figures with his fingers. If this sequence emphasizes the opacity of a medium (the screen) that essentially inhibits the possibility of coming into contact with the Other, thus risking to legitimize technophobic readings already questioned in recent times (Carbone [2020]), turning the attention to the appearance (*phainesthai*) of the image could be helpful to reconfigure the notion of contact in a pandemic and even post-pandemic key. In this sense, a sequence that proves the morphology of a hybrid contact is that of the replicant-hologram relationship in Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) (Figure 4). Indeed, this scene shows the organic and inorganic intertwine that Mario Perniola defined, just starting from the Homeric etymology of *ápto*, «a state in which things are interpenetrated but still preserve their nature» (Perniola [1994]: 75). In a dystopian, even if not pandemic horizon, the feature film deploys an evocative register of intermedial images, exhibiting *phantasmata*, *eidolons* and pictures, that saturate the polluted atmosphere of a post-human world, in which Wearable Technologies (WT) have conquered the *status* of ordinary bodily prostheses. What seems pivotal here for the
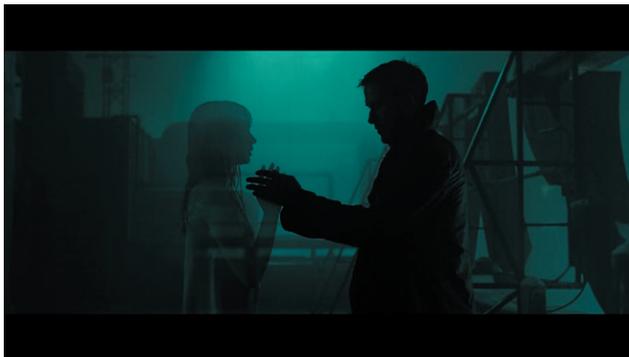
Figure 4: Frame from *Blade Runner 2049* by D. Villeneuve, 2017.

pandemic notion of haptic concerns the gap that such «an-iconic» experiences (Pinotti [2018b]: 233, trad.) trigger in the notion of proximity.

In the wake of the considerations elaborated by Rabbito [2020] and Eugeni [2018], what emerges from the ambiguous relationship between the replicant K (Ryan Gosling) and the holographic interface Joi (Ana de Armas) is precisely the discrepancy of touching in a perspective complementary to the Bergmanian one. Employing a device perhaps unconsciously yearned for during the pandemic isolation, namely an emanator that allows the hologram to move freely, Joi discloses herself as a realistic weave of lights and not a *Körper* of skin and flesh. For those physiological and technical reasons, the emotional affair that the characters entertain is hinged on the intangible (Figure 5).

According to Baudrillard's interpretation of *trompe-l'oeil*, a simulacral entity and technique that solicits «tactile fantasy» and «tactile hyper presence of things, as if one could hold them in one's hand» (Baudrillard [1979]: 63), without however imposing itself as a *surplus* of the real, the fictitious three-dimensionality of hologram opens a crisis within the reality of touching. More precisely, touching, here understood in its extreme haptic motility, coincides with the interspace that exists between the "body without substance" of the hologram and the one of the replicants in the act of touching (Figure 6). Therefore, the Husserlian «double sensation» (*Doppelempfindung*) (Boccali [2019]: 111, trad.) falls between sentient

and touching bodies since Joi turns out to be programmed as an entity deprived of touching reversibility. Thus, the contact is realized in a simulation internalized by both characters, in which their images overlap and superimpose. However, they do not and could never come to touch each other effectively. This regime of intangibility leads them into a state of suspension, not dissimilar to the polarization between the body-ego and the digitized Other, which has become the primary relational mode of the viral era.

To circumvent the barrier of screen opacity, what the syncretic relation of *Blade Runner 2049* makes manifest, thanks to the avant-gardist coefficient of special effects, concerns the «*spacing*» (Derrida [2000]: 35) that the experience of the haptic discloses within the intangible. Hence, in the intangible, immunological paradigm of the pandemic and structural feature of the hologram, the motility of the haptic can reach its highest interoceptive coefficient and, consequently, its limit. In Derrida's words, «what is it to touch one's own limit thus? It is also not to touch, not to touch oneself enough, to touch oneself too much: impossible sublimity of tact, the diabolical machination of love when it dictates infinite renunciation» (ivi: 111, emphasis mine). According to Derrida, such sublimity implies an «interruption» in the contact, a «*syncope*» close to the one that shapes Nancy's thought on touch (ibidem). As a counterpoint to the interruption stands out the infinite renunciation, the retreat of the object of desire, Barthesianly «*always* absent» (Barthes [1977]: 15). Locating the fascination at the

«extreme of detachment» (ivi: 72), Barthes conceived absence as a physical entity to be manipulated (ivi: 16), in the extreme attempt to hold back, to «delay as long as possible the moment when the other might topple sharply from absence into death» (ibidem).

BEYOND «TOUCH-PHOBIA» AS A CRITICAL PARADIGM

Inscribing the specificity of the haptic in the interruption, in the movement *in potentia*, allows us to evaluate what Didi-Huberman defined as «*phobia* of touch», referring to the art-historical field (Didi-Huberman [2008]: 87, trad.). Even then, Didi-Huberman prophetically adopted viral-sounding terms such as «anthropological paradigm» of «transmission» (ivi: 48) and «contagious magic» (ivi: 69). The author, inserting himself in the centuries-old aesthetical debate on the competition between touch and sight, associated this *phobia* to the modern (basically theoretical) rejection of the excessively carnal and inconveniently mimetic morphogenesis of particular artistic techniques (namely, those obtained by imprint).

Between the *Paragone delle Arti* and the Greenbergian media specificity, the junction at which this excess finally overcoming the ideological impasse of a *téchne* regarded as degrading is located in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. As pointed out by Elio Franzini, Herder's merit was to have systematized the relationship between touch and sculpture on the heels of previous treatises, which from Condillac to Burke recognized in touch a subordinate sense endowed with an analytically obscure quality (Franzini [2013]: 185, trad.). However, it is striking to note how Herder, who recognized sight as a sense dependent on touching — «We believe we see something when in fact we touch it and where only touch is appropriate» (Herder [1778]: 38) — already supposes what Andrea Pinotti has emblematically called «a Herderian uncertainty» (Pinotti [2009]: 181, trad.). A symptom of this aesthetic short-circuit that disorients the German philosopher's system, based

Figure 7: Agnolo Bronzino, *Noli Me Tangere*, 1561. Oil on poplar wood, 291 x 195 cm. Paris, Museo del Louvre.

on the dialectic between touch and sight, distinctly arises when Herder empathizes with that sculptor who cannot touch his creation, «not even in a dream». As Pinotti argues, this excerpt establishes a crucial turning point since Herder transposes the gesture of touching into an imaginative horizon, alluding to the possibility «of touching in a dream, of a virtual, imagined touch» (ibidem).

Considering the breach that deepens the pandemic interdiction of touching and touching each other, it reveals a perceptological horizon grounded on the interstice between tangible and intangible. It falls on the *Noli me tangere* iconography to intensely reify that invisible space in which haptic feeling is positioned (Figure 7).

NOLI ME TANGERE, MĒ MOU HAPTOU: THE INFRAMINCE SPACE OF THE HAPTIC

It should not be astonishing that, introducing the pamphlet dramatically entitled *Pandemic!* the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek turns to the ancient Christian expression of «Noli me tangere» (Žižek [2020]: 1). The choice of biblical iconography, indeed, not only emphasizes the individual and collective veto imposed by the spread of the pandemic but exceedingly highlights the penetrating quality of «a deep look», a vehicle of intimacy even more intense than actual contact (ivi: 2). According to Jean-Luc Nancy, as compared to other idiomatic expressions, the *Noli me tangere* presupposes, on the one hand, the existence of a situation of potential hazard (Nancy [2008]: 13) — the anguish of a contagion that one can unconsciously activate or suffer. But, on the other hand, it unseals the «space without dimension», to such a rarefied point that it condenses within the «line that separates the touching from the touched and so the touching itself» (ibidem). At least, the materialization of this «scarto *partes extra partes*» (Caldarone [2011]: 50) allows us to make two observations tightly interrelated.

First, a linguistic reflection rich in consequences on the theoretical level. Namely, the fact that Nancy, digging up into the Greek syntagma *mē mou haptou*, goes back to a privative meaning of the predicate *háptein* translatable as «to hold back, to stop» (Nancy, [2008], 15). In this sense, the author claims that in John's Gospel account, to Mary of Magdala is denied even the possibility of touch, since the Saviour's body has already risen to a body that is no longer tangible, the «appearing of *an appeared and disappeared* [*un apparu et disparu*]» (ivi: 28). Beyond the theological and teleological horizon of salvation, it seems at least peculiar to observe how the biblical narration outlines a phantasmatic presence not dissimilar, in its transient and untouchable being, from the functioning of the holographic image mentioned above (ibidem).

Second, it is in the absence that touching is accomplished, *in letting go*, since Magdalene is inhibited even from the desire to touch (*hàptein*) (ivi: 37). This specific point is based on the comparison with the evangelical *pendant* of the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (Most [2005]: 41). Instead, it aims to crystallize in the image the substantial motility of the haptic, exemplified by the distance existing between the hands and the outstretching of Mary Magdalene's whole body.

Here, a hiatus opens up concerning the surreptitiously «vulva-like» dynamism with which the finger of Thomas, the incredulous apostle, penetrates the plague on Christ's ribs (Most [2005]: 164): the blasphemous euphoria to brush and being brushed by the heavenly body culminates in the satisfaction of a digital desire. At that time, the hand, *à la* Deleuze, «is reduced to a finger» ([1981]: 104) or to a supervising pupil. Nevertheless, breaking the space of distance — the

Figure 8: iPhone Apple advertisement, *Touching is believing*, 2007.

measures of containment and security —, equally nurtures a horizon of intangibility if one recollects how the New Testament synopsis ultimately does not contemplate any form of palpation (Most [2005]: 21, 55, 57). This ambiguous dimension of the *contactus* is reflected unintentionally in an advertisement launched by Apple in 2007. As will be illustrated below, the occasion was technically *touching*: the release of the first iPhone.

THE INCREDULITY OF THOMAS AND THE LIMITS OF «FINGERBOMBING»

At the mercy of a bodiless hand, an iPhone twinkles hanging in the darkness, phantasmagorical in its being "chronophotographed" while typing (Figure 8). *À la* Barthes, this is the «great tactile phase of discovery» (Barthes [1957]: 90), not automotive, but equally mechanical, haptic in both the polished communication that the device conveys (Han [2015]: 2-3) — the display exhibits a screenshot of the Whatsapp messaging app — and in its irresistibly seductive materiality (ivi: passim). This dual aptitude of the device acquires further importance if we consider how between the first and the fourth quarter of 2020, in two apical moments of the pandemic emergency, the American multinational sold over 19 thousand units of iPhone 11 and 79 thousand iPhone 12 (Stamford [2021]), confirming the ubiquity of touch screens as a means of entertainment and communication. Omnipresence, however, shared with other brands (Samsung and Xiaomi are around 62 thousand and 43 thousand), reached at the same time when the avant-gardist technologies of Predictive Touch were being tested, aimed to substitute the actual touch with a Touchless system of artificial intelligence and eye-tracking (Scialom [2020]).

Given this scenario, recent studies show how the automatism of typing practised on the screen or the trackpad has helped change the habits about purchasing goods on the network (Mason [2020]). At the same time, it has soothed the feeling of physical and social isolation (in the

«together apart» logic), exploiting with unprecedented intensity the chance of staying globally in touch thanks to social networks (Gabbiadini et al. [2020]). Nevertheless, the providential role recognized to these devices in the pandemic everyday life seems insufficient to fill the margin of intangibility materialized by the screen, an alleged technophilic analogue of the resurrected body. Although Apple's advertising recited the statement «*touching* is believing» (emphasis mine), counterfeiting the evangelical expression «seeing is believing» (Most [2005]: 47), what the digital relations in the viral age have invoked coincides with a peculiar experience of «ingression» (Böhme [2001]: 83, trad.), generated within a dimensionless emotional edge that intertwines devices and private spaces. The haptic feeling is not absolutized in the compulsion of an automatic tactility but extends itself to the visual and auditory area, taking advantage of the corresponding imaginary and mnestic potential.

To say, in other words, that the belligerent «fingerbombing» (Parisi [2008]: passim) cleverly dissimulated by the auratic appearance of the device, Benjaminian phantasmagoric in soliciting the incautious consumer to «its manipulations, enjoying its estrangement from self and others» (Pinotti [2018a]: 56), would coincide with the visible gesture of the experience of contact, without equally exhausting it. The instantaneous appropriation of what lies beyond the screen, as Cupertino's *Incredulity* persuades one to believe, exploits that desire of the masses that Benjamin already called «ardent» to «bring oneself closer» to things, to tactilely extinguish distances (Benjamin-Archiv
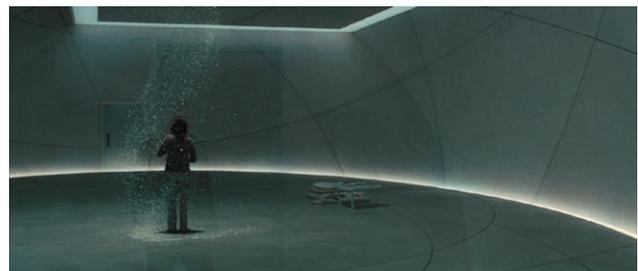

Figure 9: Creation of a Graft from *Blade Runner 2049* by D. Villeneuve, 2017.

Ms 386; Pinotti [2012]: 67), arousing the longing of the so-called «transparency society» (Han [2012]: passim).

This passage appears to herald suggestions even for the present pandemic. Since, as Han argues adopting an unconventional position, the implosion of the imagosphere would have paradoxically instigated a tactile modus of being in the real (Han [2012]: 13) grounded on the neutralization of the shock moments, in which Benjamin glimpsed the modernity of tactile media.

For these reasons, the dyad of elements that will be taken as paradigmatic for theoretical analysis avoids the immediacy of touching. Conversely, it will include the fleeting interlude — the *inframince* space that separates replicant and hologram, the yearning that hinders and fills the non-touching of Mary of Magdala — and the faculty imagination to outline an image theory of pandemic "haptic feeling".

HAPTIC FEELING: FOR A PHANTASMATIC THEORY OF IMAGES

In order to introduce the theoretical section of the contribution, it will be necessary to dwell a few more moments on the imagosphere exhibited in *Blade Runner 2049*. As mentioned, what is striking about the feature film, along with the medial *milieu* it inaugurated, results in the heterogeneity of iconic experiences that it spread out: in particular, three-dimensional grafts and *eidolons*, pictures projected onto screens of varying sizes, holographic *simulacra* (Figure 9). If even the sensitive appearances of *phantasmata* had been included among these, *Blade Runner 2049* might return an iconographical scenario, albeit technologically less advanced, of the fruition of body images in the viral era according to the triple activity of reproductive, productive and interactive imagination (Montani [2014]: 12).

Starting from the etymological and physiological motility of the haptic, here we propose the neological locution of *haptic feeling*, in which the feeling of one's own body — the most appro-

priate verbal equivalent appears the English to feel/«feeling-with» (Paterson [2007]: 147) — is consumed in a perceptual synaesthetic horizon. In this way, haptic feeling results strictly based on the «indirect co-presence» of the percipient subject and perceived object, on which we will return shortly (Böhme [2001]: 118, 120, trad.). Nevertheless, what sort of haptic feeling did the pandemic state of emergency help shape?

Recalling the Benjaminian model of innervation, the training to telepresence that healthcare limitations have imposed and accelerated, in which social contact coincides with the editing *in absentia* of audiovisual materials seems to prevent the outline of an ileomorphic ontology, Cartesianally anchored on *res extensa*. Instead, even if the digital world is endowed with its peculiar materiality made of pixels and supports, what the haptic feeling seems to favour is the breaching of a state of suspension in which the «appearances-*phantasmata*» (Boffi [2009]: 296, trad.) exhibits their quality of *affectio-onis*, almost sensitive things that impress. The cruxes stressed by this formulation are several and need to be methodically explained in order.

First of all, the non-contact aptitude intensified by social and health restrictions raises the question, not unimpressive, of how to conceive a perception experienced in absence. The configuring of such a collective *habitus* is to be found since the 2010s, and even earlier in terms of critical discussion, according to Derrida ([2000]: 300-301) and Žižek [1997] as a result of technological improvement, globalization and hyper connection. In the absence, is meant, of the Other's body, which has been textured within a binary code or introjected into a phantasmal image during the past year. Assuming the theoretical position elaborated by Böhme in the early 2000s, we will be inclined to identify a strategy that essentially extends the phenomenology of presence, referable to what he defines as «indirect co-presence» (Böhme [2001]: 119-120, trad.).

To illustrate this species of being and giving oneself, which Böhme considers within the framework of the generation (and fruition) of

atmospheres, he invokes a series of circumstances in which the noetic moment of proximity results radically reconsidered. The sidereal image whereby a star is perceived as near, even though it is light-years away, is echoed in the feeling of proximity — a prophetic observation, compared to the everyday life of the viral era — that the percipient feels when hearing a telephone voice, however distant it may be (ibidem). This reconfiguration, however, does not seem exempt from the dynamics of reversibility. Thus, carrying over the astral metaphor related to the intromission theory, it is the emanation of rays projected by «a real body, which was there», as Barthes said, that touches us, just like the «deferred rays of a star» (Barthes [1980]: 80-81). In a theoretical scenario already critically outlined (Ghilardi [2011]: 33-34; Paterson [2007]: 147-172), present-day pandemic seems to foster a way of encounter that exceeds material *contactus*: but rather it concerns the *phantasma* image, an entity bound to inflame the «emotional-affective dimension» of the mind (Bianca [2017]: 19) in a cognitively multimodal way.

In the pandemic present, this happened within that state of suspension often identified with the notion of *epochè* (Mitchell [2020]; Žižek [2020]: 98). Thus, on the one hand, the suspension is configured as a punctiform counterpoint to the space of the haptic, which sometimes constitutes «the only access to otherness, a way to feel close to all the isolated people on Earth», as Catherine Malabou noted on March 23, 2020 (Malabou [2020]). Nevertheless, on the other hand, it represents the *conditio sine qua non* of the *vis imaginativa*. As asserted by Foucault and Žižek in different times, if imagining is not positioned in an unreality regime *à la* Sartre, practising imaginative activity, which precedes and is fulfilled in the creation of an image (Boffi [2009]: 399-404, trad.), corresponds to «regaining that original movement of our existences», which implies a co-inhabitation of the same world «as entirely new in my presence» (ivi: 402). It is «the subject's phantasmatic frame» that allows the subject to survive the «*overproximity*» (Žižek: [1997]: 67) that shapes the encounter with one's neighbour, declaring non-

contact as the third foundational element of emotional discourse.

Concerning the Foucaultian destructive transition from imagination to image, the enforced remote communication have profoundly connected these categories. Furthermore, the pervasive employment of social networks and digital technologies as a pandemic *pharmakon* has contributed to model subjective and ephemeral worlds, in which the motility of the haptic appears technically shaped by media forms that generate it. As will be seen shortly, from *phantasmat*a, we will then move on to *simulacra*.

HAPTIC SOUNDS: VOICES

Focusing on the synaesthetic quality of haptic hearing allows us to include a metaphorically and physically touching interlocutor frequently disregarded: the voice. In the Covid-19 era, the voice has acquired a renewed intermedial centrality, both when it resonates without an image or contributes to shaping a particular atmosphere, amplifying itself through the screen's interface. Consider, for example, the disembodied and alluring telephone voice of Samantha, artificial intelligence from the not-so-distant futuristic world of *Her* (2013) by Spike Jonze.

In this sense, the interdiction of physical contact has solicited the reevaluation of the similarity between voice and indexical trace, gathered in the Derridean locution of «*double imprint*». Thus, it is the echo phenomenon that presides over that sympathetic and synaesthetic resonance (along with sight), which makes such perceptual forms «modalities of *haptical* approach or appropriation» (Derrida [2000]: 148, emphasis mine). A particular passage of the French philosopher appears, *a fortiori*, rich in enlightening suggestions about the haptic and stratified sound quality. The author follows the vicissitudes of a couple of lovers separated for life. Unfamiliar with but not deprived of a potential ecstatic condition, they avoid the «tragedy» of detachment, caring «the spectral phantasm of ecstatic pleasure» and nour-

ishing of «the telephonic memory of a touching» (Derrida [2000]: 113). As Derrida concisely notes, a «*phantasm* gratifies them» (ibidem, emphasis mine).

In the collective physical and social isolation due to the pandemic in which, as we have tried to argue, the encounter with the Other takes place in the hypertextual forms of narration through images, voice acquires the role of a haptic interface (*aptychus*) that connects heterogeneous systems. In other words, it represents a medium not only between the iconosphere and the real but also between Reality and the real, according to the Lacanian binomial recalled by Žižek ([1997]: 66). Furthermore, because the voice itself is configured as a particularly complex haptic device, this medial capability can arise. In this sense, the voice holds respectively: its indexical morphogenesis as a result of an intracorporeal phonic itinerary; its participation not in the eidetic faculty of the *phantasma*, but rather in the exosomatic and touching faculty of Lucretian *simulacrum*, modelled on the Epicurean concept of *eidola*.

The current pandemic situation seems to have reconfigured this Lucretian notion, exploiting the undulatory nature of a sound that does not disperse in the distance and that, also by its motility, allows reaching immaterial emotional proximity. Hence, the simulacral image offers suggestive medial perspectives for the post-pandemic future. Specifically, the «rerum simulacra», compared by Lucretius to very lightweight images that fluctuate swiftly in the ether as sort of «quasi membranae vel cortex» (Fellin [2013]: 232-233), seem to represent the genealogical forerunner of a technology capable of reformulating the connection between presence and contact: that is, holograms.

CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBLE MEDIAL FUTURES

To conclude, the consequences of the state of pandemic emergency have elicited an unexpected acceleration in the configuration of the media landscape, actively contributing to the rewriting of subjective and public cartographies. Among the "re-emergence" and innovations that have occurred, we could include: the awareness of the potentialities inherent in screens (Carbone [2020]); the predominant role of material engagement in social media (Montani [2020]: 25-26); the cross-sectional diffusion of Virtual Reality devices, variously employed in medical/healthcare field (Singh et al. [2020]), gymnastics/ludic environment, and as a substitute for tourism-related activities (Sarkady et al. [2021]); the proliferation of applications that exploit Augmented Reality (AR) hybrid systems – from *Google Art & Culture* to the *Acute Art* project; the proliferation of podcasts entirely based on the voice and sound element – culminating in the launch of the *Clubhouse* platform produced by Alpha Exploration & Co in January 2020.

However, the most promising horizon for the haptic co-presence advocated by the present contribution coincides with what Simone Arcagni defined since 2018 as «the era of holograms (...) those three-dimensional images that float in the air (...), visible from every point of view without the use of special glasses, creating the illusion that the person or object we are looking at is in the same room as us» (Arcagni [2018]: 219, trad.). The futuristic dream of proximity in the distance, of a non-phantasmal bodily being, longed for by sci-fi cinematography in the past decade, is being designed with Ikin's *RYZ* hologram device. Overcoming the limits of invasiveness and compatibility frequently attributed to the use of VR visors, this interface, according to its creators, would allow enjoying brilliant holograms simply by employing the smartphone, through a system of Full Touch Interactivity probably supported by *Ultraleap Haptics*.

While it may be premature to formulate reflections about this rising technology, the suspicion that an element of intangibility subsists, even in the front of realistic tactile feedback, endures (Figure 10). In other words, this would not be sufficient to violate that condition of intangibility that constitutes «the ghostly revenant (*phantasma*), at the heart of (self-)feeling» (Derrida [2000]: 35).
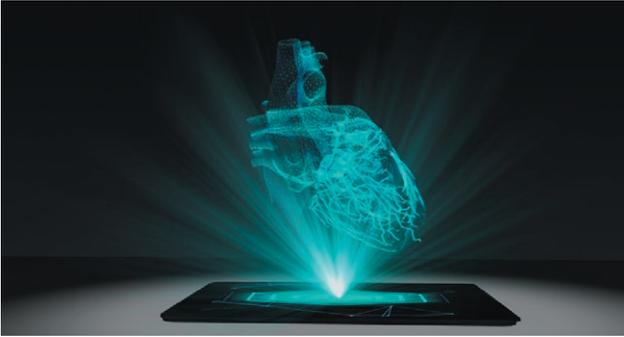
Figure 10: Hologram prototype generated by Ikin's RYZ.

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Aisthesis

Pandemic and the Fairy Tale Narrative

Dario Cecchi

Abstract. The article considers how the narrative of the pandemic has been developed, especially with regard to literature. The case study analyzed is the Italian novel *L'assemblea degli animali*, written by an anonymous author, whose penname is Filelfo. The article shows that the wide range of classical, literary and artistic references recognizable inside the text corresponds to a precise attitude of the ecologist culture, which is in search for traditional and elevated models to assert their ethical and political objective. The novel brings this directory to the point that it evokes an esoteric dimension of ecology. The article states that this stance is not serious, but ends into a literary game and feeds the needs for entertainment by the cultural industry, rather than giving any real contribution to the ecological question.

Keywords: ecology, literature, entertainment, cultural industry, esoterism.

THE ECOLOGIST NARRATIVE

The representation of the pandemic through images has shown a poverty that does not allow the elaboration of narrative formulas that are completely appropriate to the situation (see Cappelletto [2021]). If we look at the journalistic account of the pandemic, it seems that journalism is increasingly rediscovering speech, after years of uncontested domination of images. It is interesting to note that, at this juncture, genres such as the *Bildungsroman* or the didactic fable are making a comeback. I would like to consider in particular a literary case, which will let me reflect precisely upon this aspect: the forms of narration that are emerging, or re-emerging, during the pandemic indicate a renewed role of literature.

However, I refrain from formulating a general thesis on the narrative forms of the pandemic, whether it concerns literature or cinema. In short, I avoid suggesting delays or foresight of this or that art. I will limit myself to pointing out how for instance, in the period preceding the pandemic and with regard to a now flourishing activity like documentary, cinema does not seem to have reacted in a striking way to this event – except of course wondering about the

limits of its medium in conditions of lockdown. On the contrary, the ecological question, as emerges in the work of many remarkable directors, of which I will mention only the name of Nossiter, had been deepened by cinema. It is also interesting to see how, once an epidemic has broken out and spread all over the globe, the same interpretative model has often been proposed, that is, the rediscovery of traditions and a lifestyle more respectful of a 'natural order'. A sort of revolutionary claim is linked to this model, however revolution is intended, and is meant to be a sort of reparative action. *Omelia contadina* (2020), the recent film realized by Alice Rohrwacher in collaboration with street artist JR, goes exactly in the same direction, despite being released when the global ecological agenda is now having to deal with the pandemic.

It seems to me that cinema – I repeat: taken in its most widespread expressions and subject to every possible exception – has not reacted fully adequately to the novelty of the event, believing to be able to treat the pandemic as a continuation of the discourse already started on the subject of other issues: the ecological question, but also the question of globalization understood as the cancellation of distances. Thus, while films on ecology continue to focus on the disasters of the Anthropocene, the issue of physical distancing during confinement is mostly dealt with as a variant of the incredible virtual approach now within the reach of almost everyone (at least in the West), thanks to new digital devices. This problem, in other words, is addressed in terms of a more or less effective and attractive remodeling of social media (Facebook, Instagram and others) and communication technologies (Skype, Whatsapp and now Zoom, Meet etc.). And it is no coincidence that some documentary experiments concerning the lockdown took direct inspiration from a film model that marked the advent of the internet in the world: I am referring to *Life in a Day* (2011) by the Scott brothers, in which the directors had he asked people around the world to film a fragment of their day. They would then edit parts of these videos together, thus creating an ideal day for humanity across the globe. I speak of

a model because the experiment was replicated by Gabriele Salvatores with his *Italy in a Day* (2014), which limits the perspective to Italy. However, it seems to me that in the experiments indicated above there is always the risk of activating the mechanism of what Grusin calls premediation. I am of course referring to how certain themes or narrative models were taken up after the outbreak of the pandemic. It is not so much the fact that familiar narrative formulas are repeated: the thing in itself is neither an evil nor an indication of little attention to current events. The point is that narrative themes and frames are repeated: in other words, the contexts of the narrative[1] have not been reworked in any way. But it is not fully accounted that, due to the overlap between narrative and information about the pandemic, such marked narrative continuity can end up providing the feeling that the pandemic is somehow within the number of foreseeable events. In short, the trauma of the event is anesthetized (see Montani [2007]), but, due to a perverse effect, this anesthetization creates even more anger, because it supports the idea that the pandemic could have been avoided[2]. In summary, the visual narrative of the pandemic has not always promoted a new understanding of reality[3]. The effect of the sense

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[1] I use the notion of "context" in the meaning proposed by Umberto Eco (1979), which distinguishes context and "cotext". The cotext is all that we find on the surface of the text and that contributes to the understanding of the cell we are dealing with. To a minimum degree, this is what we need to understand the different use or sense of the preposition "of" depending on whether we are talking about "Elizabeth of England" or "bottle of wine". The context is, so to say, the background that is necessary for us to understand what is said in the text: the phrase "they brought the lion back to the cage" presupposes the existence of a city with a zoological garden or a circus that is camped somewhere.

[2] Of course, I do not want to say that this forecasting work, for example by science, is not desirable and commendable: it is in every respect. But the problem here is the communication, direct or indirect, in the form of information or narration (of reality or fiction), of how we are coping with the pandemic, with what technical means, with what strategies and projects, with what scientific tools.

[3] For the reciprocal implication and the intertwining of understanding and narrating, see Garroni (2003), who thinks of this relationship as a "paradox" [Garroni (2003): 175] together irre-

of narration on understanding is basically the expansion, on the level of the imagination and its ability to anticipate an intellectual grasp of reality, of the art process described by Sklovskij (1968) as "estrangement". Except that here not only the renewal of perception and therefore its flagrance is at stake, but also the possibility of experiencing things, that is, of bringing them back to a possible sense, even in the absence of specific practical or cognitive discoveries (see Garroni [2005]). In this perspective, the idea of narrating as a possible anticipation of the sense of experience refers to an investigation of the ways and forms through which the subject makes an image of the world. Given these premises, it cannot be said that, in cinema, a similar reconfiguration of meaning, with respect to the ecological question or the media question, has emerged in a recognizable way, even though it is evoked in numerous videos or films. Take the question of the "spillover", or leap of the virus from one animal species to another, in this case to the human being. This scientifically attested fact has an undoubted narrative potential: that is, it invites not to a didactic exposition of the scientific meaning of the concept, but to a narrative development of a spillover case and its catastrophic consequences, as it is hypothesized that it happened in the case of Covid-19. In other words, it would be a very powerful accelerator in the process of configuring the story, of what Paul Ricoeur (1983: 125-135) calls "Mimesis 2". As we will see in the next paragraph, this happens, surprisingly indeed, in a novel, or rather a "fairy tale", released at the end of 2020.

THE ANIMAL FAIRY TALE

The fairy tale mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph is *L'assemblea degli animali* [*The Assembly of Animals*], released in the original Italian edition by Einaudi in November 2020, whose subtitle reads *Una favola selvaggia* [*A Wild Fairy Tale*]. The anonymous author uses a nick-

name, "Filelfo", on whose meaning he will offer an explanation at the end of the book. I will have to return to the fable-like nature of the story later. Let us start with the construction of the weave. In fact, the story is thought of as a sort of mythical explanation of the reason why the virus spillover from a bat to a human being. The explanation provided is linked to the ecological theme of the revolt of nature against the abuse perpetrated by mankind, but introduces some original elements. In fact, throughout the first part of the book (Chapters I-IX), the author imagines that animals gather in assembly to decide what to do with an increasingly aggressive and voracious human being. The *casus belli* was given by the terrible fire that devastated the forest in Australia, causing a terrible slaughter of animals and the destruction of their environment. The book opens with a description of all the animals that gather in the secret place of the assembly, known to all animals from the moment of birth, to decide what to do. Only the human being has forgotten the existence of this place. The scene is effectively outlined: it is the spectacle of nature that is both the setting for the meeting and it is itself, represented by all animal species, that comes together. It is a cosmic movement that narrated. The poet's words would fit well with its bucolic and epic development: *redeunt Saturnia regna*. Here too, the ferocious beast stands next to its prey, not because a kingdom of peace has been established among the animals, but because, the book informs us, it is the eternal rule of this assembly that the fundamental law of nature is suspended: say the law of the strongest. I suggested to make a comparison between the fable of Philelf and the IV Virgilian Eclogue – *si parva licet*. In fact, the assembly of animals is teeming with cultured references, not least to the Greek-Latin classics. Curiously, however, the bucolic Virgil is absent, at least explicitly. The author has in fact accompanied the book with a thick appendix of annotations in which, chapter after chapter, he indicates the more or less hidden or evident references of his to other texts. The author's cultural encyclopedia – if I can express myself thus, paraphrasing a notion bor-

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ducible to explanations in a strictly logical sense and yet necessary.

rowed from Umberto Eco (1979) – could not be more extensive. It goes from classical literature to contemporary writers: Italo Calvino is mentioned several times; Borges is referred to as the greatest modern poet. But there are also references as much to pre-classical mythologies as to pop culture, with quotes taken for example from the songs of Fabrizio De André. A similar heterogeneity suggests to a first critical reading a judgment that sees in the story a sort of pastiche covered by the aura of the allegorical fable. But, beyond the critical judgments, I am interested in establishing, in the wake of Eco's theory of cooperation, if it is possible to trace the identity of the author and establish who they are addressing, who their audience is. Naturally, the reference to Eco goes in this direction, the interest is not so much for the real identity of the mysterious Filelfo, but for the "model author" that this story presupposes. Similarly, I am interested in what could be, in the mind of the writer or at least in accordance with the narrative device they have created, the "model reader" they address. But before proceeding to examine the two issues, I will add the few other elements necessary to understand what I will want to say about the book.

The assembly, in which chiefs, the "kings" of the various elementary kingdoms (earth, air, sea, underground world; therefore: lion, eagle, whale, mouse) and the victims of human fury (the Australian koala), deliberates that the only possible solution is to hit the human being so as to make him reflect on what he is doing to nature and the rest of the animal world. It was therefore decided to accept the proposal of the king of mice to spread a virus that will hit humanity hard without annihilating it. This is obviously Covid-19, whose epidemic arises from a spillover from the bat (the winged mouse) to the human being through some well-known passages, which the author describes effectively as the future of history: the pangolin, bite from the bat, in the cage of the farmer's son who goes to the market to sell it. Everything happens in the most anonymous and insignificant events. The pandemic's direct witnesses in the story are obviously the white cat and the dog MoMo,

representatives of the domestic species closest to the human being, from which they even rise to religious symbols (in Egypt) and literary figures.

MoMo and the cat see the point of maximum resistance of mankind in the progressive degradation of the life of people and families of which they are pets, until death from the virus of the owner of MoMo, of which we intuit that he was a doctor engaged in fight against the epidemic. The pain is such that the dog is transformed into a new being, a Filelfo in fact, half dog and half human. The "Filelfi" are those beings who have undergone a process of metamorphosis that makes them hybrids; hybridization is seen as access to a higher stage of existence, even of essence, similar to the ascension towards the astral constellations.

We can now formulate hypotheses on the identity of Filelfo. First of all, in order to understand who the author is, we need to understand what kind of text they propose to us. At first glance, *L'assemblea degli animali*, according to what has been said, would seem to be an initiatory fable. However, there are two elements that must lead us to be more cautious. Unlike other authoritative models of esoteric or key fable, just think of Goethe's *Fabel*, here the historical context in which the fantastic story is to be placed is clearly indicated: the immemorial time typical of the fable and of the epos disappears, which refer typically at the time of "once upon a time" or "no longer always", that is, they represent a world that exists and does not exist at the same time[4] (see Bachtin [1981]). Furthermore, the precise reference to the sources taken from different *auctores* and inserted in the plot of the text is made sometimes for the sake of the quotation, as in the case of that "Last comes the Raven" (Filelfo [2020]: 5), explicitly taken up by Calvino, with whom the story opens. This takes away much of its esoteric character from the story. There are no enigmas to solve, a fundamental element in activating the operational procedure

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[4] Persian fables, for example, do not begin with "Once upon a time" but with "Yeki bud wa yeki nabud" ("Once upon a time there was and there was not").

through which the reader can start his or her initiatory path. Nor can it be said that the structure of the text constructed as a montage of citations of which the author indicates the sources functions here according to the authoritative model it evokes – and which is promptly cited among the numerous sources. I refer to Eliot's *Wasteland*. What is missing here, unlike Eliot's masterpiece, is the typically modernist intention of making the reader feel all the dissonant force that exists in approaching, for example, Madame Blavatsky and Tiresias. It is then up to the reader to elaborate – using a cinematographic metaphor, in the intervals of the montage – the meaning of what he has read.

Intertwining the two elements, the pastiche that refuses to give the reader reading instructions (Jameson [1991]) and the pulverization of time frames (Lyotard [1984]), both internal to the text and in relation to the possible "refiguration" of the reader's world (Ricoeur [1983]: 138-143), we could say that we are dealing with a product of late postmodernity, which, however, lacks the ironic trait typical of postmodern literature: it is not possible here to assert the clause according to which that's all folks! The fable is "wild", as the subtitle states, not so much because it operates a 'conversion' of the reader to the feral state, but because it offers a pastiche that can no longer be dismantled as it is immune to an ironic reading. Therefore, it is not an esoteric fable in the narrow sense of the word, but rather a successful *Singspiel* which, winking at themes and figures taken from the most disparate traditions, exhibits a variable rate of hermeticity. Therefore, despite the crowd of cultured references, the matrix of the story does not seem to come from literature and high culture but from entertainment and pop culture (Bolter 2020), in the highest and noblest sense of the term, which a well-thought-out *Singspiel* can guarantee. Consequently, Filelfo is not a Pythagorean sage, a hermit by his choice in some remote land of the Italian countryside, but rather the refined editor of a large publishing house.

We can now ask ourselves who is the model reader of Filelfo's "fable". Here is what the author themselves says at the end of the book, with words and cadences that emphasize its mysterious or esoteric character:

> *Sappi però che i nuovi giusti sono ovunque, confusi tra la gente comune, disseminati in tutto il mondo, persi in mille lavori e fatiche e problemi, a ricostruire umilmente, finché dura la terra, una nuova arca. Forse qualcuno di loro ora ha tra le mani questo libro e lo sta leggendo. Forse sei tu, lettore arrivato alle sue ultime parole. Che non possono che essere: de te fabula narratur. Perché da sempre la favola parla di te. Sei tu, lettore, l'autore di questa e della prossima.* (Filelfo 2020: 140)

> [*But know that the new righteous are everywhere, confused among the common people, scattered all over the world, lost in a thousand jobs and hardships and problems, humbly rebuilding a new ark while the earth lasts. Perhaps some of them now have this book in their hands and are reading it. Maybe it's you, reader come to its last words. Which can only be: de te fabula narratur. Because the story has always been about you. You, reader, are the author of this and the next.*]

The syntax, always fluid, has maintained an adequate level of hypotactic complexity throughout the text, such as not to discourage the average reader, without risking the accusation of simplification. In closing it becomes a little more complicated: subordinates and incisions increase. The sentence even breaks up and gives rise to two consecutive subordinates at the beginning of a proposition, connected in meaning with the previous proposition. Everything emphasizes the dramatic tone of the author's final considerations. Not only is the book about the reader, as we would feel to understand the saying *de te fabula narrator*, according to a *lectio facilior*. The fable belongs to the readers, in the sense that they are the authentic author, also in view of future extensions of history.

We draw the conclusion that the reader is the one who gives meaning to the unprecedented dissolution of the historical time of the pandemic in the mythical time of animal nature: readers are in fact the author of the present and future fable,

as if the story had created a direct bridge, without mediation, between the world of fiction and the real world. From a similar perspective, the concrete author of the story can affirm the total reversibility between themselves and the reader: the invitation is to enter into a communion of ideas and a communion of intentions and feelings. The author is not Filelfo, but the newly formed brotherhood of the Filelfi, in which the reader is called to enter, becoming an author in turn. And the fable itself from a pure metamorphosis tale becomes an effective transformation action of a human race that must choose whether to embrace the project of a return to animality as a new frontier of moral and civil progress reformed according to the imperative of ecology. In this respect, the most powerful classic reference in the final part of the book undoubtedly goes to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this sense, *L'assemblea degli animali* is not really an esoteric fable for initiates, but a sort of propaganda pamphlet for the layman, which uses a high style and classic models to gain authority among the reading public.

The point reached satisfies only in part, especially if we start from the assumption, widely requested by the story, that the "encyclopedia" the reader needs to interpret the text cannot be composed only of knowledge and notions, but must also include a bundle of feelings and inclinations, a wide-ranging sensitivity towards the themes of ecology and the protection of nature. The model reader of this story is not, in all respects, a scholar or a militant ecologist. The reader's culture is solicited in a broader meaning: not only his knowledge properly so called, but the set of informal knowledge, information and quasi-knowledge that contribute to forming his opinion. It could be said that this model reader, due to the culture and preferences attributed to him, comes from that middle or upper middle class with a progressive orientation, which lives in the centers of large urban agglomerations. We could almost speak of a "Limit Traffic Area" reader, to use a figure which has become popular in the Italian political debate. However, we must bear in mind that this popular journalistic category perhaps makes

more sense on a cultural level than on a political one. Consequently, more than a model reader, *L'assemblea degli animali* implicitly draws the contours of a model environment of possible readers: it is in fact in the mechanism of imitation and emulation, in the sharing of cultural habits within the same social reality, which goes to place the fortune of this book. In the absence of salons and literary circles, we must imagine the relationship between the model author, behind whom we think there is the figure of an editor, and the model reader in terms of the relationship between spin doctor and blogger, that is, between professional and semi-professional actors of the same media system.

As argues Wolfgang Iser (2013: 228), elaborating a paradigm of interpretative cooperation more open to the assumption of the aesthetic elements of this performance, reading presupposes an "artificial habitat" (*künstliches Habitat*) in which, like an actor, the reader can move with a certain degree of freedom. Readers can thus restructure their own hierarchies of aesthetic, ethical and political values. In this context, the aesthetic component of experience performs in particular the function of fluidifying the complex of other values, so that it is possible to shape a new configuration of life (Jauss 1972). In this sense, aesthetic values present themselves as meta-values of human experience. *L'assemblea degli animali* essentially insists on the meeting point between media and the dimension of affectivity widely understood, and interprets this relationship in terms of an overlapping between the sphere of human communication and the sphere of inter-specific communication, between the cultural environment and natural environment.

At this level, the ambiguity of the book emerges. It is the same ambiguity that runs through the rhetoric of the rediscovery of the nature of progressive, intellectual and even philosophical discourse (cf. Coccia [2020] among others). The starting point is not problematic, which is indisputable: the defense of the environment requires a decisive change of gear in the industrial policies of developed countries. This is a priority on the

global political agenda. Problematic are the point of arrival and the ideological substrate, if you can call it that, connected to this rhetoric. The latter often ends up identifying the "metamorphosis" of the human with the uncritical re-appropriation of an alleged animality, or even a lost "vegetality" (Coccia [2018]; Mancuso [2019]). A problematic element of these philosophies emerges, for example, in the latest formulation of his thought program by Emanuele Coccia (2020). Here, the notion of metamorphosis has both a descriptive value and a normative value at the same time: it indicates belonging to a cycle of natural transformations and the imperative to a return to the origin. *L'assemblea degli animali* relaunches this contradiction, or perhaps indicates its place of origin: the question should not be sought so much in the conflict between nature and culture, between ecology and progress, but in the short circuit between communication and information, between the sphere of the media and the culture of sharing and the sphere of knowledge and critical knowledge. Filelfi are placed here, but they are not the wise guardians of an ancient wisdom: they are skilled users of the internet, at times shrewd at times (maybe intentionally, or just luckily) naïve.

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The Optical House of Tactile: The Bricolage-Like Response to COVID-19

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Abstract. This paper aims to analyse how COVID-19 pandemic is changing our perception of reality. It starts looking at our situation from the point of view of Riegl's distinction between optical and tactile, and then it compares the nature of the relationship between these two approaches to Lévi-Strauss's description of *bricolage*. Our current world-view turns out to be not only an optic one, because the optical approach is just the means by which we can articulate a private and social life messed up by Coronavirus. Thereby, optical takes care of tactile without replacing it, and this article draws parallels between this aspect and language as described by Heidegger. Finally, after having argued the presence of an aura in this "optical house of tactile" in both Walter Benjamin's and Hito Steyerl's forms, this article tries to figure out how this perspective could last beyond the end of this emergency.

Keywords: Bricolage, Alois Riegl, Martin Heidegger, Aura, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has not had (nor it will continue to have) an impact on our lifestyle just in social and economic terms, but also in aesthetic ones. Alois Riegl's distinction between tactile and optical approaches to the image can help us to understand its effects, also since his dichotomy between "tactile connection" and "optical isolation" can ring a bell in a year characterised by video calls and social distancing. In fact, the Viennese art critic intends to attribute a sort of tacticity to the point of view that perceives images in their unity, while locating a more strictly optical gaze where people look at things in their mutual individuality (Riegl [1901]: 21). Applying these considerations to today's situation, we also have to keep in mind features such as the «uninterrupted and *immediately* convincing materiality» (Riegl [1901]: 65, transl. my own) of tactile and the penchant for thoughtful detachment encouraged, instead, by the works of art made during an "optical" era such as the late-Roman period.

Immediacy has undoubtedly no place on Zoom, among "elbow to elbow" greetings, or where a constant measurement of distances requires a mental grid in front of our gaze. However, it is also true that those behaviours have not happened because we have «begun to find a fascination (*Reiz*) in having to complete a work of art with a mental effort» (Riegl [1901]: 65, transl. my own) as instead, according to Riegl, did the late-Roman intellectuals. On the one hand, external, sudden, and clearly negative circumstances forced us into this approach; on the other one, it involves social classes in quite a transversal way, given the nature of the virus, and not just the elite that dictates the «fashion art» (*Modekunst*) (Riegl [1901]: 65). The "masses" themselves are involved in an optical point of view, whereas Benjamin, in *The Work of Art in the Era of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935), wrote that their very inclusion in the enjoyment of artistic production was responsible for art being sinking into a tactile «distraction» (Benjamin [1935]: 31, 32). In facts, film is the art form that «corresponds to deep-rooted changes in the apparatus of perception» (Benjamin [1935]: 49) widespread among the masses exposed to the perils of modern life. That is because it prevents viewers from contemplating an image through an uninterrupted flow of frames which «cannot be pinned down» (Benjamin [1935]: 32).

Therefore, the pandemic has led people to an optical gaze, both sudden and unnatural, which has been imposed on our minds too abruptly to replace harmoniously the haptic closeness we all mourn. That invites us to ask ourselves where the tactile approach could be hidden now and how it can endure in an eye bombarded by signs to wash our hands, to wear a mask, and to stay six feet away from other people; or after hours of smart-working. The hypothesis that we will try to develop throughout this article concerns the possibility that the optical world-view is perceived (in a more or less unconscious way) as a sort of custodian of tactile. I will try to argue this point as a result of the diffusion in everybody of the *bricoleur*'s way to look at things, in the terms in which Claude

Lévi-Strauss describes it in his essay *La pensée sauvage* (1962).

THE RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The separation perceivable between the parts of a whole is one of the features found by Riegl in works of art from the late-Roman period, e.g. in the construction of buildings, where

> the insertion of a wall between columns and ceiling means, in itself, a disruption of the necessary connection between support and ceiling: a significant difference from the Greek columnar house. It seems as if one deliberately planned to eliminate any allusion [Versinnlichung] to a causal connection between the parts. (Riegl [1901]: 31, transl. my own)

Furthermore, the Austrian art historian specifies that the late-Roman artworks began to show a juxtaposition of heterogeneous pieces, such as the columns plundered in the fourth century by pagan monuments in order to build churches (Riegl [1901]: 92). Riegl considers this approach as typical of an optical gaze, since an age that looks at things in a tactile way cannot employ for its own purposes pieces used in different times and places (Riegl [1901]: 92). Therefore, only the Romans' descendants could have cobbled together elder elements in stark contrast to their original relationship, be it absent from the beginning (as between pillaged marbles) or only later deprived of all meaning (like the one between columns, walls, and ceiling).

Hence, only regarding those who have an optical world-view we can draw a parallel with the *bricoleur* of Lévi-Strauss, if it is true that he has a «heterogeneous repertoire» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 17) whose elements he combines inserting them one after the other in order to fill «each place» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 19). Although they are assembled, the pieces of a *bricoleur* do not hide their reciprocal differences, and indeed they put the spotlight on the intermediate space between them, i.e., on their relationship. A tactile approach could rise again only if singularity of the assem-

bled pieces regains importance *after* the act of *bricolage*, and if each one is thereby conceived in itself and not in its bond with the others. Instead, an optical juxtaposition between recycled objects requires that, with a gaze on the whole (*Ganze ins Auge*), we can «overlook disturbing tactile details» (Riegl [1901]: 92, transl. my own). This attitude is deeply explained by the French anthropologist, who states that in totemism, a practice in which he says we can find a form of *bricolage*,

> [t]he homology they evoke is not between social groups and natural species but between the differences which manifest themselves on the level of groups on the one hand and on that of species on the other. They are thus based on the postulate of a homology between two systems of differences, one of which occurs in nature and the other in culture. (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 115)

Thus, quoting his example, members of the bear clan does not have (albeit on a cultural level) the nature of bears, but rather their clan differs from the eagle one like an eagle differs from a bear (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 115). In this way, they are assigned roles leaving their essences intact, with an attitude similar to the one identified by Peppino Ortoleva in what he calls "homo ludicus". The latter is the one who faces a great variety of situations relying on ludic models (Ortoleva [2012]: 82), such as the distribution of roles. Gaming becomes thus an «operating model» (Ortoleva [2012]: 90, trans. my own) in the context of a «passage from a lasting "positional" conception to a dynamic "relational" conception of the process of setting up the subject», as pointed out by Ruggero Eugeni in 2015 (Eugeni [2015]: 62, trans. my own). However, although this relational perspective was already widespread before the pandemic, a few examples will be enough to highlight the intensity with which it presents itself nowadays.

In the episode of Last Week Tonight on May 10 2020, John Oliver points out with irony that, if someone watches «old-timey clips» today, what catches your eye is, above all, the fact that people were close to each other in a public place «with no fear of dying» (LastWeekTonight [2020]: 15:52).

This «severe quarantine brain» (as he puts it) is caused by the widespread diffusion of social distancing rules, which lead the individual to consider himself relatively to his spatial relationship with others and to think about their mutual position. Those measures were necessary due to the possibility of spreading the virus to others while being asymptomatic, a feature that makes SARS-CoV-2 unique among «any virus or pathogen we've experienced that has killing potential in the past» (Park [2020]: 10). Since the appearance of another person and our self-perception are not reliable indicators of our health and of the others' one, it is crucial to rely on the six feet apart rules and on masks capable of protecting others from ourselves.

In the knowledge that there is a chance that our own breath is a threat to others and that even underneath the dearest among our friends (or grandchildren) may hide a mortal enemy, the compliance with social distancing rules and the habitual use of masks allow us to shift the focus towards a less anguished perspective, i.e., from shadowy singularities to crystal-clear spatial relationships. Furthermore, as Gavin Yamey, a professor at Duke University, argues, what hinders the practice of wearing masks in the U.S., although this precaution can save tens of thousands of lives, is the «"me first" culture», which places the right to go around unmasked above everyone's health (Yamey [2020]: 20). The very fact that a personal limitation can safeguard others, as well as our protection depends on whether people around us wear masks, makes mutuality of the "roles" played devoid of any concern for our family pedigree and wealth as soon as we are placed, and therefore isolated, on the COVID-19 "draught board".

UNDERLYING TACTILE

Riegl asserts that late-Roman perception of things in their isolation hid the feeling of a magical bond between them. Leaving behind the previous concept of a mechanical relationship among elements, emerged a «new, positive belief in a con-

nection between things that is extra-mechanical and nonetheless based on the individual shapes - thereby magical» (Riegl [1901]: 217, transl. my own). There are no the durable, universal links science has mapped out, which belong to a "tactile unity". Instead, between pieces that are, according to an optical perspective, *mechanically* closed in themselves, we can find a relationship both temporary and secluded (Riegl [1901]: 217). In fact, there is no place for «an exclusively mechanical connection between inalterable, individual shapes» (Riegl [1901]: 217, transl. my own) both of which result, quoting Lévi-Strauss, from «a complete and all-embracing determinism» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 11). The French anthropologist wonders how things or images are tied together within a "savage mind" and finds an answer in magic, seen as a sort of determinism that unfolds in a series of levels, isolated from each other, so that connections existing on one level «are held not to apply» on others (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 11).

Although a "separative lens" presides over it, therefore, a tactile gaze passes through an optical one and allows links, albeit limited, between the elements it finds. Since we will analyse in the next chapter a possible connection between the two distinct poles identified by Riegl, now we have to assess the presence of tacticity in *bricolage*, although in the form of temporary influences both independent from each other and indifferent to the individuality of things. They are forces flowing through space, just like electricity (Riegl [1901]: 217) or the vibrant sensation that, according to Deleuze, runs through Francis Bacon's bodies like waves, destroying their organs (Deleuze [1981]: 32). However, whereas in this latter's paintings there are «axes and vectors, gradients, zones, cinematic movements, and dynamic tendencies, in relation to which the forms are contingent or accessory» (Deleuze [1981]: 32), in the case of the late-Roman period and of a "savage mind" the optical approach is not buried into the tactile one, as we have seen, but rather the shapes themselves generate the magical.

Turning to our time and our mind, from the very beginning COVID-19 showed up as a curve of infections, graphs, and statistics. Whether data concern the effectiveness of a treatment, the filter of a mask, mortality by age group, a trend of the spread, or the effectiveness of certain measures, the pandemic has taken on an intensive, probabilistic tone everywhere. The cases described by an ascending curve cannot reasonably be expected to reset to zero the next day, but that does not imply that we perceive these "forces" as undefeatable. A middle ground is, for example, the one that CBS Channel 8 explained to the general public through some mouse traps ready to launch a ping pong ball (CBS 8 San Diego [2020]). The experiment aimed to show how, in the chain reaction triggered by releasing an "infected" ball, those traps that have been spaced a span apart are more likely to be untouched than the ones in close contact with each other, without assuming, however, that the first ones will all remain intact. Therefore, the intensity we *perceive* inside the viral energy is linked to the mutual relationships between the individuals it may infect, their reciprocal distances, and the precautions taken by each. Thus, it takes the form of an extra-mechanical force dependent on shapes and circumstances, which thereby does not unfold itself everywhere in the same way.

Showing up as a force flowing across the planet, albeit bound to the exposure of individuals, the pandemic has reintroduced an energetic force field capable of uniting contemporary fragmentation, in a way that we can compare to the terrorism in the early 2000s. According to Emanuele Severino, the diffusion of technology in what he calls the «age of technology» (Severino [1998]: 46, transl. my own) entails, at the end of the twentieth century, a widespread fragmentation (Severino [1998]: 48) resulted from the detailed specialisation at which technology aims (Severino [1998]: 47). This form of the hegemony of the West (Baudrillard [2002]: 5) is, as Baudrillard puts it, a «system of generalized exchange» at the heart of which the attacks of September 11 claimed an «irreducible singularity» (Baudrillard [2002]: 9). Just as the terrorists used the same weapons of technological power to revolt against

it (Baudrillard [2002]: 20), Ruggero Eugeni argues that it was necessary, in the same years, to give an order to media «pulverization» through a «meta-practice of construction and reconstruction of unitary, coherent worlds» (Eugeni [2015]: 40, transl. my own). It has been this "media-practice" what would have led to «subjectification of experience» we can find in the spread of the first person shot (Eugeni [2015]: 53, transl. my own). The «universal» has thus left room for «singularities» (Baudrillard [2002]: 96-97), but then, as Joan Fontcuberta points out, the construction of one's own identity alongside hundreds of thousands of others' ones has shown that «the meaning dissolves in excess and confusion» (Fontcuberta [2016]: 43, transl. my own), or, in the words of Walter Benjamin «[q]uantity has now become quality» (Benjamin [1935]: 32, 33).

Being faced with this new shattering, which combines the isolation of fragmentation with the homogeneous indifference of «various equivalents» (Baudrillard [1976]: 89), Coronavirus has instead given the world a tactile dimension that could reunite it, rather than the «irreducible alterity» that has divided it once (Baudrillard [2002]: 97). While the latter has then put tacticity into play through a jumble of singular realities, the virus has also encouraged an optical approach through the various ways we confront it, on which its different powers on each nation, region, city, town, and private citizen depend.

THE OPTICAL HOUSE OF TACTILE (THE OPTICAL ASPECT)

Among the features of a *bricoleur*, as described by Lévi-Strauss, there is the fact that «[h]is universe of instruments is closed» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 17). The optical aspect with which he will try to articulate the form he has in mind (or his tribe, in the case of totemism) does not extend beyond the borders of his set. However, this latter cannot even be reduced in quantity on the basis of an alleged inadequacy of some elements with the «mere sketch» which is the initial project

(Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 21). The French anthropologist explains, in fact, how the «set which has yet to materialize […] will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 18). Therefore, it is on the relational aspect between the elements that a *bricoleur* focuses on as soon as he wants to arrange them "over" the sketched project. He has no regard for a greater or lesser essential (and therefore absolute and immutable) link between a part of the ideal outline and a piece he has to use, and, in this way, no element will be "closer" than others to the tactile essence over which the shapes will be cobbled together. Then, a successful *bricoleur* will be satisfied to have arranged

a system which can be employed as a grid is used to decipher a text, whose original unintelligibility gives it the appearance of an uninterrupted flow. The grid makes it possible to introduce division and contrasts, in other words the formal conditions necessary for a significant message to be conveyed. (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 75, my italics)

Therefore, at least as far as *bricolage* is strictly concerned, there is no need for some meaning to emerge from the "unintelligible text", but rather for the grid to be ready for any "message". Taking a look at the late-Roman statues (on the basis of Riegl's essay, of course) will allow us to understand how their sculptors did not want to express any definite spiritual act through their faces, but rather they aimed at carving «the spiritual relational ability [*die geistige Relationsfähigkeit*] of man in general, not this or that individual relationship» (Riegl [1901]: 111, transl. my own). Therefore, through «mighty, wide open eyes» and the stone-made shell around them, artists tried to show the «spiritual life in itself» (Riegl [1901]: 111, transl. my own).

Like a dome made with heterogenous parts floating above the floor thanks to their reciprocal joints, then, *bricoleur*'s elements form a sheath around the vague shape they are looking at. Since they keep intact their target, mediating an external gaze on it while staying at a distance, there is here in some respects a sort of "guardianship" of the

tactile by the optic. It will be useful not to ignore how complex this definition could become drawing a parallel with Heidegger's thought. First, however, we have to observe under what circumstances should be possible to find this specific aspect of *bricolage* in life during the pandemic. It will be enough, for this purpose, to bring to mind those spaces that hosted our existence during the lockdown and those bars, restaurants, schools, library entrances, churches, etc. which have been set up from scratch in order to preserve, even under the shadow of social distancing, the aforementioned «capacity for spiritual relationships of man in general». In the Time magazine issue of April 6 and 13, there is a double-page photograph of a Catholic priest sitting in his chair, which was part of the «drive-through confessional» (Mages [2020]: 17) he put together in a parking lot with cones of traffic, wires, poles, and an old curtain. It would seem an act of *bricolage*, but it is not precisely what Lévi-Strauss described, as the priest looked for its pieces within a much wider "universe of instruments" than the set he used. Considering the way he outlines his setup, in fact, there can be little doubt that if he had thought another «old curtain» to be more fitting for his project, he would have dismissed the other one (Mages [2020]: 17).

Instead, we have to look at those practices of refurbishing one's own apartment through which «[k]itchens and living rooms were transformed into classrooms, home offices, meeting rooms and sourdough breeding grounds» (BBC Radio 4 [n.d.]). As Ronda Kaysen and Michelle Higgins point out, in fact, even if they had never found a flaw in their furniture, it often proved unsuitable for the new dynamics. In fact, it seemed to be necessary to rearrange everything in order to make room for an unprecedented lifestyle. Furthermore, «[r]ethinking your space can offer a sense of control» (Kaysen, Higgins [2020]) on a tactile presence spread all over the world, whose influence on your existence you can try, in this way, to reduce. The advice of the two journalists is, in order «[t]o figure out the best use of your space, [to] try moving things around», letting yourself be guided by the function of the different

rooms and by the "instrumental set" of the furniture (which remains the same), placing each piece after the other (Kaysen, Higgins [2020]). A similar challenge was then faced, with the addition of some dispensers, by anyone who had to rethink the arrangement of the spaces that would be reopened to the public in order to safely welcome, guide, accommodate, and ushering it out, thus preserving its relational life, whatever it is. As Lou Del Bello states, they too had to «reimagine those spaces from scratch» to «rediscover what togetherness means in new spaces» (De Bello [2020]).

As mentioned above, Heidegger's reflection allows us to deepen the understanding of what optic's guardianship of tactile may imply. In fact, we can agree with the Japanese man of *A dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer* (1953-54) when he argues that the view according to which language is designated as the «house of Being» plays an increasingly pivotal role in the path of the German philosopher (Heidegger [1959]: 21). According to the latter, «thinking in its saying *merely* brings the unspoken word of Being to language» (Heidegger [1949]: 239, my italics), without thereby becoming an «instrument of domination» over "Being" as it is over "beings" (Heidegger [1949]: 199). If "thinking" is thus willing, in fact, it «has no result. It has no effect» in practical terms, but it «lets the Being-be» because it «builds upon the house of Being» (Heidegger [1949]: 236).

The dependence of this "thinking" on Being itself, by which it is «thrown […] into the preservation of its truth and claimed for such preservation» (Heidegger [1949]: 236), leads man away from an existence that «lies in the subject-object relation». Instead, he is put «into the openness of Being», and thereby into the «"Between" within which a "relation" of subject to object can "be"» (Heidegger [1949]: 229). According to Heidegger, man lives in that "house of Being" which is Language (Heidegger [1949]: 193), and, there, he «is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being» (Heidegger [1949]: 221). *Mutatis mutandis*, i.e., by substituting "Being" with a social or private life made inarticulate by the virus and "language" with the elements available to take care of

this life, the relationship between the tactile existence and the optical "arranging the furniture" can then show itself in their mutual dependence.

Before we go any further, it is perhaps necessary to emphasize that the aim of these pages confines itself to argue a possible actuality of the type of relationships outlined by Heidegger both between language and Being, and, in the final chapter, between man and language. We do not want to speak further, in a few lines, of the meaning that these concepts have in the thought of the German philosopher. Not only is it not the purpose of this essay, but – to misquote Lord Polonius – to "expostulate" *here* why Being is Being, language language, and man is man, would be nothing but to waste Being, language and man.

THE OPTICAL HOUSE OF TACTILE (THE TACTILE ASPECT)

Just as, in a synchronic point of view, the "house of tactile" closes around it in detachment, so an act of *bricolage* generates a sort of dome, as I said above. This happens by virtue of the way in which the "language/grid" is created by listening to what it has to take care of, or, in Heidegger's words, through its being "thrown" and "claimed" by it. The manner in which the *bricoleur* assembles the "grid" does not have any earlier origin than his first act itself and cannot be used later, and thus it is limited to its own. Whether this *assembly* of "language" is a medium through which its singular "words" (the elements of *bricolage*) can be disposed to organise the inarticulate form, or vice-versa we look at it as the medium by which this latter can emerge through the selected pieces, the final setup will be useless elsewhere. In the arrangement of the furniture described in the previous paragraph, for example, the combinatorial possibilities are limited by the very objects you have at home, and even if they were the same for everyone, the spaces they have to organise and the life that flows through the rooms would always be different.

Proceeding towards the result does not only mean putting the pieces together, but also following the call of what will be beyond it, that is the shape/idea/essence to be housed. This is what does not allow to "apply" the same manner to any other shape. Listening to the singular essence, in fact, is itself a part of the process, and it consists in arranging pieces as if around an idea, inside a contour, or over a sketch. During the COVID-19 emergency, given the extremely varied resources and contexts, it has not been possible (or reasonable) to provide strict instructions from above on managing one's own reality in order to prevent the virus spread. This way, we have got used to looking at our situation in its singularity, so that solutions found to cope with new rules and needs have been numerous and all of them unique. We can see this, for example, in the never the same calls to wash hands and keep a safe distance, in the variety of masks made by converted factories, or in the signs on New York storefronts in late March, which expressed, depending on the case, «empathy, resolve, concern, even humor» (de Luca [2020]), as there was non print-ready format in the event of a global pandemic.

We can find a more in-depth explanation of the latter point of view in Nelson Goodman's *The Languages of Art* (1968). Here we can read that although «all correct musical performances are equally authentic instances of the work», «even the most exact copies of the Rembrandt painting are simply imitations or forgeries» (Goodman [1968]: 113), and learn that this is because the «symbol scheme» of a score is «substantially notational» (Goodman [1968]: 181), and thereby internally "differentiated" (Goodman [1968]: 152). In painting, instead, «with no such alphabet of characters, none of the pictorial properties […] is distinguished as constitutive; no such feature can be dismissed as contingent, and no deviation as insignificant» (Goodman [1968]: 116).

Each painting remains unique by virtue of its tactile, seamless continuum through the elements. The same is true for *bricolage*, which from its tactile shape receives its «here and now», quoting Benjamin's words, meaning «its unique existence in the place where it is at the moment» (Benjamin [1935]: 5). According to the Berliner philosopher,

this value of authenticity is related to the sphere of worship, be it magical or religious (Benjamin [1935]: 11). Therefore, the aura, i.e., the perception of the «singularity» of the work of art (Benjamin [1935]: 10), depends on a cultic approach towards the sacredness it houses inside. Lastly, by attributing an auratic nature to a «unique manifestation of a remoteness» (Benjamin [1935]: 9), Benjamin reveals that a work of art made for a contemplative gaze has still to preserve its tactile «sheath» (Benjamin [1935]: 10) in order to maintain its optical detachment from the public.

In the last sentence sight and touch seems to overlap and, quite above, we have talked about symphonic music and auras enveloping works of art, things to which it may be difficult to attribute a tactile or optical nature. It could be therefore useful to make more explicit the choice of referring to these adjectives in accordance with the values that Riegl and Benjamin give them, regardless of the physical nature of the art concerned. Instead, the dichotomy between tactile and visual has to deal with the relationship between the "closeness-detachment" polarity and the "indefinite-well defined" one. These aspects, of course, can be intertwined in manifold ways, e.g., in a "caressing" gaze, in which the observed things fade into one another, while the observer remains distant from them. In the case of music, this difference unfolds on different levels, since, although scores feature a definite notation, «[t]he performances of the most specific score are by no means exact duplicates of one another, but vary widely and in many ways. A moderately good copy and the original painting resemble each other more closely than do performances of a Bach suite by Piatigorsky and Casals» (Goodman [1968]: 196).

At this point, one might also wonder how this article has dealt with the underlying situation, meaning the COVID emergency. Concerning these muddled dynamics, it is not entirely rhetorical the desire (or the necessity) to do nothing more than what every bartender has had to do with his tables and chairs, as described above. Arranging his furniture (in our case, our sources), he too has not directly addressed the entire COVID situation, while he has dealt with the new attitudes, risks, needs and rules that have spread in every space, even in his bar. Furthermore, he too does not make his point about the value of these novelties, trusting (ideally) in more expert judgments. Instead, he arranges his furniture in order to "map" a physical and relational space that has suddenly become unfamiliar. In this article, the "map" outlined features various concentric regions. In the next chapters, in fact, we will analyse the relationships between the acts of *bricolage*, such as we have explained this latter by describing the current relationships between touch and sight, on which the first two chapters focused. After all, many pages have already been spent in underlining, rightfully, the social, political, and economic impact of the present pandemic, and, beyond any doubt, with macroscopic and microscopic lenses far more expert than ours.

TACTILE BETWEEN THE ACTS OF BRICOLAGE

Apart from the initial project into which the *bricoleur* «always puts something of himself» (Lévi -Strauss [1962]: 21), the fact that «each choice which is made will involve a complete reorganization of the structure, which will never be the same as one vaguely imagined» (Lévi -Strauss [1962]: 19) makes *bricolage* impervious to an external will. On the other hand, as we have seen before, even it cannot have a "will" of its own capable of turning towards external circumstances by imposing its model elsewhere. This lack, or extreme weakness, of any type of will in *bricolage* is a factor that unites those who engage in it, binding them together in shared powerlessness. Even if the same «cards», as in an example of Lévi-Strauss, are played differently by different players, or although there are systematic variations between the customs of even contiguous Australian tribes, the «rules of the game» are shared, and the underlying «social and philosophical style» is the same for each tribe (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 90, 106).

During the pandemic, it is due to the very perception of this common powerlessness that «DIY

methods of communication» have been successful (Berman [2020]: 46), i.e., those videos, often broadcast live and streamed on the new social platforms, in which it is self-evident that the celebrity or the show suddenly had to come to terms with Coronavirus, just like the rest of us. Whether the host starts the episode (as Stephen Colbert got used to) chattering with his wife, or Jimmy Fallon's «joyfully disrupted» daughters barge in, «there's a sense that if we're all self-quarantining at home, then we're all in this together» (Berman [2020]: 47). In Italy, besides, a "transmission error" done by the press office of the Quirinal made public President Mattarella's address to the nation in a version with no editing whatsoever (Messina [2020]). This blunder has brought government offices closer than ever to ordinary people, showing them no longer as a Kafkaesque castle, but for once as workplaces stretched thin dealing with anti-COVID regulations (Vecchio [2020]). The same goes for President Sergio Mattarella, both for the "human" mistakes of the takes that would have to be discarded, and for his response to the invitation to fix his hair: «Eh Giovanni, non vado dal barbiere neanch'io» ("*Eh Giovanni, I don't go to the barber either*") (Messina [2020]).

The homemade look of those videos, i.e., the perception that they were made with what was at hand and in the available spaces, does not arise only from ruffled hair, converted rooms, family members both on and off the screen, or the absence of an audience (at least a living one, referring to Conan O'Brian cardboard cutouts). In fact, a «sense of community and personal connection» is also generated by their lo-fi nature (Berman [2020]: 47), whether they are YouTube clips, Instagram Live or Skype and Zoom calls aired on TV. As Hito Steyerl points out in his famous article *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009), the circulation of low-quality images «creates a circuit» capable of reconnecting «dispersed worldwide audiences»; and so it happened during the solitude of lockdowns (Steyerl [2009]). This process, according to the German artist, «constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history» and, in doing so, the image is permeated by a «new aura» (Steyerl

[2009]). With clear reference to Benjamin's thought, «[t]his aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original", but on the transience of the copy» (Steyerl [2009]). It is this latter what provides that pure «intimacy» in which «we're getting emotionally invested» (Berman [2020]). Therefore, this aura generates a sense of closeness and «visual bonds» (Steyerl [2009]) that do not "strike down" the viewer as in the case of «film's shock effect» (Benjamin [1935]: 32), but, on the contrary, convey the pure feeling of «living in a society» (Berman [2020]).

OPTICAL BETWEEN THE ACTS OF BRICOLAGE

There is, therefore, this further tactile aspect in *bricolage*, i.e., the fact it deeply unites together those who practice it. Under the banner of this, and of its aura of singularity described above, these conclusions want to figure out the chances this point of view has to last beyond the end of the COVID-19 emergency. We will not weave (or emphasise) a bond between climate change and the global pandemic, although this was argued, for example, in relation with the lower greenhouse gas emissions due to the drop in traffic and to factory closures, or with the new possibilities of massive investments in clean energy (Worland [2020a]). It could also be argued that the various ways in which global warming will affect different areas of the planet will trigger singular responses using whatever will be locally available. Instead, we will follow another lead, driven by the exclusive features *bricolage* has revealed through this article. Its nature of a medium finite and irreproducible, as well as cloaked in a double aura, could grant it a pivotal role in the future that opens to technology.

The means by which Western man has shaped nature, in fact, threatens to destroy the subject or the object among which it is, as the health emergency has had the opportunity to stress. Regarding the second, COVID-19 has highlighted how strong the influence of the industry and the transport is on pollution, while spreading the hope of a turning point in favour of nature. During the

lockdown, for example, several clips of animals wandering on the streets (Garcia [2020]), whether they were real or fake, were watched worldwide because «[t]he idea that animals and nature could actually flourish during this crisis "could help give us a sense of meaning and purpose - that we went through this for a reason"» (Daly [2020]). Concerning the "subject", instead, to the damages humanity suffers as results of an unhealthy planet, it has to be added that «[t]he deployment of robots as a response to Coronavirus was rapid. They were suddenly cleaning floors at airports and taking people's temperatures» (Semuels [2020]: 58). In fact, the replacement of real workers with robots or AIs has speeded up during the pandemic «as companies struggle to avoid workplace infections of COVID-19 and to keep operating costs low» (Semuels [2020]: 58). Meanwhile, «the number of new jobs is often minuscule compared with the number of jobs lost» (Semuels [2020]: 61).

According to Emanuele Severino, technology's enhancement has already made people abandon an undeniable *epistéme* (Severino [1998]: 208) on which to base their will. That has happened due to the «ever higher level reached by technology when its purpose is not a specific value […], but it is the improvement of the capacity to achieve any goal» (Severino [1998]: 139, transl. my own). That is because we have started targeting as our main aim the development of technology itself, which is the *medium* par excellence according to a modern conception (Severino [1998]: 8). However, this "reversal" (Severino [1998]: 135) has not affected the inner nature of Western culture, which is, according to Severino, its ability to «coordinate means with a view to creating aims» (Severino [1998]: 147, transl. my own). On the contrary, it protects Western man from waning with every durable truth, offering him as a new target «the infinite increase of his own creative freedom, his own infinite self-empowerment» (Severino [1998]: 148, transl. my own).

However, when technology turns out to be a threat to both the human subject and its object, *bricolage* can provide limited, unique media, which are, in their independence from each other, the opposite of Severino's «scientific-technological

Apparatus» (Severino [1998]: 139). First of all, this technique can be, as we have seen, the house of what it cares about, and thereby of nature, without putting it into a subject-object relationship. Furthermore, *bricolage* can preserve the "*téchne*" with which, from the Greeks onwards, the West has identified humankind (Severino [1998]: 144), thus taking care of both the subject and the medium at once. Regarding the subject, the *bricoleur*'s way of doing can protect the singularity of an individual, a people, or a period through the uniqueness of every technique they create. Concerning the medium, instead, *bricolage* offers the opportunity to observe a medium from birth to death, free from causes and effects, and without external values or wills.

This way, the attempt «to call forth the nature of language, so that mortals may learn again to live within language» (Heidegger [1959]: 161) can take shape even and especially now that the medium (and language is too) looks like it could endure only changing its inner penchant for dominance. *Bricolage* allows us to take the medium and language themselves as a template to articulate from scratch, due to both the auratic tacticity and the optical contour they obtain as *bricoleur*'s products. However, we have to remember that «[w]hat is so spoken cannot […] take the form of a scientific dissertation», because «[s]peaking *about* language turns language almost inevitably into an object» (Heidegger [1959]: 50). Instead, we should be «hearing from it», and doing so «there would only be a speaking *from* language» (Heidegger [1959]: 51). The "savage" art of the *bricoleur* provides us with a way to meet these needs too, through a grid to be assembled over the limited, inarticulate language/medium. Thereby, in a *bricolage* of a *bricolage*, we would be getting ready to wait this latter for a massage. Otherwise, «[t]he *will* to know does not *will* to abide in hope before what is worthy of thought» (Heidegger [1959]: 13).

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Aisthesis

Alteration of the Touch Into a Gaze - Reading Through the Drawing

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Abstract. Studying the touch as a sense developed by contact, and the necessity to redefine it, due to the global pandemic and social dissonance that occurred is the topic of this text. Questioning the approach to drawing under the influence of remoteness addresses the need to look closely, to get personal with the drawing, a manifestation of experience. Drawing of intimacy, evaluate concepts of encounter and isolation posing the question of whether we can experience the closeness of the other through the embodiment of the experience in the drawing. Re-examining tactile sensation observed through the obstacle of corporeal distance, a reflection of intimate experiences and spaces opens up for a new interpretation - of touch without the touch. Can this obstacle transform touch into gaze; and can an image in its making, construct a tactile sensation? Intertwining theoretical and practical approach, this text witness drawing and its visual consumption in space of violated closeness.

Keywords: drawing, tactile, intimacy, touch, absence.

INTRODUCTION

This text deciphers intimacy within a drawing and points to the relationship of gaze and touch. The concept of proximity, violated by the newly imposed physical distance, created the shortage of intimacy, therefore, touch. To analyze drawing in these anxiety-enhanced events, the intention is to strip off the process of drawing and to analyze the changes in intensity, and try to explore the connections under the influence of the constant shift of presence/absence, touch/gaze.

MEANING OF ABSENCE

«Absence [noun]: a state or condition in which something expected, wanted, or looked for is not present or does not exist; is absent» (Merriam Webster, 2021). Like one of the main concepts, *absence* arose as an expression, since all humankind is experiencing

it through some kind of shortage, of something or someone, while paradoxically, virtually we are at one's fingertips. Revealing our personal space, we are exposing the intimate, and at the same time, we are cut off genuine intimacy, through inflicted limitations. The new discipline we are experiencing is based on power technology and its anatomy, through the exercise of a set of different techniques, and regimes (Foucault [1977]: 215-216) imposed on people on many levels; regarding the spread of a virus, corporeal distance, global trade and economy, geopolitical or pharmaceutical battle... Introducing *tests* or *Covid Ausweis/passport* can have its benefits for some, on the other hand, questioning the surveillance apparatus, like Deleuze took notice of Guattari's idea of the city

> where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position - licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation. (Deleuze [1992]: 7)

Surely, pandemics changed everything, regarding the contacts, depending on the country, they were/are, inevitably forbidden globally. Whether, you share views on control of the human population, like the ones from the authors mentioned above, or the one from Žižek, who says that «those in charge of the state are in a panic because they know not only that they are not in control of the situation, but also that we, their subjects, know this. The impotence of power is now laid bare» (Žižek [2020]: 123).

The predicament of the pandemic and lockdowns has its cost, leads to overexposing that became unavoidable in solitude. Are we learning something new, did we get smarter? According to Hegel's well-known quote about learning from history, most likely, no. In the situation where our room becomes our cell, we unveil ourselves, trying to redefine notions of distance/proximity through lack of touch. Like with some odd form of *collective escapism* that is inflicted on

us, tactility became questionable. The distance and imposed solitude can be deciphered through drawing and its instruments, in a situation where experiencing others through our thoughts, the link with our close ones can be even more intense (Žižek [2020]: 3).

INTRODUCING THE NEW TOUCH

In an article dealing with the topic of disability studies, Georgina Kleege explained the interesting process of drawing based on touch in the exercise called «Blind Contour Drawing». The students followed the contour of an object with their eyes and were making a drawing with charcoal without looking at the paper. She said «while the eye seeks the outline of the object, the hand does not. The hand embraces the object in its multifaceted complexity» (Kleege [2013]: 3).

Exploring the drawing as a form of a memoir, a diary in the moment of stillness, reflects on the situations of common life. Since detaching from our prior life is impossible, one can recall it through basic materials - charcoal and pencil, paper, where freezing of experiences and reproducing the images and events happens. «To see, to perceive, is more than to recognize. It does not identify something present in terms of a past disconnected from it. The past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter» (Dewey [1980]: 24-25).

Maybe the process should be inverted, erasing pictures since the memory is fading with time. And the absence of others is more intense and noticeable. However, the habitual meditative method produces delicate scenes of intimacy, and impenetrable blackness echoes the intensity of the moment. «The sense of touch is perceived as annihilating both space and time. This oft-perceived ability of touch to bridge space and time gave it a special value » (Classen [2012]: 142). Giving drawing this temporal quality, the intention was to connect events that happened and the ones that are prevented by the new circumstances. Drawing the shapes, creating them by repetitive strokes is

the process of evoking the touch, closeness of the other. Through repeating the action, putting pressure on the paper with mechanical repetition of strokes elicits a resemblance of contact, pressure, rub.

METHOD OF DRAWING

The topic in my works included in this paper deals with the issue of intimacy (*fig. 1-10*). The question of intimacy could be observed from different standpoints and might be disseminated through multiple terms. The motives presented, can be understood differently if we take into consideration possible spatial and temporal distance, for example. Are we near to the one we are fixing our eyes on, or we are separated by time or space or another kind of obstacle? Some of the images included are older than a year, but since they were made in the absence of the other, to put things in context they were included intentionally (*fig. 6-10*).

There are many examples of how drawings were made, or at least finished, distant from the scene they first occurred, like a famous bullfight from Goya, *The Agility and Audacity of Juanito Apinani in the [Ring] of Madrid*. He had limited time to put everything on paper while witnessing it, so he had to return to it later, fixing parts, overdrawing, giving it a final touch (Petherbridge [2010]: 90-91). Either it is a matter of sketching as a fast record or some more studious and detailed method, different circumstances demand a different kind of approach. The process of the works proposed held place away from the ones they were embodying. Needless to say that besides the absence, which is critical, the author is always drawn to the details and complex imagery, therefore durable practice is crucial. However, during creation, unnecessary is striped, and very few elements are kept in focus, and details are intensely developed on them. Taking into account the current situation with covid lockdowns, distance

Fig. 1, Sonja Šurbatović, *Mother*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 100x100cm.

Fig. 2, Sonja Šurbatović, *Angst*, 2017, charcoal and pencil on paper, 70x100cm.

Fig. 3, Sonja Šurbatović*, Untitled,* 2020, pencil and charcoal on paper, 70x100cm.

Fig. 4, Sonja Šurbatović*, Untitled,* 2020, pencil and charcoal on paper, 70x100cm.

in any form is mandatory, and more demanding practice is desirable.

The artist with a distinguished body of work, that this particular situation is relatable to is Louise Bourgeois, as Roberta Smith called her once, the «force of nature» (Smith [2017]) because of her prolific practices and narratives in different fields. The last years of her life, maybe even a decade, she spent locked inside of her house which was her studio as well, under the influence of agoraphobia that she suffered from. Some say it was triggered by her father's death in 1951 and was followed by depression, too. Of course, we could say that her condition was imposed on her from the outside but it can't be identified the same way as current lockdowns. Even if it was initiated by this event, it was imposed from the inside. One could say that the significant association lies exactly in this con-

Fig. 5, Sonja Šurbatović*, Untitled,* 2020, pencil and charcoal on paper, 130x70cm

nection of her work with cells, recalling enclosed spaces, prison lookalike. Referring to her work is not supposed to be correlated to the technical manifestation of it, but the feeling of disconnection, fear, and anxiety.

Fig. 6, Sonja Šurbatović, *Untitled, 2018, pencil and charcoal on paper, 70x100cm.*

Fig. 7, Sonja Šurbatović, *Hug,* 2018, pencil and charcoal on paper, 70x100cm.

Documenting everything was one of the essential things to keep things in order. Therefore she kept 3 diaries during her life. Written, audio, and *drawn*. As she stated, that was the way *she keeps her house clean.* Her parents had a tapestry restoration workshop where she assisted with sewing and repairing, involving her drawing talent, she became valuable in a workshop. Needless to say, that later in her life drawing was meditative in situations submerged in anxiety. She said, her practice was «to give meaning and shape to frustration and suffering» (Wells [2018]). At the time her frustration was depicted, she claimed, that with the finishing drawing, anxiety level would decrease (Hutton [2020]).

A piece that is worth mentioning in the context of lockdown and her state of being is *Hours of the Day*. The piece from 2006 is made from 25 digital prints supported by fabric and can be seen in form of a book. All the pieces have texts from her daybooks and include the clock as an important element, which shows 24 hours, separated into 24 instead of 12 parts. Only by looking at it, causes discomfort for the observer with its disturbing perspective of time. One of those 25 pieces called, *Untitled, no. 2 of 24,* holds the text *House Artest / Agoraphobia* (*fig. 11*), which is very suggestive and corresponds with the current circumstance.

What is so captivating and obvious in the work of Louise Bourgeois is that they carry an extensive amount of sadness and trauma. Bourgeois frequently used red color for depicting the pain, to represent «"the intensity of the emotions involved" in her work — blood, organs, capillaries – and added that the "depth of depression is measured by your attraction to red"» (Wells [2018]).

Fig. 8, Sonja Šurbatović, *Intimacy 011*, 2019, pencil on paper, 30x30cm.

Fig. 9, Sonja Šurbatović, *Intimacy 017,* 2019, pencil on paper, 30x30cm.

Another of her works, where red color dominates as intense emotions were involved, represents series of drawings called *10 am is When you Come to Me*, (*fig. 12*). Pieces depict the hands of

Fig. 10, Sonja Šurbatović, bd.hbts pt. III, 2019, pencil and charcoal on paper 125x70cm.
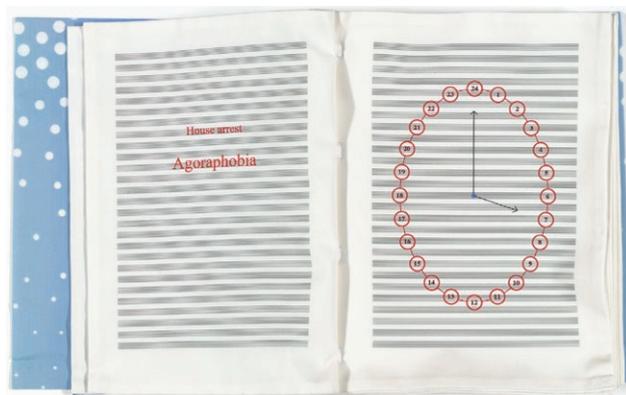
Fig. 11, Louise Bourgeois, *Untitled, no. 2 of 24*, from the illustrated book, *Hours of the Day,* 2006 (Copyright © The Easton Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY). Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/collection/works/130749?association=illustratedbooks&page=1&parent_id=128387&sov_referrer=association.

Bourgeois and Jeremy Gorovoy, her assistant and a close friend. 10 was the time when he would come to her studio and start their daily routine, which lasted more than thirty years. They were painted in the technique of gouache on paper. She used hands, limbs, among other bodily forms as motive countless times in her practice. With this work, their mutual trust and support are depicted, through welcoming gestures of touch.

THE LIFE OF A TOUCH

The urge to touch is identified in a rather early stage of our lives. To describe this impulse is confusing nowadays since the digital age brought

Fig. 12, Louise Bourgeois, *10 AM Is When You Come to Me*, 2006-2007. (Copyright © The Easton Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY). Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/s/lb/collection_lb/object/object_objid-204046.html.

us a new approach to senses and habituated acts, a new way of experiencing things. «The point is always made that touch is sequential while vision is comprehensive and instantaneous. The hand must move over and around an object, while the eye can take it in at a glance» (Kleege [2013]: 3). Through scrolling and swiping, we are getting visual sensations by touching. And by that, complete perception is changed. Through culture, touch is constantly redefined. *Seen* became a new kind of instant statement and way of traversing the senses.

Considering the historical point of view, the matter of touching and owning the image always existed. Religious art, for instance, where closeness to the pictures of the divine scenes, placed the person into a position of the one who is *close to God*. This imagery, as sometimes believed, was used as relics for healing, too.

We can examine differently, the way touch participated in grasping art. A significant dissent

is established whether we talk about touch as *a subject* of a piece or intention to provoke a *tactile* sensation in contact with some piece of art, in this particular case, through drawing. Depicting tactile sensation is one of the numerous challenges that even Albrecht Dürer encountered when he tried to paint his sick body, using yellow color, identifying the place of pain. He wanted to communicate the influence of the pain on his body that he felt «That is where it hurts» (Classen [2012]: 126).

As a sensation, touch expresses emotions and associates means to express them. It raises numerous questions concerning proximity, which it is defined by. Aristotle wonders if it is one sense or the group of them, and since it is defined by proximity, unlike other senses (except taste) what is the organ of touching, «is it or is it not the flesh?» (Derrida [2000]: 5).

Diverting insight about the sense of touch is that reviewing the obstacles of social distanc-

ing and the impossibility of its realization, do we turn to gaze as the only conceivable choice? And how evoking the intimate experience looks like through enclosing it in a drawing. The method of drawing in its basic approach, in this matter, requires commitment. In a physical sense, closeness is required, as well as duration. Like making contact with each other, through this method of drawing, physical contact and reciprocity with the matter are made. With the notion of «reversibility which is always imminent and never realized in fact within seeing and the visible, of the touching and be touched.» Merleau-Ponty questions tactile experience, when we touch are we being touched at the same time (Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 147-148).

In the case of art, using different senses to achieve the experience is desired. It is also crucial since at some point museums and galleries had to preserve the artworks, so touching became forbidden. The link between «seeing by the sense of touch,» and «touch with the sense of sight» was always debatable, in life and art as well (Classen [2012]: 146).

INSTRUMENTS OF DRAWING

Intruding one's intimacy was always one of the topics that these works rely on. The article written by Terrence Heath about Louise Bourgeois' *Insomnia* drawings, says, «Drawing itself has an intimacy that most media do not. The drawing is, so to speak, still warm from the hand of the artist. Certainly, this room of drawings has the presence of the artist, not as a star, but as a human being» (Terrence [2004]). As a sketch, it is an immediate response but at the same time, also a deeper devotion.

When everyday routine embraces isolation for the work you are involved with, this new *within 4 walls era* does not hit so hard. Some studies confirmed that at a certain level we all endured foggy feelings due to pandemics, even basic tasks that we perform on daily basis suffer from forgetting even during mechanical action that occurs.

Reaching back for drawing every day, or better say, feeling the boundaries within the paper and modifying them according to the atmosphere, as a concept has its toll. Materializing the borders makes you think about the situation which enables manipulating and expanding of those boundary lines within the process. The limits of paper, experienced through «touch, embedded in lines and strokes, is one of the dynamic forces that activate the paper space into limitless or controlled depth, assists it to move forward and backward in high or low relief, enwrap objects or recede into vaporous indeterminacy» (Petherbridge [2010]: 116). Drawing becomes a self-explanatory process by itself.

Through drawing, we can resee missing, giving, sharing, being, and commodifying everything we own and what has been taken from us within a new state of affairs. Indifference is impossible since we all witnessed or experienced, the clear cut within interpersonal relationships and contacts in general. The ones who were lucky enough dodged trembling at work, but most likely, felt it on a personal level. Marking the spaces of the absent one could become an obsession; in an artistic sense, it is *loving* and deeply caring for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised (Dewey [1980]: 49). Somebody said that pencil is honest. With that thought in mind, the all-day routine could become a lingering confession. Sketching seems too fast, within recent occurrences, something to consume a vaster amount of time, with length and duration is more cherished.

The notion of drawing can never be stripped entirely to the skill, there is always more involved like in any personal interaction. Like with conversation, sometimes you can feel the void, sometimes it is too intense. «Drawing carries out the gesture of its desire» (Nancy [2009]: 25-26). Therefore, shaping is unpredictable. You are making a contact and at the same time, marking the margins, a border around the object, or a person, putting them into the context. For the spectator to read those gestures and marks of a hand drawing, makes it possible for him to comprehend and experience the process of putting it together

(Petherbridge [2010]: 92). When you are interacting with an individual, you strip them, but at the same time, you strip yourself. The interaction is inevitable.

Inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. As André Marchand says, after Klee:

In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me… I was there, listening… I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it… I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out. (Merleau-Ponty [1947]: 167)

Both sides are almost always equally exposed. And if we're talking about drawing, classical approach with all its high-intensity lines enclosed in it, you have to be there, for that to happen. Proximity is crucial. Whether it is reaching for another, deciphering the resemblance, or making self-reflection, it is always a relation between presence and absence, distance and proximity.

When you face these images, usually showing the close ones, disclosing intimacy to another with its shy gestures, our senses are exerted and studied in this process. It makes you think of possessing them, as Matisse said in *Writings on Art*, «Drawing is possession. To each line must correspond another line that balances it just as one grasps it, possessing it with two hands» (Nancy [2009]: 18). The idea of possessing through the work emerged. Wondering if it is possible, the lines within those pieces, started to give shape for the missing ones, mother, friend, lover.

Visual similarity with certain images, objects, spaces in the aforementioned conditions, in which art was made and absorbed changed, trying to keep, collect, all the moments and memories vivid, by physical contact and activity is enclosed in this work, from *drawing in* to «drawing out» the integrated experiences of subject and the author (Dewey [1980]: 96). This year which every moment was warped in its every sequence, drawing like it is, with its rudimentary technique, reached a new

perspective. Manual, slow, thorough, and time-consuming unwound as a completely new practice.

Memorizing the people and moments left behind, and that can't be reached currently, is the thread that connects reality and this pseudo-life. Even if online, everything seemed possible, the new context of living makes you re-think experience, a memory of touch and put them into the new context. All those bodies, portraits, and places, dwelling on paper, gained a new dimension since within one room they became rarely preserved spaces you can sense, go into, escape.

Unlike virtual spaces which we invade, where exchanges are inevitable, good or bad, whether we like it or not, drawing is characteristic, since it has a different kind of reflective quality. It penetrates us, even if sometimes doesn't fulfill expectations it is to a certain extent steady, waiting, staring at you. Expecting a response from the spectator as a participant in a process of its identity-making. It doesn't go away with the click, it waits patiently, gives you time, and is imposed through the expectation that you will react.

There is no such thing as *just a portrait,* or any kind of scene which is deprived of emotion or presence of the other. As *Maggi Hambling* in one interview said, «Every Portrait Is Like a Love Affair» (Hambling [2018]), and that opinion can be shared. In process of drawing, it is always like in a relationship, there is no pledge. All the time in process of making, remaking it, and having it as one's *own*. To build and possess, since the attachment to another is jeopardized.

One of my drawings among these corresponds coherently regarding the intrusion of life. It is called *Mother* (*fig. 1*) and could connect frustration caused by the breakup of connections, posing the questions, unveiling doubts and vulnerabilities. This piece originally made full-frontal was named *Angst* (*fig. 2*), and even besides the fact that expresses unease, was balanced with a wide white surface embracing it. At the beginning of the quarantine, it was *reseen* in a state of uncertainty caused by everything that was happening and it is drawn again candidly describing frailty of the being. Strokes were less sensual, like

thick threads, they kept precision but the depth of the lines ended enclosed in the deep black surface interrupted with the closeness of borders of paper, suggesting cramped space and obscurity of the moment. Describing the process of this practice, can't be compared to something sudden, fast. It is a slow process, more like the unfolding of layers of sentiments, frustration, memories, that are meticulously ordered in sediments of mind. «Most mortals are conscious that a split often occurs between their present living and their past and future. Then the past hangs upon them as a burden; it invades the present with a sense of regret, of opportunities not used, and of consequences, we wish undone» (Dewey [1980]: 16-17). It is not an immediate impact, but a temporal absorption of those events.

The sentiment of disappearing and moving toward the void unconsciously forms the compositions of the drawing; «We don't forget, but something vacant settles in us» (Barthes [2009]: 262). Senses slow down, reactions are delayed. Many of the pieces I made in 2020 are *Untitled* (*fig. 3, 4, 5*). Changes in compositions are indicated by external conditions. Indicating distance, inability to touch, saturated black and bold lines establish this relationship with the absent one. Charcoal and paper touching, cancel the dominant narrative imposed from the outside. The collapse of our intimate touch and maintaining the distance reveals another way of reaching each other, «from within that we can approach one another—and the window onto "within" are our

Fig. 13, Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing /Loving project*, 2016. (Images from Julia Morrisroe – 13 ways of looking at painting blog). Retrieved from https://magpieaesthetic.com/do-ho-suh-rubbing-loving/.

Fig. 14, Alighiero Boetti, *Untitled*, 1990 (Rachofsky Collection © 2012 Estate of Alighiero Boetti/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome).Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/boetti/#null.

Fig. 15, Oscar Muñoz, *Re/trato (Portrait/I Try Again)*, 2004. (Video projection. 28". Collection of the artist). Retrieved from https://phxart.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Oscar-Munoz-Invisibillia-Curatorial-Statement-for-Web.pdf.

eyes» (Žižek [2020]: 1). Commonly these pieces are extensive, dense, with some strange calmness, but during the quarantine, portraits changed. Characters changed, they were not visible anymore like used to, censored themselves, hid in quarantine. The limit drawn became tangible, posing the question whose boundary is it?

Through diverse approaches toward memory and making absence attainable and tangible, we can embrace a couple of artists and their practices. The artist *Do Ho Suh* memorizes the apartment he leaves after 18 years of living in it, in the technique of frottage. For that project, called *Rubbing/Loving* (*fig. 13*), he stated, *the gesture of rubbing is a very loving gesture* (Forster [2016]). By rubbing he refers to the process of creating the whole space of the apartment in frottage, by transferring an image to paper that was directly pressed to the surface. He wrapped in paper everything that space involved and colored with pencils every element that he left behind, every light switch and doorknob. Embracing the whole apartment he resided in for years, through the medium of drawing, he memorized all the details from the space. Making this ghost space that he
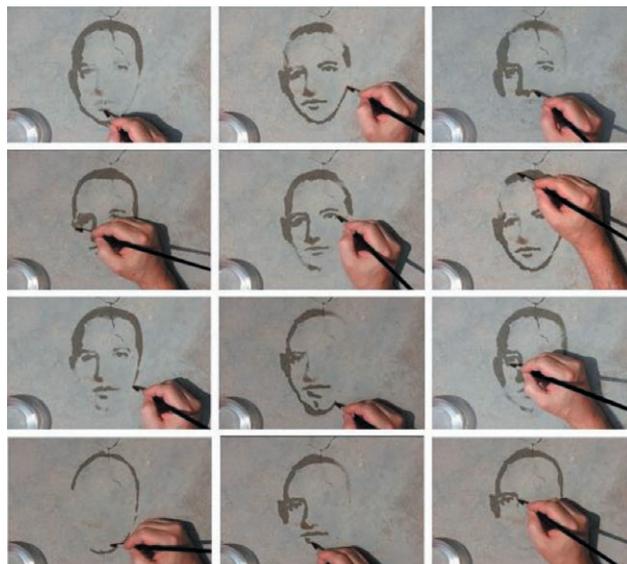
was a piece of, corporeal, he made it become a part of him.

Another interesting example that questions the idea of intangible in the drawing is the *Untitled* (1990) from the Italian artist Alighiero Boetti (*fig. 14*), where he is making the study of his body in a chair through performative action. Involving his whole body, he transferred traces of him sitting, on the paper that he wrapped around. By tracing steady shapes of a chair and gentle movements of the artist's body, linear drawing formed. He included a walking stick in this composition to suggest the action, escape from that motionless point (Petherbridge [2010]: 106-107).

Through drawing, shaping particular memories can be various. One more example that portrayed memory through deteriorating media is Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz (*fig. 15*). He summons familiar concepts, memory among them, depicted with undeniable delicacy. Playing with the concepts of presence/absence he explores the decay of the identity at the same time. Talking about his work, he says it focuses on

the signs of this immemorial setting — the impossibility of definitively retaining and fixing past events—

and strives as well to provoke memory by using a similar device, that is, by focusing on impermanence and the intangible. Invariably employing the photographic act and its chemical nature as both reference and metaphor, and centering especially on the genre of portraiture. (Davidson, Lampe [2019]).

All the examples above mentioned, discuss the drawing as means for deciphering and eliminating fears, in the case of Louise Bourgeois e.g., and at the same time, drawing is used as a mechanism to preserve the memory or challenge identities. Testimony, whether we talk about a sketch or something more elaborated, drawing can't be observed only as an instrument, because it is evident that it is a manifold purpose, it's a product, objective, fulfillment in some sense, depending on perspective. Faced with decoding intimacy through drawing, we could say it is ticklish because it blurs memories, feelings, and questions the veracity of the subject, moment, or feeling they generate in the process of drawing.

CONCLUSION

Drawing as a medium of choice no matter how outdated may seem provides an aesthetic experience, that we can grasp immediately. As David Lynch said, in movies today everything is fast and the quality of *slow* is lost. But the *slow* can pose the question, *how close can we get?* In the time when the touch is bleached out, to offer it or experience it as a more profound sense is becoming an indulgence on its own.

Experiencing corporeal distance that parts us from the ones we love or denies us our usual comforts, offers a possibility to seize things differently. It's up to us are we going to benefit from this *collective escapism*, and learn something useful from global events, or keep the same old tainted narratives. Are we going to embrace moments differently in the future? Those, until yesterday, common events, essential touches, like a handshake, hug. Perhaps drawing, even sometimes perceived as a mastodon of artistic expression, stays persistent in this fluid epoch to preserve the idea

of *slow* and *calm*. Deepening the void formed by this solitude, to display and remind us of something forgotten or overlooked, that we may nurture for tomorrow.

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Aisthesis

Distance: Closeness/Remoteness in Kim Boske's Photographs

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Abstract. The work *Moving Flowers* #1 by the internationally known Dutch artist Kim Boske (born in 1978) was published in the first cover series *HOU VOL* ("Keep Faith") of the periodical *Het Parool* on 30 May 2020. Following the aim of the newspaper to help cope with the disastrous consequences of COVID-19, the artist focused on how our perceptions had changed during the pandemic. If previously the content (or what is being represented) was the element that dominated in photography, then during the pandemic, the representational harmony of the content was replaced by the structural features or the way how something is being represented. The article aims to reflect on the artworks created by Boske in 2020 and to show the circulation of ideas contained in them, and with this case study to highlight more general trends in the recent art photography.

Keywords: aesthetics, photography, Kim Boske, perception of an image, COVID-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

The typical theme of Dutch painting – a still life of flowers – has attracted Boske's attention. The still life of flowers is an abundant theme that fascinates with the inexhaustible diversity. It is considered that the oldest known images of still life in the territory of Europe are the frescoes painted in Roman culture in around 62-69 BC. Though ancient frescoes are located in the territory of Italy, the genre of still life became popular mostly in the 17th century Dutch and Flemish paintings. At that time, it was common to paint still lifes with flowers, game, generous tables with food and vanitas still lifes, which illustrated the transitory nature of the secular life. The attention of contemporary Dutch artists and photographers has been attracted by experiments with stage[1] still life and conceptual interpretations, creating radiographs, hypercollages and conceptual

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[1] Since the 1970s there has been a tradition in the Dutch photography to create staged still life photography.

photography, as, for example, can be evidenced in the works of Arie van Riet, Bas Meeuws, Hans Withoos, Iris Gonzalez, Jeroen Luijt, Marie Cécile Thijs, Marnix Goossens, Mathilde Karrer, Ron van Dongen, Titus Brein, Yvonne Lacet and others. Kim Boske works among these artists, studying how physical movement in time and space constantly shifts our perspective to the physical world. By combining different perspectives into one image, the artist creates a multi-layered reality by maintaining an innovative approach and experimental aesthetics. To the question about her sources of inspiration, Boske replies:

> *I read the work of philosophers, such as Gilles Deleuze and Bergson. But I am also inspired by someone like Andrew Wiles, the mathematician who solved the thesis of Fermat. These people help to adjust and sharpen my perspective on the world. They keep my process going and make me notice and be inspired by different things every time, especially within nature* (Boske [2014])

Boske's approach is to provide the audience with a sense of immersion and interaction of the image with the audience, since the main role in her photographic work is to capture time and space in a transformational way, by summing up several perspectives from a distance.

2. REMOTENESS. THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION

When reading Boske's book *Mapping* (Boske [2012]: 53-56), we find evidence that the artist has continuously developed individual technical approach by practically moving the camera in time and space when engaging in the process of creating conceptual photography, that is to say, by dematerializing the visible reality and giving it artistic quality. Boske explains the working process: «Also to make clear how the physical movement through time and space constantly changes our perspective on the world» (Boske [2019]). Does this reveal the signs of iconicity and does it mean that the representation is arbitrary and not similar to what the representation

stands for? For instance, in the 2015 work *Bouquets from the Golden Age* (Fig. 1), Boske takes photographs from several perspectives. Forms taken from different perspectives are combined into one image so that the full volume of an object is discovered on a deep black background. By mechanically fixing many shots in one image, Boske creates a transition from the visible reality to an attempt to reach such a level in photo aesthetics, where one can see various forms and shades over time.

By focusing on the aesthetic features, which are integral to the colour photograph *Bouquets from the Golden Age*, the apparent combinations of its shades and air vibrations are revealed characteristic to the aesthetics of painting by the old masters. Despite the use of modern technologies, the aesthetics of the image seems to be tied with the sense of historical saturation radiated by the works of the 17th century Flemish old masters. The aesthetics of Boske's works of photographic origin reaches such a level of shades and tones that it becomes a reference to the painteresque Rembrandt's colour palette that has been developed in the figurative oil painting and reminds of the unique existence of the work of art defined as "aura" by Walter Benjamin:[2]

> *In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art-its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence-and nothing else-that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject* (Benjamin [2002]: 103)

Benjamin brought forward the question of the changes introduced by the technological development of the photographic image both in terms of the perception and diversification of the aesthetic experience. Boske is rather interested in the aspects of perception in terms of representation:

> *My work can be characterised as research into the system of time and space. I am fascinated by the sys-*

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[2] Written late December 1935 beginning of February 1936; unpublished in this form in Benjamin's lifetime.
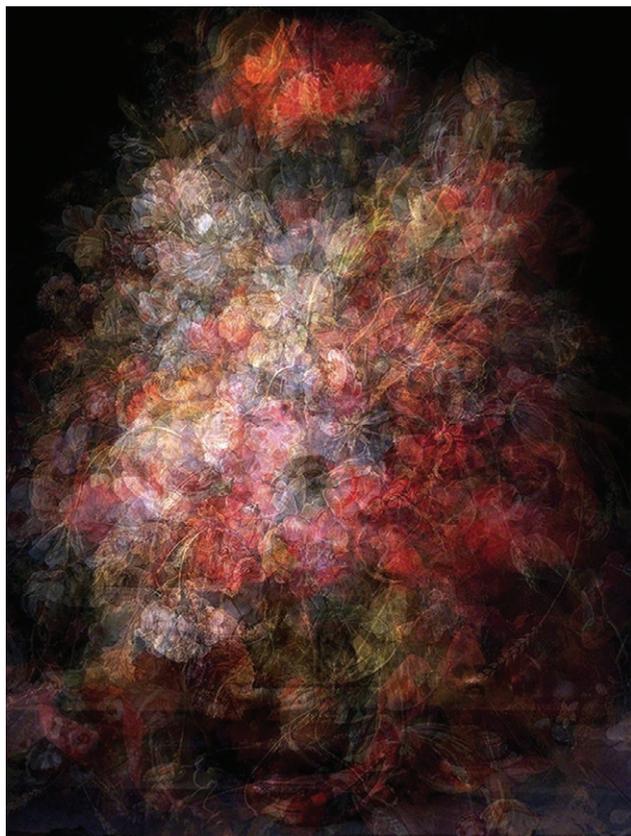
Fig. 1. Kim Boske, *Bouquets from the Golden Age*, (2015) Colour photography, 28 × 21 cm.

tems that exist behind the visible surface of the visual world (Boske [2019])

It should be acknowledged that her works have such an integrity of representation and at the same time the depth of the image that encourage the viewer to ponder. Her photographic image shows a combination of new features that considerably differ from the material, visual or aesthetic features of the initial object. Yet, it is not the same thinking model that is based in the Western visual culture and that is modelling clearly visible objects in real time. Consequently, a question emerges: if it is not an evident phenomenon, does the photographic object exist at all? However, the image exists in the perception of the viewer, who connects the essence of these objects with the meaning that they represent and not with the real form. Besides, the photographer points

to the importance of the creative process claiming: «What fascinates me is a reality and a way of thinking that presents itself more as 'becoming' rather than "being"» (Boske [2014]).

3. *USE OF THE STRUCTURE OF NATURE. CLOSENESS*

On the one hand, Boske's photographs are based on the motifs of nature (a tree, a bush, flowers, a waterfall), yet, on the other hand, the photographs are not connected with a representation of one particular natural landscape, because the artist uses nature as a phenomenon that gives rise to the process of change and movement. She explains:

'Nature' has acquired a dominant position in my photographs as nature has a special relationship with chaos and order. Patterns in nature are never totally alike and they seem to never reappear in exactly the same way. Nature is overwhelming. There is a treasure of information, structures and processes hidden in nature (Boske [2014]).

In order to examine the works of 2020, it is important to mention the fact that in 2018 Boske used an opportunity to work in Kamiyama,[3] Tokushima, Japan, where she became familiar with Japanese culture. Taking into account that in Japan culture and nature are inextricably linked, Boske refers to such a component of culture as the Šintoismu or šintō[4] (in Japanese かんながらのみち – kannagara-no-michi or 神道 – しんとう) tradition[5], which provides such an understanding of

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[3] Kamiyama started its Kamiyama Artist in Residence (KAIR) program in 1999. Every autumn, three artists are sponsored to come and stay in the town to create art and interact with the local people for approximately two months. See: https://www.in-kamiyama.jp/en/art/.

[4] Šintō, indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto

[5] Emeritus Professor of Shintō Studies, *Kokugakuin University*, Tokyo Naofusa Hirai states: *Shinto* has existed in Japan without any founder. Kokugakuin University Encyclopedia of Shinto http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/

Fig. 2. Kim Boske, *Shinrin-yoku 1* (2020), pigment print.

nature, where deification of nature and mythological beliefs form an integral part.

Since residency in Japan, Boske's works have been resonating with the Japanese culture: the natural indigo (Schueller 2021) farming, the work-consuming indigo fermenting process, the manual production of Japanese traditional paper,[6] hand-made washi paper, print dyed in natural indigo, at Awagami factory, Kamiyama, Tokushima, as well as the delicate working process, which entails the thinking pattern about the inheritance of traditions and the natural processes, thus literally integrating nature in her works. During the pandemic, she continues communicating with the colleagues of the residency, and cooperates in terms of the indigo dying traditions, which date back to the ancient world 1600 years BC.

Boske also ensures high-quality creative process in the framework of this tradition. Such global solidarity can be achieved along with the understanding that the cultural heritage must be preserved and the traditions must be cherished by understanding that the new expression has emerged on the basis of the long forgotten previous tradition. During the COVID-19 restrictions, Boske returned to the theme of trees in her work *Shinrin-yoku 1* (Fig. 2) by revealing a scene of a

forest, where the trees merge with each other and refer to the world, which is simultaneously the existing reality and a different reality in terms of the movement, tonal gradation and adventure revealing multiple meanings. By placing one layer of photography onto another that has been taken from a different angle, Boske finds her own conceptually autonomous image, which characterises the constant state of change in nature in the most vivid way.

In nature, organic objects are never entirely still. Each form of life is characterised by movement, for example, the movement of branches and leaves filters the light and provides both the light and shadow on the ground. Both the silhouettes of tree trunks and the plants close to the roots form the foreground. In addition, the branches and the green leaves fill the midsection and the background of the image, creating a dimension of depth, representing the total form as an atmospheric object. Taking into account the distance from the trees, Boske shows such a perspective that leaves both the tops and the roots of the trees at the layer of soil with the energy of life outside the frame. The frame includes the trunks of bigger and smaller trees as a metaphorical reference to shelter and nutrition provided by the oxygen-rich forest. The foliage rendered by Boske vibrates at the slightest deviation of light and is reproduced from detailed, smear-like shapes that encourage the viewer to look and calm down, providing balance and simultaneously maintaining the idea of an active healing power, or bathing in a forest. Forest Bathing (Shinrin-Yoku, jap. 森林浴) originated in Japan in the early 1980s, and may be regarded as a form of nature therapy and the positive effects of nature therapy are also indicated by the field studies in science (Park et al. [2010], Berger [2020]), emphasizing the crucial role of the tree as a collector of macro-particles and producer of oxygen.

In the work *Shinrin-yoku 2* (Fig. 3) the abundant tonality is determined mostly by the presence of light onto the green leaves and stream, whose representation is rather abstract than objective, but it can be identified as the co-exist-

xwords/
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[6] Washi (和 紙) is a traditional Japanese paper, which is made using a local fibre processed manually and made in a traditional way.
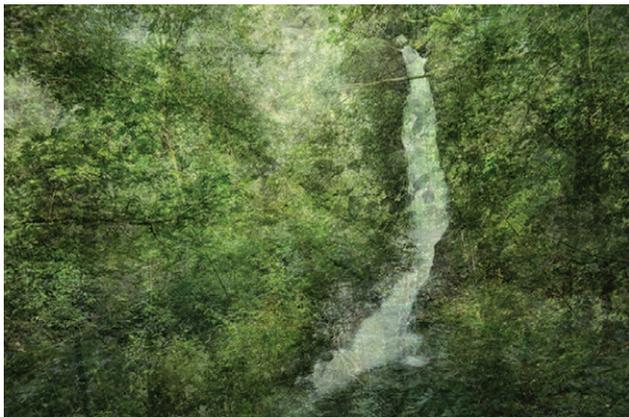
Fig. 3. Kim Boske, *Shinrin-yoku 2* (2020), pigment print.

ence of the forest and mountain river as parts of the elements of the global natural order, witnesses of the past that are related with a harmonising archetype of Japanese natural landscape. When examining the artist's approach, Josephine van Schendel claims:

The so-called struggle of natural life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of the ability to coexist and cooperate with complex relationships, rather than the ability to exploit and suppress. This serene thought of togetherness pops up in my mind when I hypnotizingly look at the shapeshifting landscape of Boske's layered photoworks. She seems to be a master of high-lighting the multiplicity of forms of life (van Schendel [2020]: 4).

If we talk about the artist's works as works of art, which shed the light on the essence, it is crucial to find out whether it could be the case that the restrictions caused by the pandemic have allegedly created unprecedented forms of practice in the aesthetics of Boske's works.

4. INTERACTION BETWEEN TIME AND SPACE DURING THE PANDEMIC. CONTACT

At the times, when due to the COVID-19 spread, national isolationism emerged, the restrictions determined by the countries also gave rise to the artists' needs to ensure creative process, at the same time keeping the opportunities of show-ing the work at the exhibitions. Boske in social media published photographs as an insight in the working process, adding such hashtags as #kimboske, #artcanhelp, #coronavirus. In June 2020 she wrote:

What is currently happening brings me back to the essence of my work. [...] But it also means that we have more headspace. It includes boredom, too, but you can explain it with a heightened state of focusing and understanding. It inspires me. This heightened sense of awareness will taint our memories. If we are allowed to move on in full speed, I hope, part of this attention will remain. Speed, which we are used to in life, distances us from ourselves. Lingering takes us to the core and essence (van Zadelhoff [2020]:8-9).

The times of the pandemic are globally characterised as times of anxiety and adaptation to the environment with screens. Although it provides us with inexhaustible amount of information, it is also known that long-term screen consumption causes difficulties both to focus attention and to concentrate on the work that you have started. In these circumstances, the government carries out support measures. National museums are accessible online: «In April 2020, the Dutch government launched financial stimuli aimed specifically at supporting the cultural sector during the COVID-19 crisis [...]. These measures added to pre-existing generic measures aimed at protecting the employment of artists and professionals of the cultural sector during this time of profound crisis» (Boekman Foundation [2020]).

With the challenges arising from these circumstances, Boske provides an opportunity to focus on a specific case, helps to explore not only the temporal system, physical movements in time and space, but also how we perceive what we see and how it changes our view to the world. In the view of Boske, time is itself a structure consisting of differentiated structures, so in spring 2020 during the quarantine she implemented an idea to create a series of photographs *Moving Flowers* (Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) of archival materials, which included the masterpieces of the 17th century still life painting, freshly picked herbs and meadow flowers. As a pigment

Fig. 4. Kim Boske, *Moving Flowers #1* (2020), photography Inkjet print in washi paper, edition of 7 + 2 AP, 60 x 45 cm. Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam.

Fig. 5. Kim Boske, *Moving Flowers #2* (2020), photography Inkjet print in washi paper, edition of 7 + 2 AP, 60 x 45 cm, Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam.

print on the washi paper it was later processed with the natural indigo fermentation process.

In the finely elaborated time network *Moving Flowers #1* (Fig. 4), all images have been combined so that a new image would be created, as a result giving rise to associations with the represented phenomenon. Out of five works of the series, *Moving Flowers #1* is the lightest in terms of tonality and the most translucent. Perhaps, for this reason it was chosen for the first cover layout of the Dutch periodical *Het Parool*[7] on 30 May 2020 as a stimulus for the battle with the devastating consequences of the pandemic. The shapes of Boske's multi-layered photographic works intuitively reveal that natural phenomena have equal rights to exist, grow roots, bloom, wither and engage in the network of nature relations.

Boske admits that every piece of her art is created in a time-consuming process in which she tries to achieve and to ensure that the viewer would stay longer by noticing the sense of time. The longer you look, the more and more you see the hidden, multi-layered and complicated world embedded in the image structure. She made the image *Moving Flowers #2* (Fig. 5) by analogy with Flemish masterpieces, using the principle in which flowers (carnations, hydrangeas, irises, anemones, tulips, meadow clovers and other summer meadow flowers) were arranged in a vase from plants available in different seasons, which in reality would never have been able to bloom at the same time. In her work *Moving Flowers #3* (Fig. 6) the object has at the same time many perspectives representing the photographed fern leaves, painted hollyhocks that overlap and are

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[7] *Het Parool* is an Amsterdam-based daily newspaper.

Fig. 6. Kim Boske, *Moving Flowers #3* (2020), photography Inkjet print in washi paper, edition of 7 + 2 AP, 60 x 45 cm. Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam.
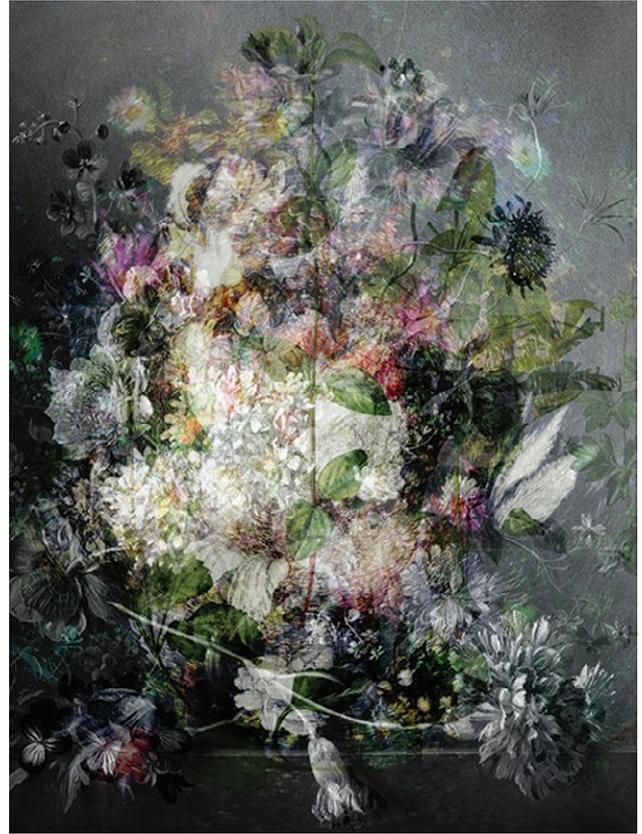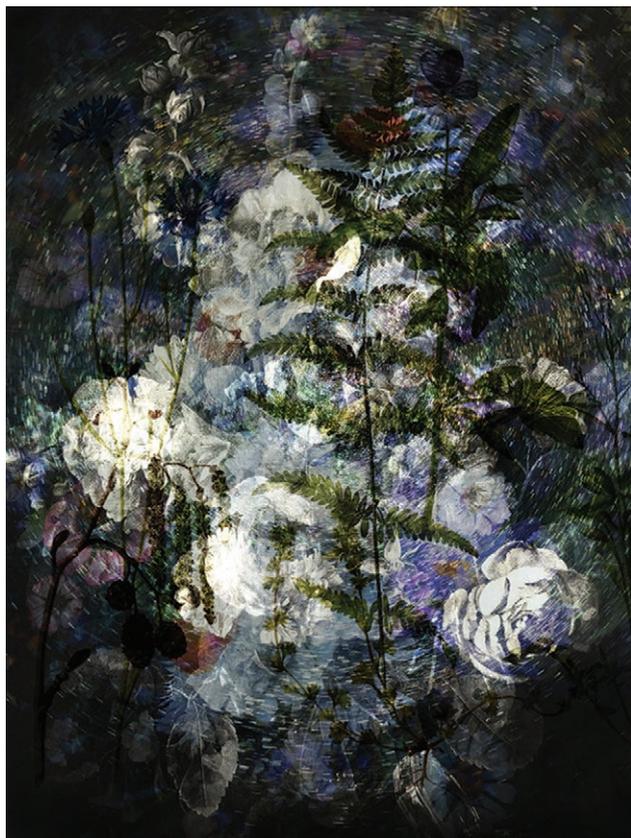

Fig. 7. Kim Boske, *Moving Flowers #4* (2020), photography Inkjet print in washi paper, edition of 7 + 2 AP, 60 x 45 cm. Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam.

merged in the image, as if simulating the movement of appearance and disappearance.

Technically analysing Boske's multi-layered images, each separate layer has a clear focus and a sharp image. Besides, the spectator's knowledge gives rise to associative links and develops awareness of details and presence.

Photographic image *Moving Flowers #4* (Fig. 7) is tonally the most colourful of the works in this series – it is seemingly a still image, yet it continuously changes due to the colour relations and work construction. Without affecting the overall unity of the image, along with the presence of the indigo pigment onto the washi paper, shapes and tones are revealed to the spectator gradually. Both the translucent texture of the flowers chosen by the author and the indigo colouring process with coded metaphorical refer-

ences resonate with the continuity of the natural cycles characterised by variability, movement and continuation.

The closing work of the series – *Moving Flowers #5* (Fig. 8), as it can be seen in the printout on the washi paper, is the most richly saturated in terms of tonality in the process of natural indigo colouring. In one of the drawing layers of the image, there are clearly marked circular lines with a dashed stripe resembling the images of long-exposed stars photographed in the night sky. This centred circular movement reveals that natural processes are connected with everything that exists and, although the relations between man and nature are complicated, it is a natural order, where the death is not the end in the framework of life processes, but the beginning of continuation.
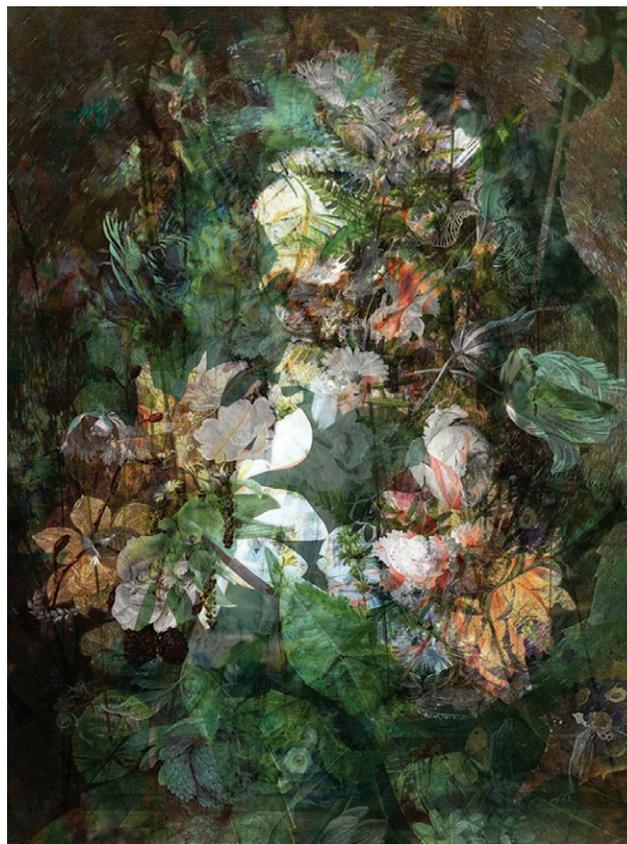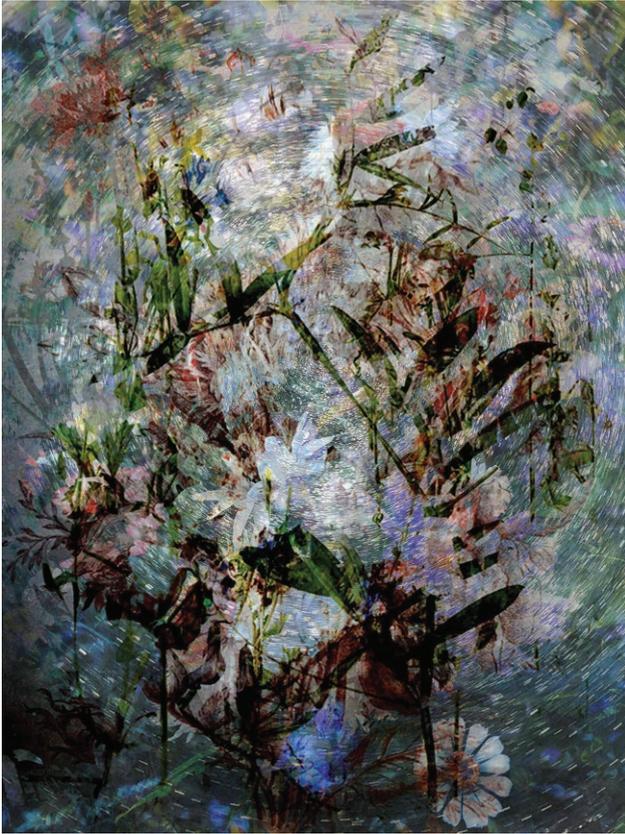
Fig. 8. Kim Boske, *Moving Flowers #5* (2020), photography Inkjet print in washi paper, edition of 7 + 2 AP, 60 x 45 cm. Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam

Fig. 9. Kim Boske, *Akui Gawa #*1 in the exhibition *Trancendence: Outside Time* (2020), inkjet print on washi paper in artist frame, 282 x 94 cm. Courtesy *FLATLAND*, Amsterdam.

Finally, let's focus on Boske's work *Akui Gawa #1* (Fig. 9) created in the vertical format. In the work nearly three metres long the artist is exploring the movement of the river stream, which is a combination of many photographs revealing changes in the water flow and resembling the transcendent river flow as a state of continuity, essence of change and state of vitality. In the framework of the rich Eastern visual culture, Boske associatively reflects on the merged areas typical of ancient Chinese silk paintings, as well as the use of proportions, composition and vertical format known in the Japanese aesthetics. With the work *Akui Gawa #1*, which has been printed out on the washi paper and has been painted by the artist herself in an indigo bath made in her studio, Boske participated in an exhibition in the gallery *FLATLAND*, which received audi-

ences according to the previously made appointment list. Artists Kim Boske and Valérie Belin participated in the exhibition with works about transcendence as an object of research. In 2021, the following idea was expressed about the exhibition *Transcendence – Outside Time* at the gallery *FLATLAND*: «Their work can be described as trans-semiotic: they use iconic signifiers to challenge the expectation of the viewer and let us rethink the way we inhabit the world».[8]

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that the effects of the pandemic COVID-19 have resulted in the paradigm shifts at a global level – in political, economic, social and cultural aspects – but for the representatives of visual arts this time has been a real challenge, because the meaning of creative work has had to be seriously reconsidered.

For Boske, this means using innovative practices to continue to create by maintaining links and interaction with both unreachable colleagues in Japan and with the audience overall, taking into account the need to exhibit and incorporate works into arts affairs, both on-site and

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[8] See http://www.kimboske.com/News.

off-site models – in *Art Rotterdam* (February, 2020), *POST* Bookshop Tokyo (July, 2020), *Art Paris* (September, 2020), *Photo London* (October, 2020), *Mondriaan Foundation* (December, 2020) and *FLATLAND* (December, 2020). It should be acknowledged that, due to the limits of the pandemic, the participation in *PHOTO Paris* and the personal exhibition *INDIGO* at the Tokushoma Museum of Modern Art, scheduled for 2021, have been cancelled.

The creative process of Boske followed up in the context of the pandemic in 2020 and the solutions that the artist has undertaken in her studio in Amsterdam, in order to create photographs *Shinrin-yoku 1* and *Shinrin-yoku 2*, make series *Moving Flowers* out of five works, as well as large-scale printout on the washi paper *Akui Gawa #1*, it should be recognised that during the global quarantine Boske is able to focus on new works, activates the digital potential and applies unprecedented practices in the aesthetics of her works. She continuously develops and reinforces the use of technical means (maintaining fermentation processes in the indigo bath, dyeing with natural indigo colour).

The case study of the series *Moving Flowers* additionally reveals that it would be a mistake to talk about the discourse of the Dutch still life in visual arts as old-fashioned. In general, in the era of the overload of screen aesthetics, which explicitly points to the convergence of visual arts and the advertising world, Boske shows an independent conceptual work. Besides, *Moving Flowers* proves that she uses the still life as one of the many available strategies.

The revolutionary approach of the artist towards to the temporal dimension attracts the interest of the field professionals, because Boske has not exhausted her potential and the still life of flowers exists both as a powerful archetype and recognisable and important example in the practice of conceptual photography. The aspects of attention conception contained in Boske's works that have been discovered in the context of the spread of pandemic, takes the audiences to the aesthetic experience based in time and space: distance, closeness/remoteness and contact. Consequently, both in the art photography and in its analysis, such categories as closeness/remoteness and contact have become crucial. It is possible to discuss them under one umbrella term – distance.

The Dutch photographer offers a new artistic reality to the viewer, in which both spatial and temporal perspectives are synthesised in a single image, so that its structure does not copy at any given moment and place the objective reality, but constitutes a different surface structure of conceptual photography revealing the changes in spatial perception during the COVID-19 spread.

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Aisthesis

The COVID-19 War in Ceramic Arts: Navigating Aesthetic and Symbolic Expressions

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Abstract. This paper reports on the production of a ceramic installation artwork that explores the story of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by people throughout the world. The work is a symbolic expression in the form of a set of ceramic art models that portray the story of the battle between positive and negative values, expressed through a 3-dimensional visual ceramic installation consisting of an arrangement of statues that portray an imaginary battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. The method used in the process of creating this work was a creative approach that combined appreciation and interpretation of the object of the creative idea. The artwork was made of plastic clay taken from the southern area of Malang regency, East Java, Indonesia, which was formed using a manual technique of direct hand massage and fired at a temperature of 900 °C. The COVID-19 phenomenon is imagined and visualized as a ceramic installation sculpture consisting of the imaginative figures of COVID-19 troops, led by the king of COVID-19 who is shown fighting with Lord Krishna. The result is a visual expression of the COVID-19 troops and their king, in several imaginative forms, carrying various weapons of war, in combat with the imaginary figure of Lord Krishna. The distinction of this work is its portrayal of a battle between positive and negative forces that have become a part of human life during the COVID-19 pandemic, expressed in a symbolic visual narrative through the arrangement of a set of ceramic sculptures.

Keywords: COVID-19, ceramic art, symbolic expression, Lord Krishna.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a problem that has brought fear to people all over the world because of the numerous deaths it has caused (Kawashima et al. [2020]; Lagier et al. [2020]). This natural phenomenon of a respiratory health problem has devastated almost all sectors of human life, including the economy (Hu [2020]), politics (Kuzemko et al. [2020]), trade (Kurbucz [2020]), social community (Chakraborty, Maity [2020]), and

art and culture (Huynh [2020]). In the field of creative art, COVID-19 has sparked the imagination of artists to develop ideas that are processed to become works of art that can be presented to the public (Mayeur et al. [2020]). The imagination that has emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an overflow of artistic emotions. These emotions are expressed spontaneously in forms and techniques that are rich in the art of the artist's particular field, in different styles of expression[1] (Zheng et al. [2019]: 238-249).

Some artists are driven by the concern, anxiety, or compassion (Miller, Dumford [2015]: 168-182) that has arisen during lockdown, or as a result of the stay-at-home policies implemented by governments in different countries. These lockdown policies have led to diverse community behavior, with some people following the rules and other refusing to comply, which in turn has caused disputes between officials and members of the community[2] (Atalan [2020]: 38-42). The COVID-19 phenomenon has encouraged and inspired many artists to express their creativity in works of art with themes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They observe and appreciate this phenomenon, and are motivated by the idea of channeling their artistic expression, either spontaneously or deliberately, into works based on the theme of COVID-19 (Heyang, Martin [2020]: 1–15).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also encouraged artists to work using various media, with different forms of expression and styles that characterize individuals or groups (Oztop, Katsikopoulos, Gummerum [2018]: 266-275). These forms of artistic expression include dance, music, painting, sculpture, mural painting, and even the media of ceramic craft. The results of this study indicate that artists in many countries have been affected by the phenomenon of COVID-19, and subsequently expressed their ideas in works of art with various forms, techniques and styles. Many fine

artists have continued to use two-dimensional media, such as painting, drawing, and digital images, expressing themselves spontaneously through these media (van Tonder [2015]: 221-238) but few have chosen to use ceramic as a form of expression of this phenomenon.

This research is an attempt to appreciate and reveal the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic through various different ways and forms of ceramic art (Runco, Acar [2012]: 66–75). In general, ceramic is used to create functional works of art such as ceramic containers, which are shaped using a flashlight rotating technique. Some ceramists have tried to develop this technique further but their work is generally still limited to decorative forms of cylindrical pots, and although some artists have already tried to explore the idea of creating ceramic figurines, none of them have arranged these figures in the form of a ceramic installation artwork.

What makes this study different from previous creative research is the theme of COVID-19 as the idea for creating a 3-dimensional ceramic installation artwork, with the specific theme of a "COVID-19 Battle Story". This work is in the form of a set of imaginative ceramic figures that express the story of a battle between the king of COVID-19 and his troops and Lord Krishna. The choice of the Krishna's character as the opponent of the COVID-19 match in this work is relevant to the puppet stories that developed in Java. The COVID-19 pandemic in this case is interpreted as a Kurusetra battlefield, the Baratayuda War between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In this case, COVID-19 is a symbol of ugliness (Kurawa) and Lord Krishna as a symbol of hero or kindness (Pendawa). As depicted in the story of Krena Duta, that finally Krishna can win the Baratayuda war.

The figures were formed manually using a pinching technique (direct hand massage) and also fired in the traditional way. In terms of the technical aspects of cultivation and visual form, this work retains an element of local culture. This is evident in the various imaginative forms of the figures in the story of the battle between

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[1] This expression has been discussed earlier by Zeng et al (2019), and the present study borrows such a concept.
[2] The present study was also influenced by the discussion of lockdown phenomenon by Atalan (2020).

COVID-19 and Lord Krishna, which are based on and developed from traditional Indonesian art. Each shape has visual elements that show the individual characteristics of the figure, whether in the ornaments attached to the particular shape or other icons that convey a message of the positive or negative values associated with the imaginary character (Lluveras-Tenorio et al. [2018]: 213-221).

Another aspect that makes this work different from the previous ceramic artwork is the value of the social message contained in the work, namely the value of positive hope that is conveyed through the theme of the work. The work portrays a fight between positive and negative values, expressed in the form of a ceramic installation which tells the story of a battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna (Mohadab, Bouikhalene, Safi [2020]). Through the creation of this artwork, the researchers promote a theme related to the events that are currently trending and being experienced by the entire global community, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, presented through the visual creation of a set of imaginative ceramic figures. The creative process involved a number of stages which resulted in a product with a unique form, unique technique, and unique content about the social message that the researcher wished to convey. The installation, packaged in the form of a ceramic artwork, uses the power of the message it contains, together with its local visual elements, as a choice of expression. Its local elements include local materials, and manual techniques and forms that combine elements of local culture, but are packaged in the form of a contemporary artwork.

2. METHODOLOGY

The first stage began with an appreciation and interpretation of the COVID-19 pandemic as a source of ideas for creating a new artwork. This was achieved by exploring various sources of creative ideas, imagining ideas, designing art forms, and formulating techniques for creating ceramic works. The appreciation and interpretation of the

source of ideas was based on direct observation of the experiences of various communities. The phenomena in the field were contemplated, internalized, and interpreted to arouse the imagination of the artist and to inspire ideas for creating a new work. The second stage involved the formulation of a concept for creating a ceramic installation artwork from the results of the process of appreciation and imagination. In this second stage, the results of the imagination were formulated into a concept of a ceramic installation art with the theme of a "Battle between COVID-19 Troops and Lord Krishna" in the form of a symbolic narrative figurative ceramic artwork. The third stage was an exploration of alternative forms and techniques. The exploration of form was carried out by making alternative sketches of installation ceramic artwork designs that expressed the same phenomenon, namely a visual battle between good (positive values) and evil (negative values), through the presentation of the story of a battle between the imaginative ceramic figures of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna.

The technical exploration was carried out by processing the clay material used to form the work, which was a combination of local clay mixed with supporting materials of quartz sand and kaolin. Using a manual milling technique, the clay mixture was combined until it became truly plastic and could be formed into different shapes. The fourth stage was the process of creating the actual work of art. The work was created using a pinching formation technique or direct hand massage, with reference to the particular form desired. This process produced the visual elements, which consisted of various ceramic art forms, including the king of COVID-19 (based on the imaginary figure of *Kala*, a mythological statue used in religious ceremonies), and his troops with their various expressions, and the figure of Lord Krishna, armed with a bow and arrow, and ready to fight. The fifth stage was the process of firing the ceramic figures in a furnace. In the sixth stage, the ceramic works were arranged as an installation artwork depicting the story of a battle between the COVID-19 troops, led by their

king, and Lord Krishna, armed with his 'flower' arrow weapon, Wijaya Kusuma (the flower of life arrow). The final stage was to analyze the results of the process of creating this installation ceramic artwork using a qualitative descriptive method and an artistic symbolic approach.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic as an Inspiration for Art Creation

Despite its huge impact on social, economic, cultural and political sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted the attention of many artists around the world (Kurbucz [2020]). It has been viewed by art creators as a phenomenon that is disturbing, touching, disrupting, and destroying social order. Furthermore, it has encouraged some artists to produce works of art that are laden with human values, and inspired others with creative ideas for composing works that are founded on their concerns or express their emotions[3] (Hwang, Choi [2020]: 161-173). This is certainly a positive factor for artists as creative actors. However, there are also those who consider it as a negative factor, because since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, it has hindered the creative process for many artists and prevented opportunities to carry out creative art activities.

In addition, it has also hampered the process of developing the arts in a community environment, due to the social restrictions (lockdowns) imposed by governments in almost every country or region, which have prohibited activities involving large groups of people (Huynh [2020]). The goal of these regulations is to minimize contact between humans which may cause the transmission and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Indeed, in countries where people have not followed government recommendations, the spread of the virus has been more difficult to control (Kawashima et al. [2020]).

As a result of these restrictions, artists are more limited in their opportunities to create art and express their aesthetic emotions. In some regions, performing artists such as dancers have been unable to carry out their usual creative activities in the presence of an audience of appreciators or art connoisseurs. Not only has this affected the performers themselves, it has also negatively impacted the art audiences in these communities (Atalan [2020]: 38-42). Thus, artistic activities and artistic expression have been severely affected by these regulations. Artists have been forced to stay at home and carry out mundane activities that they do not necessarily enjoy, which in turn has limited their creativity because they are unable to communicate directly with an audience of art lovers. Music performances, dance performances, theater, literature, and other art performances given by performing artists need audiences to view their works of art (Jakhar, Kaur, Kaul [2020]).

Fine art artists have also experienced a similar situation. In normal conditions, they can usually express themselves freely in interesting places outside the studio by involving an audience as the object of their art. For example, when creating their art in a place with natural scenery or in a market, urban environment, or tourist site, painting or photography artists involve an artistic team, and this kind of creative team expression or art work can no longer take place because of the social restrictions. Artists must now live and work alone in the studio, since they are not allowed to work in a team or express themselves together.

Artists have responded to this situation in different ways. There are those who hold onto the positive aspects and others who grasp the negative aspects and use them as creative ideas. This includes exploring the situation to discover ideas for creating works of art based on anxiety or concern. These ideas can be expressed in works of art based on COVID-19, as demonstrated by the artist, who captured this phenomenon as a creative idea for his choreographic work[4] (Heyang, Mar-

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[3] The work of Hwang and Choi (2020) has encouraged the present study to discuss emotion in art activities.

[4] Choreographic work has been discussed by Heyang and Martin (2020) which influences the present study.

tin [2020]: 1–15). Artists have observed the COVID-19 phenomenon and expressed themselves in a limited space, in their own studios or homes, capturing the COVID-19 phenomenon as inspiration to write song lyrics or compose music. As a result, numerous works of music or art have been born out of the idea of the COVID-19 phenomenon (Zhao, Chen, and Zhao [2020]: 1–11).

In the field of painting, there are also many artworks based on COVID-19. The artists have captured the socio-cultural phenomena associated with health, giving rise to paintings that express, for instance, an artist's disappointment with people who do not want to stay at home (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160). Other artists have interpreted the COVID-19 phenomenon in terms of the fight between security officers and members of the public who do not comply with the rules about wearing masks, and show how people's behavior is becoming increasingly chaotic and difficult to control during this pandemic.

Hence, although there are artists who perceive this phenomenon in a negative lens, since it limits their creative space and forces them to stay at home, the positive aspect is that many artists have captured it and used it as an idea for creating new artistic works. Apparently, these works have a variety of different forms and techniques, depending on the artistic experience of each artist, as well as the artist's experience with creative techniques, and the background of the artist as a creator (Nieto-Phillips [2020]). The differences in the resulting artworks are related to techniques, materials, forms, and content, and specifically the social message about the COVID-19 pandemic that is conveyed to the art connoisseur. As a result, the personal experiences, technical skills, and aesthetic sensitivity of the artist also determine the character of the work produced. (Puppe, Jossberger, and Gruber [2020]).

3.2. The COVID-19 Phenomenon as an Idea for the Creation of a Ceramic Installation with the Theme of a Battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna

Referring to the various data above, it is evident that the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic has troubled artists around the world, while at the same time providing ideas for art creation (An, Youn [2018]). Some of these ideas are based on concern, turmoil, pessimism, or hope, while others are directed towards the creation of applied works of art (interior art with an aesthetic element). The idea for creating applied art is to produce works of art for an economic purpose, such as art accessories, paintings, or other souvenirs with shapes inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ornamental works, batik, drawings, or multimedia works (Feng [2020]).

The creation of this research-based artwork is different from the usual artworks that were created using paitings, dances, and drama. The researchers perceived the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for interpreting this natural and social phenomenon in a different way, and they had an advantage in that the phenomenon had so far only been expressed through works of multimedia art, painting, pictures, and textiles. The researchers, who have a background in the field of ceramics, captured this phenomenon as an idea for creating a ceramic work in the form of an art installation, portraying a COVID-19 battle drama with imaginative figures. The social and natural phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic was viewed by the researchers as a means of expression, to communicate their emotions in the form of a ceramic work of 3-dimensional installation art. The work is a form of a visual narrative in which the imaginative figures represent a COVID-19 battle drama (Van Tonder [2015]: 221-238). The researchers also regarded the COVID-19 pandemic as a socio-economic, cultural phenomenon that contains other psychological values, as a phenomenon that is touching, disappointing, and exciting, and has caused apathy and concern, disappointment and joy, brutality and tenderness, negative and positive energy, pleasure and sadness, and hatred and affection.

The researchers' expression and utilization of their creative ideas was different from that of other artists in that it was a visual expression of something that was captured naturally by the senses of the creator. They viewed the phenom-

enon of the pandemic in terms of its values, as a meeting between negative and positive energy, or a meeting between something good and something bad. When contemplating the phenomenon of the pandemic, they observed and imagined it as an interesting phenomenon that had the potential to raise values that could be captured as an idea for a ceramic art creation based on symbolic values. In other words, it could be interpreted as a meeting of positive and negative aspects (Helton [2020]: 1-15). The reason the researchers perceived this phenomenon as a positive and negative encounter was because when it occurred, it affected the emotional state of society, making it difficult to control, and causing social clashes resulting in chaos on the face of the earth. This can be explored further by observing social behavior such as concern or apathy, caused by the pandemic (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

Furthermore, when this phenomenon was captured as the idea for creating a ceramic artwork, it required the ability to process data about this phenomenon to become a concept for their work that was subsequently transformed into a unique, interesting form of art. (Mace and Ward [2002]: 179-192). The results of the researchers' observations of this phenomenon in various countries or regions, showed that the presence of COVID-19 has resulted in clashes due to conflicts of interests and the desire to prioritize personal interests. The interests of the general public have been neglected, causing socio-economic and cultural chaos, born out of these conflicts of interests that can be interpreted as an encounter between hope and disappointment, or sadness and pleasure.

The researchers feel that the pandemic has changed the social behavior of people to become more impatient, selfish, and apathetic, always wanting to get their own way, behaving arrogantly, indifferently, and unwilling to concede defeat. This is an indication that the COVID-19 phenomenon has changed people's behavior in such a way that they always want to highlight their own interests. There has been chaos caused by struggles for food aid and other logistics from govern-

ments in some countries. COVID-19 has changed societies from happy to sad, from living together to experiencing a life of victory alone, from togetherness to individualism, and so on. This is the way the researchers understand this phenomenon (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160). Other examples of social behavior include communities refusing to obey government regulations to stay at home and avoid contact with other human beings. There have been numerous instances of social resistance against government officials, and many people are not disciplined about wearing masks when they leave the house. When they are warned by government officials, arguments break out between the security officers on the streets and the people who do not want to stay at home, or to wear masks.

When people carry out activities outside their home, especially activities involving a large number of people, it is believed that such a meeting encourage the rampant spread of the virus. However, when reminded about these risks, many people protest against the government and other officials. This is what intrigued the researchers, as art creators, and inspired them to create a form of installation ceramic art that was symbolic of this situation, expressed in the form of a dramatic portrayal of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna (Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21-34). It was an interesting idea to create a ceramic work with a dramatic theme, because it was an idea that had not been carried out by artists in other countries. In general, the COVID-19 phenomenon has been expressed by artists in other countries in the form of dance dramas, paintings, illustrations, mural images, and so on. Few artists have captured and expressed the phenomenon in a similar way to the researchers.

The main difference between the work of the researchers and works of other artists, in both the creative process and the results, is that the COVID-19 theme is not expressed through a general visual form, but through a dramatic ceramic media, which tells a colossal story about COVID-19. The visual expression is in the form of a ceramic installation that represents a bat-

tle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna, which symbolizes the fight between evil and good, between negative and positive energy or values. The creative process involved a long journey for exploring concepts, extracting forms, extracting techniques, and strengthening techniques, manifesting in a work of art that has an aesthetic value and a social message different from other researchers or artists. (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

The structure of this work is in the form of an arrangement of imaginative ceramic figures that portray the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. The figures that represent the COVID-19 troops consist of various visual expressions and sizes, while the figure of Lord Krishna is expressed as a warrior shooting at the COVID-19 troops with an ornate oversized weapon attached to his body. The two different elements of form are arranged into a single unit of installation ceramic art of fired plastic clay.

3.3. Actualization of the Concept of Creation to Become a Ceramic Artwork

The formulation of a concept requires a medium or method in order to be arranged or transformed into a finished work of art. The process of realizing ideas to become works of art is strongly influenced by the artistic and technical experience that has been mastered in creating the art (Morphy [2012]). The process of actualizing the idea of the theme of a "battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna" to become a finished work of art was an essential part of this creative research process that was needed to communicate what had been formulated in the concept of creating the ceramic installation art (Kosonen, Mäkelä [2012]). The concept of creating this ceramic installation artwork, which was the transformation of the struggle between negative and positive energy into a work of art, was built on the basis of an imagination that was carefully explored and processed with various artistic and technical considerations, to be expressed in the form of a ceramic installation artwork. The artistic expression was a medium for communicating the thoughts and imagination achieved through close examination of aesthetic in artist activities[5] (Cazzola [2020]: 57-72).

In order to create a work of art, it must be supported by the forces that exist within the creator, beginning with the process of extracting ideas, contemplating, formulating the concept of creation, and mastering the technical skills needed to actualize the idea of the creation (Racz [2009]: pp. 215-227). This is part of the language of researchers as artists in expressing their thoughts and imagination. Every artist has a different way of capturing the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic and communicating it to become a work of art in a way that is masterful, interesting, and supported by the exploration of the potential that exists in the artist (Morphy [2012]). An artist may use various ways to express his or her artistic obsession so that he feels satisfied in expressing his anxieties or concerns, and satisfied with the result of his contemplations. It is evident that not all researchers experience a smooth pathway to achieve a final work from something that they originally envisioned. Oftentimes, various ways are required and a long journey must be undertaken, whether it is technical or related to the form to be conveyed.

Form and technical aspects are considerations that are absolutely necessary in the work process in order to turn ideas into works of art (Varma, Menon [2017]). In this case, the technical aspects were related to the way the clay material was processed and shaped to form a work of art. The revelation of the concept of the work about the battle of COVID-19 troops in the form of an installation ceramic art was chosen as a means of expression, based on the concept developed to achieve this particular form of work (Cazzola [2020]: 57-72). During the process of creation, the researchers performed various technical tasks, including an exploration of techniques and shapes, before selecting those that were suitable to be transformed into the ceramic artwork, and to achieved

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[5] This reflection of artistic activities is influenced by the work of Cazzola (2020).

the desired form related to the material processing or treatment of work techniques (Mäkelä [2016]). The exploration process was carried out to find the best methods and techniques for processing the material, shaping the ceramic figures, and firing the clay. It also served to strengthen the idea for the work in realizing the concept of the design for the "Battle between COVID-19 Forces and Lord Krishna" through which the material became a finished work of art (Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä [2020]: 31-46).

The next stage was to select the best form for the work, from the results of the exploration of various alternative sketches, which would enable it to be turned into a ceramic artwork. The technical exploration involved conducting various experiments on clay materials because clay was the main material used for creating this ceramic work. The clay material used was a type of stoneware clay made from local clay in Malang, in the province of East Java. In order to obtain the desired material, it was necessary to combine this clay with other supporting materials, and use the correct processing technique. All the components were combined and then processed into plastic-based materials using a kogelmolen. This plastic alkaline processing in clay does not necessarily produce the expected material (Varma, Menon [2017]), and there were a number of technical problems. These included selecting and sorting the clay obtained from the original mining site so that the material could be processed into a plastic material and formed into the imaginative ceramic figures of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna to create the final ceramic installation artwork.

In processing the clay, the material obtained in the form of chunks from the mining site was not immediately turned into plastic clay but first required the addition of other supporting materials. The materials used consisted of poor local clay, river sand, quartz sand, and kaolin, mixed with a certain ratio. The ratio between the elements was: 40% stoneware clay + 20% river sand + 20% quartz sand + 20% kaolin. This mixture served to provide the skeletal structures of the clay figures. River sand is a material that can be

obtained easily because it is found in the Brantas river, which is not far from the research studio. The river sand first needed to be filtered using a 100-micron mesh filter. Meanwhile, the clay obtained from South Malang was also chosen carefully so that the rock and gravel content in the clay did not interfere with the subsequent processing and shaping, removing any elements of coarse materials, such as rocks or gravel, from the clay soil.

These two components were mixed in wet conditions. Water was added first, then kaolin flour or kaolin clay. The kaolin mixture was used to strengthen the structure of the material when it was fired at a temperature of 1.100 degrees Celsius. Before the material was ground, it was mixed in the ratio required for the process of making ceramic. After it had been mixed in wet conditions, it was processed or milled with a clay grinding machine, using kogelmolen technology, to transform it into plastic. The milling was carried out for 3 hours in order to achieve the desired level of softness and homogeneity. In addition to obtaining a homogeneous consistency, it was also important to create a clay material that was truly elastic and could be shaped by hand (Ponimin, [2019]: 280-291).

It was essential to ensure proper homogeneity of the clay since it would affect the plasticity of the material and enable it to be shaped more easily. After processing the plastic clay material from the stoneware clay in South Malang, which was mixed with kaolin and river sand, a material was obtained that was able to be shaped into the form of statues of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. A number of obstacles were encountered in the processing of the material, such as discovering elements of the material that were not mixed properly or evenly, which would lead to potential cracking of the clay when it was formed into the statues. Therefore, the homogeneity of the clay before forming is essential.

In the exploration of form, alternative forms were also considered for the imaginative figures of COVID-19 sculptures, in various poses or with various expressions, to portray the idea of

Fig 1. Sketch of an alternative plan of a ceramic installation work.

Fig 2. Result of processing clay.

the COVID-19 king, or *Kala*, COVID-19 troops, and Lord Krishna. Alternative models for the figures were made by drawing sketches with a variety of expressions, to find the visual expression that would strengthen the overall appearance of the work. The main figure of the king of COVID-19 was about 1 meter in size, and supported by the elements of other figures in the form of COVID-19 troops, measuring about 30-40 cm in height. The statue of the other main character, Lord Krishna, was armed with a bow and arrow and also measured 1 m in height. Several alternative forms were sketched using a pencil, to obtain the best form that could be transformed into a ceramic work made from clay. The sketching process also strengthened the dramatic aspect of the work, by creating a number of alternative expressions for the COVID-19 statues, including facial expressions, gestures, foot positions, hand positions for carrying the weapons, and other ornamental elements attached to the COVID-19 figures.

Meanwhile, the exploration of the shape of the Lord Krishna was carried out by sketching a number of alternative images in different positions, such as pointing his arrow towards the king of COVID-19 but blocked by the COVID-19 troops around him. The statue of Lord Krishna was ultimately portrayed aiming an arrow, with his right leg squatting forward and his left leg pulled back. His body leans backwards, the right

hand holding the bow and the left hand holding the arrow, pointed towards the King of COVID-19. To strengthen the expressive aspect of the statue, a number of ornaments and attributes were attached to the figures of both Lord Krishna and the King COVID-19, on their chest, shoulders, stomach, legs, and arms. The goal of this exploratory process was to try and achieve the desired forms to portray the dramatic battle between the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. When the desired form was completed and considered to meet the requirements of the work concept design, the next step was to create the work using the treated clay.

3.4. Process of Creating the Ceramic Art

The creation of this work was the realization of the creative idea or concept which was transformed into a three-dimensional ceramic installation work portraying a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna. In the visual imagination, the figure of Krishna was expressed holding a bow and arrow, while the COVID-19 troops were depicted carrying various weapons, such as batons and sickle swords, ready to attack Lord Krishna as he aimed his arrow towards them (Kosonen, Mäkelä [2012]).

The creative process referred to the results of the technical and material exploration, and the exploration of the shape, with the aim of realizing the ideas based on the concepts, technical expe-

riences, and forms that had been achieved in the previous stages of exploration of form and technique (Cass, Park, and Powell [2020]). The exploration of technique and form had produced several alternative forms in the selected sketches that had the potential to be transformed into a work of art. The selection of sketches was based on technical and aesthetic considerations related to the forms that would have the best symbolic aesthetic value and be able to communicate the message of the content when transformed into a finished artwork (Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21–34). This form of exploration also referred to aspects related to the social message to be conveyed through the form that was to be transformed into a work of art, as well as taking into account the technical aspects of the clay material that allowed it to be formed using a pinching technique or direct hand massage. Therefore, it is true to say that the exploration of form is always associated with technical or material exploration, or exploration of formation technique (Ponimin [2019]: 280-291).

The clay was selected based on the experimental results of processing the clay materials with several different compositions. The material chosen was clay comprising a combination of Malang stoneware and other supporting materials. The clay material used for creating the ceramic figures was based on the composition that had been determined during the plastic clay processing. When the shape and technical method had been selected, the formation process could be carried out by applying a direct hand massage shaping technique. The technique of forming the work referred to the sketched design of the selected work form (Mäkelä [2016]). Two methods were used to form the work. First, pinching and massaging with the fingers, which is the main form of global shaping technique. This technique was also combined with a plastic clay or clay coil twist technique. In the figurative works, one of the most suitable methods to be used is a massage shaping technique because it enables the desired shape to be achieved more freely by making clay twists and then forming or compiling from the bottom up to create the planned structure, which

in this case was a ceramic sculpture portraying the imaginary figures of the COVID-19 king and Lord Krishna.

The technique for making the shapes began by creating plastic clay strands with a diameter of 3 cm and a length of about 15 cm, twisted on a board with sufficient moisture content. When these strands had been made in sufficient numbers to form, they were taken one by one to be stacked or massaged upwards. The first step was to make the main part of the work, which in this case was the statue of the king of COVID-19. Starting from under the twist, the clay was looped and then arranged in a continuous circle until it reached the desired shape for the basic form, then massaged to make a wall from the basic form that would become the structure of the work. When the basic shape had been achieved, the refinement process could be carried out on the inside and outside of the walls of the basic structure. When a certain thickness had been reached, work could begin on the top process.

The same procedure was carried out on the upper part of the structure, massaging the strands that had already been arranged, with reference to the lower shape so that they could easily be arranged upwards to form the basic shape of the body figure of the king of COVID-19. When the walls of the global structure or basic structure had been formed, the next step was to carefully smooth or massage the compaction of the wall to achieve the desired thickness. After attaining the desired thickness, the next process was to refine the details of the surface of the statue of the king of COVID-19. When the final global form was finished, the details of the anatomy and other elements supporting the character of the king of COVID-19 were refined. When searching for or perfecting the structure of the main form of the figure of the king COVID-19, it was also necessary to make sure that it would not crack during the firing process. This was done by massaging the inner and outer walls to bind the joints, in order to prevent cracks from occurring (Chihi et al. [2019]).

During this formation process, it was important to ensure sufficient water content to establish

proper bonds between the strands, while making sure that there was not an excess of water content, which would create a burden on certain shapes, causing them to fall or crack. This same process was also carried out for the other figures of the COVID-19 troops, but greater care and attention to detail had to be given to the larger structures of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna, so that the result would be perfect. The next stage in the creation of the figures of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna was to dress and decorate the figures. For example, the leg of the king of COVID-19 was draped with a cloth ornament, and other ornaments were placed on the chest to reinforce his splendor. His head was made in the shape of a giant, or *Kala* figure, but the crown was composed of elements that represented his character as a visual icon of COVID-19, namely in the form of the COVID-19 virus. This all supported the character of the king of COVID-19 (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160).

The technique used for strengthening the visual character was to place or apply twisted ornaments on the surface of the shape while it was still moist. The process of attaching the twisted ornaments involved twisting the clay in accordance with the desired ornaments. When applied to the surface, the strands were adjusted to achieve the predetermined design, for example with a twist that was elongated, a twist that was circular or spiral, a twist that was in the form of a curl, and so on. This was all done with great care, while taking into consideration the level of moisture of the clay and the degree of complexity of the shape. When placing the twists onto the surface of the work form, the surface needed to be in a sufficiently humid condition and with sufficient water content to enable the ornamental clay twists to be attached. This also ensured that the ornamental twists would not become separated from the surface of the shape even when the figure had been fired.

The final stage was to perfect the details of the COVID-19 troops and the figure of Lord Krishna by making the anatomical details more precise. This was done by refining the curves of the *drafi*

Fig. 3. The Process of forming the figurative ceramics of body parts expression figures of King Corona using local clay and pinching techniques.

(folded form of the cloth costume) and the shapes of the imaginary characters, including the body postures and the details of the body parts of the figures. Since this work was intended to be an expression of combat, it was important to strengthen the dramatic aspect to be conveyed through the characters of the figures in the work (Helton [2020]: 1-15; Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21-34).

3.5. Process of Drying and Firing the Ceramic Artwork

When all the elements of the statues had been completed, it was time for the firing process. Pri-

Fig. 4. Process of forming the face ceramic of the giant King of Corona.

Fig. 5. Detail forming of the expression figurative ceramics body of King Corona.

Fig. 6. Process of forming the global form of figurative ceramics body of Lord Krishna.

or to the firing, the finished work was first dried out naturally by placing it in a shady place with sufficient aeration, until the water content had decreased to a certain level where it could be dried out further under the sun. The final stage was the combustion process. This was initially carried out using an open furnace, or a wood-fired stove, and then in a direct fire combustion process, under the heat source, after which the furnace room was ignited, and after heating the whole work, the flames were enlarged, and the final stage was to fire the entire combustion chamber which heated up all the statues as they were burned in the combustion chamber.

At the time of firing, great care was taken because the statues were at risk of breaking due to the irregular shape of the structures. During the combustion, the entire combustion chamber was evenly lit so that by the end of the process, the statues would be properly hardened or 'cooked'. The firing process took a total of 8 hours. The first stage was the heating, the second stage was the initial firing, at a temperature of 600° C, and the final stage was to increase the heat of the fire to reach a temperature of 1,100° C, to fire the entire work that was being fired (Ponimin, Guntur [2020]: 285–306). At the end of the 8 hours, all the hotspots were turned off so as not to disturb the color of all the works being fired when they were removed from the furnace (Mezquita et al. [2014]). The cooling process took 12 hours, and when the combustion chamber was cool, the statues were carefully removed, and the artwork was ready to be presented.

Fig 7. Drying process.

Fig 9. The ceramic work in the form of a battle between the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna.

Fig 8. Firing process.

3.6. Symbolic Visual Expression of the COVID-19 Battle

The overall concept of the form of this work was produced with reference to the values of a battle between positive and negative energy, a fight between positive and negative values, or an encounter of positive and negative values (white and black, good and evil, nobility and defamation, gentleness and brutality, etc). Therefore, the visual expression of this work is an arrangement of visual elements that portray an encounter between two different elements (Dalmasso [2019]), expressed through the arrangement or composition of figurative imaginative elements. The form of the COVID-19 troops is expressed through an imaginative visualization of the king of COVID-19 and his troops in various positions and with various attributes, as a way of strengthening their character. Lord Krishna is expressed as a knight dressed in oversized clothes with decorative elements on every part of his body, and carrying a bow and arrow pointed towards the COVID-19 troops.

The figure of Lord Krishna is a character from traditional shadow puppet theater who is portrayed in this work as driving away the COVID-19 troops with his arrow. The two main visual elements are shown facing and attacking each other (Rabb, Brownell [2019]). This concept of a work that expresses two different elements, face to face with each other, serves to strengthen the depiction of a dramatic story about the battle between the two parties. The 3-dimensional visual elements are arranged dynamically and contradictorily to strengthen the visual dramatic aspect of the work as a whole. The dramatic aspect of the story is reinforced through the dynamic of shapes that express the various forms of statues of COVID-19 troops carrying weapons. Meanwhile, the statue of the king of COVID-19 is made much larger than the statues of his army, and portrayed in a position that represents the concept of negative energy, through the dynamics of form and visual expression. Meanwhile, the concept of form reveals the positive energy in the form of the figure of Lord Krishna. This figure was created based on the shadow puppet charac-

ter Lord Krishna in the Mahabharata story, who symbolizes the defender of virtue (Fitzgerald and Buitenen [2004]) (Singh [2019]). The visualization of the figure of Lord Krishna is depicted carrying a bow and arrow which is directed at the group of the figures representing the king of COVID-19 and his troops. The expression of Lord Krishna, with one hand raised and holding an arrow, and the other hand clasping the bow, his body slightly leaning back, is an expression of positive energy (representing truth), as he stands ready and excited to fight against the COVID-19 forces (Deprez [2020]).

There are a number of contradictory elements in the composition of the visual elements which strengthen the message about the battle between the two parties who are out to destroy each other. The overall appearance of the ceramic installation artwork is an arrangement of figures with a composition made up of high-low dimensions and pedestal display media (for example, the foundation of the statue) (Wilder [2020]). This enables the overall display to be depicted in its entirety, and visible from various directions.

In the display of this ceramic installation artwork, the main characters of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna stand face to face with one other. The king of COVID-19 carries a hammer with a head in the shape of the COVID-19 virus, and the statue of Lord Krishna carries an arrow aimed at the king of COVID-19. The king is supported by statues who represent his surrounding troops. Once again, this reinforces the aspect of dramatic effect in the presentation of the work, as well as the message conveyed, which symbolizes a fight between the energy of good and evil (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

4. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with the aim of producing an installation ceramic artwork inspired by a creative idea based on the social phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic. The result of the ceramic art creation was manifested in the form

of an arrangement of imaginative ceramic figures portraying a battle between the COVID-19 army, led by the king of COVID-19, and Lord Krishna. It is an expression of a battle between positive and negative values, or the values of good and evil[6] (Tzanidaki, Reynolds [2011]: 375-382). The positive values are represented by the figure of Lord Krishna while the negative values are represented by the COVID-19 king and his troops. The manifestation of the work as a whole was packaged in the form of a dramatic visual story. The work was produced through a manual forming process (direct hand massage) using local plastic clay from Malang, East Java, Indonesia (Ali et al. [2013]).

The source of the idea for this work was the researchers' knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic that has been experienced by the entire global community and caused public chaos. This phenomenon is something that the researchers had experienced directly, and spent time contemplating and imagining. The visual expression was interpreted in the form of a ceramic artwork with the theme of a 3-dimensional story in an installation art package. Every artist needs a way to express what he has experienced, what he remembers, and what he has pondered or discovered. When something is disturbing to an artist, it can be expressed as a work of art. Every artist responds to his life experiences or natural discoveries in a different way (Hwang, Choi [2020]: 161-173). This is influenced by the technical background and different forms of psychological experience of each artist. The expression of something that causes concern to the artist is achieved after a process of contemplation, a process of appreciation, and a process of deepening knowledge, which takes into consideration the artistic aspects that the artist possesses or uses to express himself (Rabb, Brownell [2019]; Vitiello [2015]: pp. 71-89). Of course, an artist's expression is not necessarily spontaneous, but may also involve a deeper process of thought and imagina-

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[6] Positive and negative values of batlle arts were previously discussed by Tzanidaki and Reynolds (2011) which serve as the conceptual framework for the present study.

tion, which when revealed, offer him a valuable artistic experience[7] (Miller, Dumford, [2015]: 168-182).

In connection with this, the researchers' own personal experience in the creative process of this particular artwork was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon that is currently sweeping the entire world and has caused a deep sense of concern. The researchers viewed the COVID-19 pandemic as something that is disturbing, intriguing, and can also be a touching, as an experience that is disappointing, phenomenal, and has become an ongoing social problem (Hwang and Choi [2020]: 161-173). The researchers saw the pandemic as a life-threatening phenomenon which has had an impact on socio-economic and cultural aspects of life, and they managed to capture it as an artistic phenomenon. This artistic phenomenon was expressed in a creative artistic experience in the form of a work of art, which passed through various stages to result in the finished product of a ceramic art work. The researchers presented the phenomenon of the pandemic as a dramatic battle between negative and positive values (Morphy [2007]; Ponimin [2019]: 280-291). The idea for the creation was based on the understanding that the pandemic has caused people to experience chaos, worry, disappointment, and egoism, and has changed the way of life for many, with new rules and regulations that must be obeyed, though in some cases are still being or resisted (Leavy [2020]).

After deciding on the idea for the work, the researchers used their artistic experience to contemplate and imagine the form of the work, their technical experience to shape the work, and their knowledge to convey the message or meaning of the work about the COVID-19 phenomenon (Kokko, Dillon [2011]; Miller, Dumford [2015]: 487–503). The ceramic art work entitled The Battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna, which was inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic,

symbolizes a clash between individuals and communities, between personal interests and public interests, between group interests and the larger interests of the state. It is a portrayal of a battle between negative energy and positive energy[8] (Jingyi, Wang [2020]: 19-23).

The results of the appreciation and creative process were manifested in the form of a ceramic work that tells the story of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna. The phenomenon of COVID-19 has brought chaos to people's lives, and led to an extraordinary fight between human beings themselves, as they prioritize their own interests and are engulfed by pessimism. The researchers understood and interpreted this phenomenon as a meeting of negative energy and positive energy (Puppe et al. [2020]), which they developed and processed to become a ceramic installation that describes these conditions - the conditions of a struggle between good and evil, a struggle between the idea of egoism and positivism, or egoism and loyalty, and a struggle between those who are concerned with individualism and those who prioritize the interests of society. These values are depicted in the form of a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna (Long [2014]: 427–438). Assuredly, the transformation of a concept into a work of art does not rely merely on visual artistic aspects, but also requires technical experience, which in this case was the techniques of ceramic forming (Corazza, Glăveanu [2020]: 81-91).

The researchers used local clay materials from Malang that were processed using a plastic clay material processing technique, then formed using a direct hand pinching technique to form the elements in the work that represented the positive and negative elements in the story of a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna (Fredrickson, Branigan [2005]). The COVID-19 troops were shaped and formed in a smaller size than the larger figure of the king of COVID-19. This created a contradiction in form that por-

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[7] Miller and Dumford (2015) discussed valuable artistic experience in their work that focused on artistic expression and thought process.

[8] Positive and negative energy was disclosed in a battle as convyed by the work of Jingyi and Wang Lun (2020).

trayed the negative and positive energy, and reinforced the dramatic aspect of the battle, expressed through the contradictory elements (Carmichael [2020]: 1-29). To strengthen the dramatic aspect of the form of this work, the arrangement of the different elements consisted of different sizes and different poses for each statue. The COVID-19 troops carry various weapons and have different expressions as they attack Lord Krishna's army. This strengthens the message of the social content about the struggle, which is also reinforced through the composition of contradictory forms (Pasquinelli, Sjöholm [2015]: 75-81). The presentation as a whole can be viewed from various angles because the work is three-dimensional, and it is hoped that this will convey the idea to the appreciator that the fight is expressed through a strong form that describes the battle itself.

The concept of the form of this work is a contrasting arrangement of visual elements that contradict each other, attack each other, and seek to dominate. It is an expression of a message about a fight between negative and positive energy, through the expression of contradictory visual elements in the visual form of a ceramic installation artwork with the theme of a battle between the king of COVID-19 and his troops, with their various expressions that symbolize negative energy, and Lord Krishna, who is a symbol of positive energy (Cui [2020]: 45–54). At the end of the creative process, the researchers carried out an in-depth analysis and discussion to evaluate the technical considerations of the content or social message of the work, as well as the message about the artistic form that could strengthen other aspects of the content. Eventually, the findings of this study inform that creativity is essential in art installation.

5. CONCLUSION

The creation of this ceramic installation artwork was carried out through a creative process of understanding the source of ideas and using the imagination to create a symbolic visual expression in the form of a three-dimensional ceramic artwork. The work portrays a battle between positive and negative energy based on the phenomenon of COVID-19. This idea is expressed through the visual form of imaginary figures with the theme of a battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. This visual expression is in the form of statues of the imaginary figures of the COVID-19 troops, led by the king of COVID-19, with various forms of expression depicting the body movements of each figure and supported by attributes that strengthen the iconic COVID-19 figures.

The visual expression of the statues of COVID-19 troops consists of various imaginative figures of the troops and the king of COVID-19. The form of the COVID-19 troops is visualized through their various types of mace weapons (corona clubs). Meanwhile, the form Lord Krishna is depicted as a mighty warrior with ornamental attributes attached to his body. The imaginary figure of Lord Krishna is also portrayed carrying a bow and arrow that is aimed at the COVID-19 army. The excellence of this work is in its unique form, as a ceramic art work in the form of a 3-dimensional installation that expresses the meaning of positive energy fighting against negative energy. This meaning is expressed in a visual, symbolic narrative in the form of a series of ceramic figures or sculptures. The symbolic narrative aspect of the work is an expression of the battle between the values of good and evil (positive and negative energy). Both of these elements exist in humans in the form of good and bad behavior. The visual image of the story of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna is a metaphor that symbolizes the battle between these two elements. This research contributes to strengthening the artistic experience of creating art by exploring potential sources of ideas from the appreciation of the COVID-19 pandemic as a natural worldwide phenomenon. Furthermore, the results of the appreciation are imagined and expressed in a figurative symbolic narrative through ceramic media made from local clay. Finally, it provides additional insights into art discourse that can be directly experienced, appreciated, enjoyed and pondered on.

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Vaccine Selfie. The double face of self-representation in Covid-19 era

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Abstract. If at its beginnings the Selfie was interpreted as an expression of the narcissism of contemporary culture, at the time of Covid-19 not only does it become the ordinary mask of the show performed on the stage of social networks, but it acquires the power to act on the social body. The Selfie, therefore, can be characterized as an iconic two-faced act with contradictory and ambiguous intentions and outcomes. The contribution examines the case of the Vaccine Selfie, in this particularly emblematic sense.

Keywords: Covid-19, Self-representation, Image, Social body.

SELF-REPRESENTATIONAL FORMS AND THEIR BODIES

In the contemporary pandemic world, self-representational processes are almost inevitably involved in everyday and personal storytelling (Busetta [2019]; Eckel, Ruchatz, Wirth [2018]). At the time of the Covid-19 the user of digital media – first *bricoleur* and then remixer – has been frequently summoned to a constant mediatization through self-portrayal narrative forms (Bellour [2002]), which allowed more and more frequently to escape the domestic and claustrophobic reality due to lockdown contingencies. The amateurisation of self-representational experience, in this sense, has been inevitable. Contemporary self-narratives are, in fact, literally in the hands of the everyday user who tells her/his own everyday life stories using the equipment mobility and its almost unconditional availability.

For my theoretical proposal regarding self-representative forms in the pandemic era, the role of the face is central, starting from the Selfies that proliferate on the screens of each device. If the image of our face is nothing more than an instrument we use to "play" building our identity in an Goffmanian relationship between the face and the mask we wear on the stage of public life, the Selfie is first of all

a conversational image (Gunthert [2014]), actually a networked one – an assemblage (Hess [2015]). In fact, as both social and technical object, when lockdown inhibited physical proximity, the networked mask of the Selfie acted on the pandemic stage as one of the few relational tools and practice (Gómez Cruz, Thornham [2015]) that include the broadcaster ego into the picture and allow to "make present" the subject of the representation through technological mediation, often asking for an emotional reaction also with an act of appreciation suck "like". In short, a Selfie is at the same time representation (a photo) and presentation (a performance), as well as a conversational iconic object and a materially and affectively entangled picture.

In the contemporary variant of the "Narcissism epidemic" – and far beyond a reductionist generational reading of the 2000s, however soon criticized (Twenge [2006, 2009]) –, a *ménage à trois* is established between the subject, its reflection and its eco (Santangelo [2020]). The Selfies posted on social networks are in fact echoes of the identity of those who produce them, heuristic outcomes of a relational and dialogical practice of self-design or self-branding through a sharing to be recognized, appreciated, but even only seen and experienced through the web, that during the hardest phases of lockdown often seemed to be the only socially habitable place.

Not only, therefore, a proliferation of the Selfies with protective masks, double cultural and historically contingent ones (Dynel [2021]), can be recognised, but also of the videocall images, close-ups or half-length framings where we are called to show ourselves, for work or pleasure, in the need to occupy space that is virtual, yet material, since the complex procedural gestures that access to devices and platforms implies (Zimmermann [2020]).

Consequently, the user pursues the self-representational act first of all thanks to its productive gestures, of which the self-representational form of the Selfie constitutively carries the traces. Far from the concept of a representation that benefits the transfer of reality from the object to its repro-

duction thanks to the mechanical process initiated by the analogical medium, the indexical logic that characterizes the Selfie is no more tributary of a reality to which it ontologically refers. Such process is, rather, a deictic and agentive regime within which the producer is inscribed and materially operates through a connective performance (Frosh [2015]).

Such performance can only take place thanks to a particular medium, the body, exquisitely amateur and committed to "the passion of the material" (Sobchack [2004]) that necessarily goes through a technological device: as Maya Deren (1965) wrote in the Sixties, the great advantage that the amateur has over the professionals consists precisely in its mobile body, its imaginative mind and freedom of choice to use both to making films.

The body itself is therefore a living and technological medium, since it allows us to acquire, archive, retrieve and transform images through mnemonic, creative and productive processes that are both externalized and embedded. Seen as technical and technological objects that emerge from the involvement of a subject always individually embodied, enworlded and entangled, the media are to be understood as potential, complex and ambiguous acts and processes of subjectivation. In this sense, the miniaturization of technological tools, allowing the proliferation of a deeply artisanal filmic practice, hands over to the *amauthor* (Sabatino [2020]) the chance to create their own narratives through amateur filmmaking (Rascaroli, Young, Monahan [2014]), which requires above all bodily and embodied narrative acts. Selfies are also clearly bodily images, as they are not only images of our bodies but also images of the body behind the camera establishing its relation to the world (Mcdougall [2006]).

Such productive dynamics are crucial for the iconic amateur productions in time of Covid-19. As outcome of contextual interactions, bodily movements and technical gestures as conveyed by media innervating the daily experience of self in the ordinary world, in the pandemic era the self-representation becomes a material act to reclaim

a relational, narrative and narrated Self, of which social distancing has deprived us during the lockdown. It is exactly through such self-representative dimension that images provide access to certain spheres of the everyday life, otherwise inhibited in such circumstances.

MATERIAL (ACTING) SELFIES

During the days of the Covid-19, the process that produces the transition from immaterial to material in amateur self-representations acquires a renewed relevance, which it is worth reflecting upon.

When the iconic object depicts its own creator, as in the case of the audiovisual or photographic self-portrait, the contact of the iconic subject with the produced object inevitably leaves traces of the representative act itself, following the indexical logic I mentioned earlier[1].

Selfie's productive gestures are emblematic of the delicate relationship that is activated between the materiality and the immateriality of self-representation, especially in the embodied relationship of the producer with their own image (Warfield [2018]). The amateurs who produce a digital image of themselves, on the one hand, bear the responsibility of their own technical and declarative gesture; on the other, in a more unreflective and expressive way, they call in their own body and flesh, since it refers to what they see, feel and perceive while they are flesh and blood in the place of the event (Fontanille [2006]).

The digital photographic self-image is therefore unthinkable outside the act that makes it exist, and therefore inseparable from the context and its referential situation much more than analog photography (Dubois [1983]), for which the self-representation was not feasible as contemporary prosthetic technology nowadays allows (Cati [2011]). As such, the amateur audiovisual and photographic gestures acquire exclusively performative characteristics, transforming them-

selves through and within the reality of the media where they are contextualized and used, not only through the gaze, but also through technical and bodily involvement.

Integrated as it is inside portable devices such as smartphones, the camera works as an extension of the limb of the amateur operator (Giusti [2019]): as an embodied device, it generates an image where the presence of the author is clearly visible thanks to aesthetic-formal characteristics (the blurring of forms, out of focus traits and other stylistic choices) typical of the cine-amateur practice. Thus, this authorship seems to be evidence and symptom of the physical and material – but also social, ethnic, gender and therefore "immaterial" (Carnevali [2012], Blackman [2012]) – inscription of the subjects directly involved within the self-portrayal device, starting from the act to turn the screen towards own face and begin recording.

The Selfie is then an iconic digital object that preserves and crystallizes the authorial trait of the self-portrait, both in its iconographic subject and in the material trace of the gestural and technological production. The practice of Selfie, therefore, «not only composes technicity and embodiment in the moment of image production; it also constitutes a deictic movement of the body that draws attention to the immediate context of image viewing and to the activity of a viewer» (Frosh [2015]: 1615). The act of framing, zooming and selecting the frame, of touching the device screen to activate the front camera and start or stop the recording, are the founding elements of the connective performance that involves and "concerns" the operator (Ibid.).

This indexical circularity concerning the amateur self-narrative forms concretely binds the representation to its productive subject, to its technical and medial performance and its object. Configuring itself as an index and expression of the will and creative act of its agent, the digital photographic or audiovisual Selfie constitutes an amateur artifact, both allographic and autographic[2],

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[1] I recall here the classic phenomenological derived division between *Bildding*, *Bildobjeckt*, and *Bildsujet*.

[2] For a first approach to this question, that lies outside this work, see D'Cruz, Magnus (2014).

whose identity can only depend on the technical and existential conditions of its history and on the material immanence of its object, bearer of social, cultural, ethnic and gender traces of its maker.

As it can be easily noted from the countless self-representative videos that populate everyday life, starting from the digital meetings that allows work and school activities to be pursued, the audiovisual Selfies describe the identity of their authors not only as explicit representations of the subject but also through additional significant elements. I am thinking of videocall backgrounds, rearranged as occasional sets, selectable from a library of available locations or predetermined filters, but also of para-operational technical gestures in order to adjust the framing and the lighting.

But this issue cannot be considered exclusively private. Just like the Infodemic outbreaks of links, posts, tweets, infographics, photos and memes that describe, comment on and inform the inhabitants of the global infosphere about the Coronavirus, the hyper self-representation on social networks seems to keep following the trend – initiated during the first lockdown – of inhabiting the online more than the offline. Due to the emergency situation, the online surfing in fact became a surviving tool to temporary replace the reality and ordinary life with a bubble of contents of their own and about themselves.

Facing the iconic invasiveness and pervasiveness that cause infections harder to fight than information alone, the self-representative social network activities increasingly summon the users to narrative acts aimed at literally showing them to be there and assert their existence, but also their icon resistance.

If the Selfie has been wrongly interpreted as an expression of the narcissism side – sometimes as the pathological one – of the contemporary culture, in the Covid-19 era it becomes the ordinary wearable mask on the social networks stage, as well as on the daily life stage that occupies increasingly expanded virtual spaces.

In this sense, it can be considered a particular social act (Lefebvre [1947]) that the producer

of the image, in the triple role of main character, author and spectator, realizes in an always situated and performative process, where the agentive connection is not arbitrary, but caused by the significance of the technological gesture at the origin of the self-image.

Given the correspondence and deictic circularity between the subject, the technological medium and the object of the representation, in the amateur self-narratives a particular form of iconic agency (Gell [1998]) takes place: it can activate a feedback between production, narration and fruition that is not always effective, but rather unpredictable.

In the self-representational logic of the Selfie, it seems to me that a performative "profanation" (Casetti [2015]), never obvious and univocal, can be recognized, where the relationship between subject and sense, theoretically produced and predetermined by the soft power of the medial device, is medially shaped and influenced.

Indeed: thus complex relationship between the subject of the Selfie and the meaning created by the sharing of experience through the image can be ambivalent and ambiguous, precisely because of the hyper contextualization of production and the indeterminacy of the fruitional expectations.

In fact, the indexical and symbolic circularity between the producer, the medium and the context of fruition always operates bidirectionally and relationally through a social feedback generated in the circulation and consumption of the image far beyond the intentionality of the creators.

From the image to the situation in which it is realized, from the subject to the anonymous and indeterminate recipient to whom it is addressed, and vice versa, a Selfie could be the product of an individual who performs and stages, illustrates and shows oneself, but also of a subject who uses the device in order to return an image caged in one genre to another use, or to search for a meaning not only shared but also collective. It could be, in short, an image that responds to an ethical instance rather than a narcissistic aestheticization of itself. It could.

"I WAS THERE, I DID IT": VACCINE SELFIE

According to the argument carried out so far, it is possible to state that the contextual self-representation of the Selfie activates complex narrative processualities, which involve the body and are made possible by its gestures, which are both condition of technical possibility and subjects of such self-representation. In the pandemic era, the Selfie provokes a particularly articulate and multiform social feedback, not linear nor easy to read, since the iconic agency is conveyed and reverberated by personal and institutional devices, by individual and shared social channels that show and tell the stories of the vaccination campaign progression.

The case of the photos that show the moment of the Covid-19 vaccine administration, a phenomenon now becoming viral due to the sharing on famous and ordinary people social profiles of in the act of inoculation, is truly emblematic. Defined a new social genre, by some news articles such as the New York Times[3], the iconography of the Vaccine Selfie[4] is historically reconstructed starting from the wellknown photo of Elvis Presley, getting vaccinated against poliomyelitis with the sleeve of the sweater up, smiling together with the doctor and the nurse who are inoculating the vaccine.

Strictly speaking, the image in question, soon re-mediated[5], is not a real Selfie. The documentary images of politicians and celebrities in the act of getting vaccinated are recently becoming popular, especially because, as the New York Times writes, documenting with images "works".

It works because the images themselves are involved in the vaccination campaign as awareness-raising tools, normalizers of a collective and global experience, often told with neutral and reassuring tones of positive empathy and social sympathy.

Some of these vaccine self-portraits are, on the contrary, real Selfies, such as the one of the designer Marc Jacobs, who posed with his unbuttoned shirt while getting vaccinated. Linguistically, the difference is glaring. If, as with Elvis, President Biden is photographed at the crucial moment by reporters who went to the vaccine location specifically to capture the scene, document it and spread the relative images, Marc Jacobs photographs himself in a mirror, as if to say "here I am. I'm doing it. Look at me".

In this sense, his celebrity face, well known and well recognizable in the photograph he took, acts in the self-representative device not only when he interpellatively intercepts his own reflection, the camera lens and the viewers' gaze, but also with a further purpose, in some unexpected and no less problematic ways, triggered by the image itself – in its linguistic and semantic composition.

The Selfie of the designer does not exclusively refer to the documentary, reportage and, dare I say, propagandistic function, nor does it linguistically take up the structural elements in the frame and in the point of view of the shot. Instead, it tells and clearly shows the involvement of the author and protagonist of the image, finally witnessing in the specific situation the indexical inscription of his body, here exposed together in its biological – mythologically universal, although historically strongly marked – vulnerability and in its singular stylization: embodiment and emplacement are here, as always, not only technologically and aesthetically, but also culturally and socially connoted.

The hyper contextualization, in this sense, is rich not only in fashion iconographic details, but also symbolic ones: next to the designer, an African American nurse, wearing a pink ribbon pin, a global symbol of the fight against AIDS, can

[3] V. Friedman, *Enter the Age of the Vaccine Selfie*, New York Times, published Apr 1, 2021, url: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/style/vaccine-selfies.html. Cfr. H. Schwedel, *Every Celebrity Vaccine Selfie, Ranked From Worst to Best*, published Mar 22, 2021, url: https://slate.com/human-interest/2021/03/celebrity-vaccine-photos-selfies-ranked.html.

[4] The Vaccine Selfie can be associated with the *Hospital Glam* subgenre as well, cfr. Tembeck (2016).

[5] M. P. Nocerino, *Pompei, spunta un'altra opera di Nello Petrucci*, Magazine Pragma, published Jan 4, 2021, url: https://magazinepragma.com/arte/pompei-spunta-unaltra-opera-di-nello-petrucci/

here be seen as a powerful and debatable bridge between two epidemics very often forcibly juxtaposed under their respective imaginary. The power of the Vaccine Selfie seems to lie in the operator's intention to bring the viewer's gaze into the image and, at the same time, to summon the observer, the anonymous and ordinary recipient, in the extraordinariness and exemplarity of the situation and experience that are told in the Selfie from a factual, pragmatic and personal point of view.

What do the Vaccine Selfies want to tell us? Clearly "do it!", in a linguistically more effective and explicit way than the institutional and social awareness campaigns, although designed for the same purpose, managed to do. The greater Vaccine Selfie effectiveness is not only due to the explicitly amateur rhetoric, but also to the virality and engagement of millions of followers, who feel personally summoned by the celebrity they follow and admire. And they envy.

The Selfie and the act of Marc Jacobs are in fact avowedly social, but have different intentions, dimensions and purposes, revealing uses that are not univocal, perhaps actually incompatible. The Vaccine Selfie of Marc Jacobs is a self-contextual image, but the indexical agency that characterizes it activates multiple meanings: it is certainly a voluntary testimonial of the vaccination campaign – similar to other reportable and documentary images, although linguistically different –, but it is also an icon of the hyper-elitist world of fashion that becomes capable of intercepting, summoning and convincing the recipient to do the same by virtue of the social device functioning in which this image is inscribed.

The Marc Jacob's Vaccine Selfie activates an ambiguous pathemization process in the potentially moralized and socially adequate recipient, well disposed to accept shared and therefore collective emotions. In fact, the subject becomes aware of her/his own disturbance and however has difficulty in giving a unique name to her/his feelings and social sentiments: such meeting-clash between different passionate instances and components arouses conflicting feelings and emotional reactions.

So, "what do Vaccine Selfies really want?" The famous question to which Tom Mitchell has made us sensitive, not by chance discussing Uncle Tom's war manifesto[6], is relevant here.

To answer the question, there would be necessary to build a typology and test a sample analysis of exemplary or paradigmatic cases; I cannot do it here and perhaps is not the most important thing. What matters, however, is to take note that during the new rituals of vaccination the many Selfies of ordinary people show us that the power of vaccination as a social device, producing behaviours and responses from the receptor of images, is doubled, amplified but also contradicted by the testimonial power of self-representation and its circulation in social network and on the internet.

The ethical virtue of the individual Selfie consists in actualizing a narrative virtuality made of infinite common stories, exemplifying a kind of collective, involuntary and participative self-portrait. Intended as echoes of identity and testimony of own selves, Selfies reach eyes and consciences as their producers and referents alone, however famous or powerful, could not do. In this sense, the Vaccine Selfie acquires a key role in the media pandemic scenario, placing itself in the social profiles of politicians and influencers no longer just as a "double face" of power or prestige, charismatic exemplariness, vanity or boast about a lifestyle, but also as an interpellation act, a call to action that many eyes can cross and listen.

In my opinion this is one of the most relevant implication of the question "what do Vaccine Selfie really want?" The agency of such a vulnerable self-image, a contemporary low intensity mythologeme (Ortoleva [2019]) of a shared humanity and biological life in the common extreme danger – regardless of gender, age, social, economic, ethnic and religious differences – also consists in producing a structural ambivalence of social feeling, putting into circulation and participating in it even beyond the intentions of its creators. A feeling that swings, as among the others Réné Girard (1961) and Elena Pulcini (2011) have

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[6] See Mitchell (2005).

shown, between sympathy and envy, harmony and resentment, in a manner similar to what happens in the mimetic desire and emulation that characterizes the most widespread and canonized Selfie practices[7].

In fact, the Vaccine Selfie is configured as an iconic two-faced act. Primarily, it is a statement of subjectivity, performance and experience as body, technical gesture and testimony –, acting in a performative society that shifts the focus from the subject to the project (Han [2015]), from the singular life to the biological life as the object of the vaccination campaign. Secondly, Selfie is an iconic target of social envy, a harbinger of unprecedented forms of discrimination, resentments and stigmatizations on the body and on the social imagination.

It is therefore within and thanks to the social networks (Fuchs [2021]) that the Vaccine Selfie points to the viewers, including them first of all in a dialogue that apparently suspend the real social differences and involving them, at the same time, in a complex communicative and agentive emplacement, open to ambivalence, often unresolved and symptomatic of a latent or concealed contradiction.

Discursive interaction (Frosh [2015]), conversational image (Gunthert [2014]) and metalinguistic icon (Fontcuberta [2016]), the reflexogram of Marc Jacobs – among the many others that resemble it by genre and subject – is therefore the outcome of an amateur composition with conflicting effects, which seems to contradict its own meaning. If the Selfie wanted to ethically profane its productive and fruitional device by returning the image to a good common use, and if it was meant to be such a double antidote for the social body against the viral narcissism of social net-

works during the pandemic of COVID-19, here it ends up reintroducing the evil into the remedy, the disease into the cure – envy and resentment into the image, infecting again the sense of community and compassion.

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[7] Cfr. K. K. Thomason, *It is totally normal to have vaccine envy right now*, The Philadelphia Inquirer, published in Mar 22, 2021, url: https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/covid-vaccine-distribution-envy-20210322.html; B. Huang, *Why posting vaccines selfies on social media cause envy, frustration*, Halifaxtoday, published in Feb 20, 2021, url: https://www.halifaxtoday.ca/coronavirus-covid-19-local-news/why-posting-vaccines-selfies-on-social-media-cause-envy-frustration-3437389.

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Aisthesis

The defied spirit. Subjective stupidity and objective intelligence

Lo spirito sfiduciato. Stupidità soggettiva e intelligenza oggettiva

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Abstract. The present article analyses the different forms of stupidity as they are presented in the two renowned lectures held by Musil in 1937, in particular by trying to connect them to some passages from *The Man Without Qualities*. Stupidity cannot be reduced to a simple "inability to understand". It becomes the symptom of a wider crisis involving the whole European tradition: a crisis of trust in human nature that ends up compromising every possible overall vision about culture and life. Valéry arrived to a similar outcome in his *The Crisis of The Mind*. Significantly, both Musil and Valéry attempted to explain this kind of crisis through the analogy with economic processes: by combining their theses, and taking into account some passages of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, we could say that money has concentrated intelligence and trust within itself, reducing individuals to a condition of stupidity and mutual distrust.

Keywords: Musil, Valéry, Simmel, Stupidity, Philosophy of Money.

«Lo sfogo viene introdotto da queste parole: "Insomma, la cosa è *troppo* stupida". Ma la "cosa" troppo stupida è l'uomo che sta parlando»
(Musil [1986a]: 252).

Gli «esemplari della specie "stupidità"»[1] passati in rassegna da Musil nel corso delle due conferenze tenute a Vienna nel marzo del 1937 si potrebbero ritrovare, più o meno, quasi tutti, ne *Gli ultimi giorni dell'umanità*: c'è la stupidità che sopisce la diffidenza, disarmandola[2], quella che lo speculatore di Berlino rimprovera ai vienne-

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[1] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 235).
[2] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 238).

si[3]. È una "stupidità astuta", una furberia: quando i rapporti di forza sono sbilanciati, il più debole si finge più stupido di quello che è[4] – proprio come il generale austriaco sbigottito di fronte al sottotenente prussiano, pieno di grinta e di organizzazione[5]. Poi troviamo le "stupide vittime" che suscitano impazienza e non di rado eccitano selvaggiamente l'immaginazione di uomini crudeli[6]: viene in mente il Kaiser Guglielmo II che si diverte a umiliare i propri generali[7]. Anche le perifrasi di coloro che si considerano intelligenti ma non lo dicono[8] – «Non sono più stupido di un altro», «Non mi faranno passare per stupido» – sono ampiamente rappresentate nel romanzo di Kraus[9]. Da ultimo ci sarebbe la rozzezza come "prassi della stupidità": «non soltanto essere stupidi, ma agire da stupidi, commettere delle stupidaggini» (Musil [1986a]: 245), come Auffenberg che deve scrivere una cartolina, si dimentica e si dà dello stupido di fronte a Brudermann[10].

1. I casi citati impediscono di ricondurre le manifestazioni di stupidità a una sorta di generica *insufficienza sul piano intellettuale*. Una certa limitatezza nel livello di comprensione degli eventi era stata "censita" già nel primo Dopoguerra:

«ci sono mancati i concetti per interiorizzare i vissuti» (Musil [1986b]: 105), nel senso che abbiamo visto di tutto e non ci siamo accorti di nulla. Ci siamo scoperti «ciechi, impotenti, anche se armati di conoscenze e carichi di potere» (Valéry [1994a]: 59), come se le determinazioni di una cosa cominciassero a presentare una gradualità nel trapasso dall'una all'altra che «le rende assolutamente inafferrabili ai nostri concetti, saldamente circoscritti» (Simmel [1997]: 188).

Ad essere travolta è la forma-coscienza e la possibilità di costituire "rappresentazioni" in senso classico di ciò che accade: «non si sa più come raccogliere tutto ciò che si vince alla lotteria dell'esperienza. I risultati parlano tutti insieme» (Valéry [2008]: 94). Alcuni termometri piazzati da Simmel "nei punti giusti" avevano già segnalato febbre alta: l'accumulo veloce di immagini, il brusco contrasto tra impressioni, la logica autonoma e indecifrabile del denaro, così come la crisi di fondazione delle scienze prospettavano un quadro clinico già fortemente compromesso. L'effetto di logoramento prodotto dall'intensificazione *della vita nervosa* non restituisce il tipo metropolitano sul piano meramente psicologico: accanto alla separazione tra intelletto e strati profondi della personalità[11], corre in parallelo lo sradicamento delle abitudini – queste armature dell'esperienze vengono aggredite direttamente dai vissuti[12]. L'informazione rade al suolo la saggezza[13]: la lettura di un quotidiano tira in ballo una quantità di cose che «non basterebbe il cervello di un Leibniz per capirle» (Musil [1997]: vol. I, 244). Imbrogliatissima, piena si sottigliezza metafisica[14], la merce

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[3] Cfr. Kraus ([2007]: 215): «può succedere soltanto a Vienna, ma che un popolo col quale combattiamo fianco a fianco sopporti una simile stupidaggine, è roba da pazzi, voi viennesi non vi rendete proprio conto che siamo in guerra».

[4] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 238).

[5] Cfr. Kraus ([2007]: 270-271): «Vedete signori, potete dir quel che volete contro i tedeschi, ma una cosa bisogna riconoscergli, diciamo la verità, hanno l'organizzazione. […] Così, invece, quel che ci manca è proprio l'organizzazione. In questo i tedeschi ci superano, diciamo la verità».

[6] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 239).

[7] Cfr. Kraus ([2007]: 486): «Guglielmo II: Troppo stupidi … ah … questa gente non ha senso dell'umorismo!».

[8] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 240).

[9] Cfr. Kraus ([2007]: 375): «Per quanto riguarda gli statisti nemici, non possono essere più stupidi dei nostri, perché una cosa simile non esiste in natura».

[10] Cfr. Kraus ([2007]: 131): «Niente … che stupido… insomma, debbo scrivergli una cartolina. È da Lublino che lo voglio fare, ma nella confusione della ritirata me ne sono completamente dimenticato».

[11] Cfr. Simmel ([1995]: 36-37): «l'intelletto è la più adattabile delle nostre forze interiori: per venire a patti con i cambiamenti e i contrasti dei fenomeni non richiede quegli sconvolgimenti e quei drammi interiori che la sentimentalità a causa della sua natura conservatrice, richiederebbe necessariamente per adattarsi a un ritmo analogo di esperienze».

[12] Cfr. Simmel ([1995]: 875). Su questo punto cfr. Desideri ([1980]: 281): «fino a che l'*Erlebnis* (baudelairiano) diviene realmente *Erfahrung*».

[13] Cfr. Benjamin ([2007]: 874).

[14] Cfr. Benjamin ([2007]: 191).

intrattiene col prezzo un rapporto allegorico: tra i due non c'è un nesso di derivazione calcolabile; il cartellino non rappresenta nulla di reale; una "scienza della merce" risulta impraticabile[15]. Il corso dei titoli di borsa si emancipa da ogni *fondazione* oggettiva: il loro valore attuale è l'effetto di un numero incalcolabile d'interazioni, incluse le scommesse sul loro andamento futuro[16]. Quale visione sintetica può tenere insieme questa esplosione di fatti? La pretesa di ricostruire sotto il profilo intellettuale la loro concatenazione sperimenta ben presto come «le cause si perdono sin dai primi anelli della catena nella vastità dell'infinito» (Musil [1986c]: 100).

Se la "fabbrica dell'intelletto" è stata dismessa, è ingenuo progettare di riammodernarla in modo che torni a produrre nuove compresse e pastiglie concettuali capaci di farci assimilare meglio un'epoca di per sé indigesta. Nessuno, nemmeno Husserl[17], ritiene che a fronte di un lavoro pure estremamente *rigoroso* si possa guadagnare una quadratura del cerchio, una specie di *restitutio in integrum*. «Non si deve più costruire la realtà – dirà più tardi Adorno – perché si dovrebbe costruirla troppo a fondo» (Adorno [1970]: 22).

2. La strada è a senso unico: «siamo divenuti poveri» (Benjamin [2012]: 369) e lo svuotamento della vita interiore non troverà rimedio nel recupero o nel potenziamento dell'Io. La riflessione come "dinamica di consolidamento" della coscienza individuale poteva "funzionare", forse, nel XIX secolo[18], ma nel *passaggio* attuale i suoi "schemi di comprensione" – il suo ideale di chiarezza e distinzione – vengono rimbalzati dal corso dell'accadere: «la vita gira intorno all'uomo e pensa, e danzando intesse per lui le relazioni che egli a fatica, e assai meno caleidoscopiche, affastella quando si serve della ragione» (Musil [1997]: 463). La collettività sognante dispone di un'auto-

percezione estremamente più affinata, più sensibile, rispetto a quella dell'individuo sano e desto[19], ancora filtrata dallo schermo della coscienza. «L'umanità si prepara a sopravvivere alla cultura» (Benjamin [2012]: 369) non nella *forma della riflessione*, ma come massa che incorpora e quasi inghiotte un'immane quantità di connessioni «al cui quotidiano aumentare lo sviluppo spirituale dei soggetti può tener dietro solo in modo incompleto, e con distacco sempre crescente» (Simmel [1995]: 53).

In un clima di frammentarietà inesprimibile il singolo osserva come «tutti gli altri che ne sanno di meno dicono sciocchezze a proposito del suo millimetro, eppure non può muoversi perché se si sposta anche di un solo micromillimetro dice sciocchezze anche lui» (Musil [1997]: 297). Col termine "intelligenza" s'intende l'*abilità* di presidiare il "proprio" millimetro quadrato di competenza. La prontezza nel denunciare l'incompetenza dei non adepti nulla sa degli altri pezzi del *puzzle*, non ha strumenti per recepire le osservazioni o i comportamenti provenienti dal millimetro quadrato adiacente o limitrofo: li considera mere sciocchezze, stupidaggini. Dato il legame originario della parola "stupido" con un'idea generale di scarsa abilità, e considerando l'impenetrabilità dei diversi segmenti dell'intelligenza, non stupisce che «l'accusa reciproca di stupidità sia oggi così enormemente diffusa» (Musil [1986a]: 247).

Siccome «*ogni intelligenza ha la sua stupidità*» (Musil [1986a]: 246), chi si comporta in modo maldestro sarà chiamato *stupido* dagli specialisti del settore anche se è uno Hölderlin[20]. Al contempo, marchiando tutto ciò che non le va a genio col bollino della stupidità, l'intelligenza finisce in realtà per confessare il proprio corto circuito: l'incapacità d'intendere il discorso dell'altro si mani-

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[15] Cfr. Benjamin ([2007]: 743).

[16] Cfr. Simmel ([2019]: 281-282).

[17] Sulla possibilità di vedere la "Crisi" già del tutto operante nelle *Ricerche logiche* cfr. M. Cacciari ([1975]: 213-218).

[18] Cfr. Benjamin ([2007]: 433).

[19] Cfr. Benjamin ([2007]: 433): «il dormiente intraprende attraverso il suo corpo un viaggio macrocosmico: grazie allo straordinario affinamento della sua autopercezione, i rumori e le sensazioni dei suoi organi interni – pressione del sangue, movimenti intestinali, battito cardiaco e tensioni muscolari – che nell'individuo sano e sveglio si perdono nella risacca della buona salute».

[20] Su questo punto cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 246).

festa nel modo più lampante esattamente attraverso l'impiego dell'insulto. In quanto termine inflazionato, in grado di sostituire quasi ogni altra parola, «l'insulto non rappresenta ciò che dice, ma un misto di idee, di sentimenti e di intenti che l'insulto non può "esprimere", ma solo segnalare» (Musil [1986a]: 249), come se fosse un esito sintomatico. Secondo Freud il sintomo sarebbe «un sostituto di qualcos'altro che non ha avuto luogo» (Freud [1978]: 441).

A indicarci questa chiave di lettura è Musil, quando affianca l'insulto alle battute di spirito, alle frasi fatte, più in generale a tutte quelle formule che risultano sufficientemente imprecise e vaghe da riuscire a «sostituirsi, nell'uso, a interi gruppi di parole più calzanti, più oggettive, più esatte» (Musil [1986a]: 250). Rimpiazzare un'espressione più articolata con un surrogato a buon mercato è a sua volta stupido, ma non privo di valore: ci stiamo difendendo dalla possibile irruzione di uno stato di panico. Sopperiamo all'incapacità di formulare una proposta spirituale all'altezza – che dunque non ha avuto luogo – sostituendola con un insulto e inflazionandolo, di modo che la quantità supplisca all'assenza di qualità. «Lo sfogo viene introdotto da queste parole: "Insomma, la cosa è *troppo* stupida". Ma la "cosa" troppo stupida è l'uomo che sta parlando» (Musil [1986]: 252). Come il fuoco da sbarramento che copre un obiettivo militare[21] (o come la mosca che sbatte ripetutamente sulla finestra), investire gli altri con una "mitragliata" di insulti rivela una propria astuzia: moltiplicando i tentativi aumenta la possibilità, benché cento possano fare cilecca, che uno colpisca il bersaglio.

Sono anni senza sintesi[22]: la situazione ambisce a un riepilogo spirituale che nessuno è in grado di fornire. Nelle pagine de *L'uomo senza qualità* recuperiamo una diagnosi: «l'ordine che si guadagna nel particolare si torna a perdere nell'insieme, cosicché abbiamo sempre più ordini e sempre meno ordine» (Musil [1997]: 429). Il panico da inadeguatezza viene coperto e rimpiazzato dall'in-

sulto sintomatico. L'individuo è già stato assorbito dalla matrice-massa, pienamente integrato in essa: «secondo la massa il presupposto principale della felicità non è quello di risolvere le contraddizioni, bensì di farle sparire, come in un lungo viale spariscono i vuoti» (Musil [1997]: 737).

3. La stupidità segnala una «crisi della fiducia che fino ad oggi avevamo riposto nella natura umana» (Musil [1986a]: 253). Libertà e ragione – ironizza Musil – non hanno più una bella cera: il binomio ereditato dell'età classica del cosmopolitismo tedesco si è sforzato invano di rimpiazzare il segreto millenario di un formidabile cemento sociale, ormai in fase di sgretolamento. «Finché si credeva nella religione si poteva buttar giù un buon cristiano o un devoto giudeo da qualunque piano della speranza o del benessere, egli sarebbe sempre caduto in piedi, per così dire sui piedi della propria anima» (Musil [1997]: 592): era previsto un "resto irrazionale" cui ricorrere qualora i conti del singolo non tornassero, quasi come se si potesse sempre richiedere un "credito di produzione". L'interazione tra le energie spirituali degli individui assicurata dallo sfondo religioso trova il proprio emblema – secondo Simmel[23] – nelle parole dell'evangelista: «c'è posto per tutti nella casa del Padre» (Gv. 14, 2). Per tornare a Musil, «la Cacania era il primo paese al quale Iddio avesse tolto il credito, il piacere di vivere, la fiducia in se stesso» (Musil [1997]: 600).

Tradurre la dinamica della fede nella richiesta di un credito non delinea soltanto una vaga analogia tra il religioso e l'economico, ma attesta un vero e proprio passaggio di consegne, confermato dalle iscrizioni "*non aes, sed fides*" sulle monete di Malta o dal motto stampato sul dollaro "*In God we trust*". Data la sua indifferenza il denaro «costituisce il ponte più adatto e il migliore strumento d'intesa tra molte e diverse persone» (Simmel [2019]: 431). Per Arnheim è un simbolo, «il metodo oggi più sicuro per trattare tutti i rapporti» (Musil [1997]: 440): grazie al suo carattere sintetico-comprensivo, assicura la continu-

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[21] Cfr. Musil ([1986a]: 251).
[22] Cfr. Musil ([1986d]: 186).

[23] Cfr. Simmel ([1993]: 70).

ità dei processi. Se «la vera eticizzazione prodotta dal processo della civiltà consiste nel fatto che una quantità sempre maggiore di contenuti di vita viene oggettivata in forma transindividuale» (Simmel [2019]: 253), di fronte agli eventuali *vuoti* che si creano nei rapporti tra le cose e le relative valutazioni, «si inserisce il denaro al fine di evitare tale minacciosa interruzione» (Simmel [2019]: 106). La semplificazione dei rapporti si trasfigura in un'immane tensione oggettivante attorno a cui ruotano e si rinsaldano tutti i rapporti sociali.

Valéry immagina una malattia misteriosa in grado di attaccare e distruggere rapidamente i documenti, gli scritti, le banconote di tutto il globo: questa "tubercolosi della carta" – oggi forse un virus informatico – fulminerebbe di colpo l'intera vita sociale, riducendoci al campo dei sensi. «Supponete dunque che si indebolisca e sprofondi il *supporto di questo supporto*, e cioè la fede, la fiducia, il credito che concediamo a questa carta scritta e che le fornisce tutto il suo valore» (Valéry [1994a]: 76). L'interazione, la complicità tra denaro e stupidità viene in luce considerando non il supporto[24], bensì *il supporto del supporto*: dopo il tramonto della religione e la breve illusione della coppia libertà-ragione, la fiducia si presenta oggi per così dire *dissociata* in due componenti. Adoperiamo qui una formula analoga a quella mostrata da Blanchot quando distingueva il "*si* muore" dall'"*io* muoio" come due aspetti differenti della morte (cfr. Blanchot [1967]: 132-133). Anche la fiducia vivrebbe una scissione tra il suo "lato oggettivo", tutto assorbito nelle dinamiche del denaro, e il lato dei rapporti soggettivi, annebbiato nella stupidità.

L'azione fluidificante del denaro su un piano che Simmel chiamerebbe "cultura oggettiva" trova il proprio correlato a livello soggettivo quando «la stupidità avvolge questi bruti avvenimenti in una nebbia protettiva: la sua necessità, si sarebbe detto un tempo, è strutturale. Se i crepacci che si aprono tra i fatti non fossero riempiti da una bambagia di frasi fatte, se la schizoidia da laboratorio non fosse occultata dalla convinzione di fare il Bene, se il raziocinio devastatore non si ritenesse l'incarnazione del Buon Senso, se… – la macchina si paralizzerebbe» (Calasso [2007]: 763).

Quote sempre maggiori di fiducia si depositano nella forma-denaro: «il credito è diventato un'organizzazione impersonale e la fiducia ha perso quel carattere personale […] il credito è diventato una forma tecnica di attività economica sostanzialmente priva di accentuazioni psicologiche» (Simmel [2019]: 411). Con lo sguardo rivolto all'europeizzazione del pianeta, Valéry auspicava un'Europa «perla della sfera, il cervello di un vasto corpo» (Valéry [1994b]: 35) – speranza delusa non perché oggi la perla si trovi oggi in un altro continente, ma in un senso più radicale: totalmente sradicata rispetto a ogni contesto locale, la perla è una "fiducia oggettiva" inafferrabile, *gestaltlos*, ma "intelligentissima", molto più di quanto possano cogliere le *forme* di razionalità alla portata di singoli individui – e con distacco sempre crescente. Svincolandosi dai limiti della fiducia *in* qualcuno, questa *fiducia impersonale* implementa processi autonomi di funzionamento, rispetto a cui la ridicola goccia dell'io[25] è destinata a fare la *figura* della stupida.

Sul piano delle relazioni soggettive – il piano originario del suo consistere – la fiducia infiacchisce nella penombra della stupidità, in un'atmosfera di ottundimento che «non indica neppure un *altrove* del senso, ma lo elude – sovvertendo non il contenuto, ma l'intera pratica del senso» (Barthes [1985]: 56): l'altro è sempre uno stupido, tutti gli altri sono troppo stupidi. E stupido è chi sta parlando: quante volte ci diamo degli stupidi da soli; il "nostro" stesso io non si sottrae all'insulto.

"Denaro e intelligenza" – "singolarità e stupidità" agiscono in parallelo: «oggettività e impersonalità, da un lato, soggettività e inadeguatezza, dall'altro, sono imparentate tra loro» (Musil [1986a]: 259). Diventando sempre più intelligente, il denaro trasforma i singoli in stupidi. Il singolo

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[24] In sé il tipo di supporto, oro, carta o bit risulta poco significativo, come si legge ne *Le parole e le cose*: «l'oro è prezioso perché moneta. Non il contrario» (Foucault [2007]: 193).

[25] Cfr. Musil ([1997]: 170).

è percepito dai singoli come incapace, inaffidabile, indegno di quella fiducia che invece accordiamo al grande mezzo assoluto, "*der irdisch got*" come lo chiamava Hans Sachs. Il sentimento della fiducia trapassa via via sempre più in calcolo: «noi usciamo continuamente dallo stato di ciò che ha senso per entrare in quello del necessario e dell'appena sufficiente» (Musil [1997]: 1552). Per riassumere la tendenza che va imponendosi in misura crescente: *ci si fida, ma io non mi fido.*

4. Alla concentrazione d'intelligenza nel denaro corrisponde una sempre maggiore stupidità del singolo: il salto tecnologico degli ultimi decenni non ha fatto che aumentare tale polarizzazione. Il livello di articolazione, di complessità e di specializzazione che la vita ormai comporta sul piano sociale, economico e politico tende a trasformare la stupidità occasionale di cui ciascuno, prima o poi, è protagonista in una specie di stupidità funzionale, e dunque costitutiva della collettività stessa. «Possiamo dire senz'altro che la stupidità e l'intelligenza dipendono tanto dall'intelletto quanto dal sentimento» (Musil [1986a]: 254): già Simmel aveva rilevato una separazione tra intelletto e strati profondi della personalità[26]. Dunque si può essere stupidi in due modi: o perché troppo intelligenti, o perché deboli d'intelletto.

Da un lato troviamo una sorta di "stupidità intelligente", ovvero di un'intelligenza che risulta troppo stupida perché si sforza di essere "solo intelligenza", intelligenza allo stato puro: non è vera mancanza d'intelligenza, ma «un fallimento dell'intelligenza, che si è arrogata dei compiti che non erano i suoi» (Musil [1986a]: 257). Nessuno di noi, in effetti, si comporta sempre con tutta l'intelligenza necessaria: «un comportamento completamente oggettivo è impossibile sia viverlo, sia pensarlo» (Musil [1986a]: 259). L'effetto complessivo

dello sforzo di adeguamento da parte del singolo ai parametri di ciò che potremmo chiamare l'intelligente necessità oggettiva «contribuisce a vivacizzare la vita spirituale, ma soprattutto la rende incostante e sterile» (Musil [1986a]: 257). In altre parole, questa stupidità è la più letale delle malattie dello spirito, una vera patologia della cultura.

Sull'altro fronte, vi è una stupidità per così dire ingenua, un po' dura di comprendonio, che non è nemmeno in grado di rispondere alle sollecitazioni in modo "intelligente": una stupidità onesta e schietta, una genuina incapacità di reagire automaticamente agli stimoli. Attribuendo importanza a elementi "oggettivamente" superflui, a circostanze accessorie, finisce in realtà per rivelare, nella sua autentica *idiozia*, qualcosa di poetico: «la stupidità schietta è una vera artista» (Musil [1986a]: 256).

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[26] Cfr. Simmel ([1995]: 36-37): «l'intelletto è la più adattabile delle nostre forze interiori: per venire a patti con i cambiamenti e i contrasti dei fenomeni non richiede quegli sconvolgimenti e quei drammi interiori che la sentimentalità a causa della sua natura conservatrice, richiederebbe necessariamente per adattarsi a un ritmo analogo di esperienze».

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The bureaucratic rationalization. On the "intelligent stupidity"

La razionalizzazione burocratica. Sulla «stupidità intelligente»

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Abstract. Focusing on the problem of bureaucracy as a striking example of the 'necessary stupidity' that real-life forces us to tolerate, the philosophical meaning of Musil's «intelligent stupidity» will be discussed. To a closer confrontation with the text, and with passages from *Man Without Qualities* that are particularly relevant to the theme of the relationship between stupidity and bureaucracy, a number of reflections will be anteposed in order to highlight how, by making the concepts of liberalism and bureaucracy react to each other, it is possible to sketch a first outline of that aporetic of stupidity that seems to characterise so substantially the behaviour of modern man.

Keywords: Musil, Bureaucracy, Ludwig von Mises, Liberalism, David Graeber.

La moderna società di massa è attraversata da un enigma, da una perplessità di fondo che molti hanno sentito come propria ma pochissimi hanno avuto il coraggio di enunciare, inibiti, si può congetturare, dalla preoccupazione suoni come un reclamo del risentimento, dunque, in fin dei conti, della cattiva coscienza propensa alla recriminazione: com'è possibile che il mondo sia in larga parte governato da mediocri di successo[1]? Perché l'intelligenza, quanto alla sua capacità di imporsi e determinare la realtà, sembra sempre in svantaggio rispetto alle strategie del conformismo e ai continui

[1] Viene in mente, a riguardo, una mordace stilettata di Ernst Jünger: «Nei saggi degli anni Cinquanta ho detto che la scomparsa della grandezza, della qualità e della sostanza è il sintomo che caratterizza l'età del nichilismo. Sennonché, essendo ormai mobilitato un flusso di energia immane, può succedere che un uomo così insignificante come il presidente degli Stati Uniti possa premere un bottone e distruggere l'intero pianeta» (Gnoli, Volpi [1997]: 108). L'inarrestabile affermarsi della stupidità di cui si sta parlando può in effetti essere inteso come uno dei modi principali tramite i quali il nichilismo in quanto «scomparsa della grandezza» si oggettiva.

riconoscimenti ricevuti dallo spirito gregario[2]? In altre parole: perché la stupidità sembra affermarsi ovunque e senza sforzo alcuno? Che cosa la rende così omogenea allo "spirito oggettivo" della nostra epoca?

Focalizzandosi sul problema della burocrazia come esempio lampante della "stupidità necessaria" che la realtà obbliga a tollerare, si cercherà di rispondere a questi interrogativi alla luce di alcune argomentazioni contenute nella famosa conferenza di Musil *Sulla stupidità*. A un più ravvicinato confronto col testo verranno anteposte alcune riflessioni finalizzate a porre in evidenza come facendo reagire tra loro i concetti di liberalismo e burocrazia sia possibile tratteggiare un primo contorno di quell'aporetica della stupidità che sembra caratterizzare in maniera così sostanziale il comportamento dell'esserci moderno.

1. In uno scritto apparentemente secondario ma in realtà di primaria importanza per cogliere appieno il carattere fondamentale del moderno, Ludwig von Mises, analizzando il concetto di burocrazia, teorizza che il crescente e capillare ampliamento delle sue prassi sia un fenomeno in controtendenza rispetto all'incremento di efficienza che caratterizza parallelamente la storia del liberalismo economico. A suo parere, la burocratizzazione della società non dovrebbe essere intesa come una diretta conseguenza delle procedure amministrative e normative che la regolamentazione della valorizzazione capitalistica comporta; si tratterebbe viceversa di un processo di segno contrario, la cui genesi, secondo l'autore, va ascritta all'intervento statale, ossia a un'azione la cui *ratio* non risponde alla massimizzazione del profitto e non può dunque agire, come invece accade all'iniziativa privata, in base al puro criterio dell'utile. Così von Mises:

This book will try to demonstrate that no profit-seeking enterprise, no matter how large, is liable to become bureaucratic provided the hands of its management are not tied by government interference. The trend toward bureaucratic rigidity is not inherent in the evolution of business. It is an outcome of government meddling with business. It is a result of the policies designed to eliminate the profit motive from its role in the framework of society's economic organization. (Von Mises [2007]: 10)

Del tutto antitetiche, invece, le considerazioni svolte da David Graeber, che nel suo *The Utopia of Rules. On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, enuncia una vera e propria legge del liberalismo, dove l'incremento delle procedure burocratiche viene immediatamente associato allo sviluppo storico dell'economia di mercato:

The Iron Law of Liberalism states that any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs. (Graeber [2015]: 9)

Siamo di fronte, in tutta evidenza, a due prospettive tra loro diametralmente opposte: la prima identifica nello sviluppo capitalistico l'affermarsi di un modello sempre più efficiente che trova nell'intervento statale, e nelle sue pratiche amministrative, un freno inibitore. In questo senso, la burocrazia sarebbe un insieme di norme e procedimenti che, ostacolandolo, limitano il processo di modernizzazione: non sono infatti un prodotto collaterale del meccanismo economico ma vengono

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[2] Esiste a riguardo una vastissima bibliografia, apparentemente meno che *mid-cult*, di largo consumo tanto da poter sembrare addirittura spazzatura e fatta di *instant book*, letteratura *self-help*, manuali per aspiranti *businessman*, che però, quanto al suo significato epocale, andrebbe vagliata con attenzione proprio per confrontarsi in modo dettagliato con la variegata fenomenologia della stupidità che caratterizza la condizione moderna. Si veda, su tutti, Pierce (2010), ma anche, per un approccio di carattere più divulgativo e aneddotico, Tabori (1993). Per una discussione filosofica della stupidità si confrontino invece Stiegler (2012) e Ronell (2002), che dedica peraltro uno specifico capitolo a Musil (61-93). Il classico Cipolla (1988) rimane insuperato per la sua ironica e concisa trattazione delle *leggi fondamentali della stupidità umana*, ciascuna della quali potrebbe essere esemplificata affiancandovi una nutrita casistica letteraria.

implementati dall'intervento statale in una misura, argomenta von Mises, in larga parte eccessiva rispetto alle reali esigenze amministrative.

Seguendo le considerazioni di Graeber, viceversa, si deve concludere che il grado crescente di burocratizzazione delle società avanzate è conseguenza diretta del loro sviluppo economico. La ripartizione del lavoro, associata all'evolversi delle tecnologie produttive e degli apparati di controllo, necessiterebbe la definizione di norme sempre più minuziose e vincolanti per governare i comportamenti sociali; di qui, in linea con lo sviluppo economico, il moltiplicarsi delle procedure burocratiche.

2. Le due opzioni, evidentemente, non possono essere entrambe vere. L'una vede la burocrazia come un ostacolo alla modernizzazione, l'altra come un suo necessario prodotto. Surrettiziamente, tuttavia, esse condividono l'idea che la burocrazia sia alcunché di deteriore caratterizzato da un certo grado di insensatezza[3]. Graeber, che rispetto alla modernità mantiene un atteggiamento critico, vuol sottolineare come le società avanzate, nonostante la loro apparente efficienza tecnologico-produttiva, siano caratterizzate da un'inefficienza strutturale che l'irrazionalità della burocrazia andrebbe in effetti a smascherare; von Mises, invece, giudica che vera modernità sia soltanto quella implementata da uno sviluppo, il più possibile deregolamentato, del modello economico liberale, e che pertanto la sua razionalità potrà

effettivamente sortire i suoi migliori risultati solo quando avrà saputo liberarsi di tutte quelle pratiche regressive di carattere marcatamente statalista, che, burocrazia *in primis*, nulla hanno a che fare col "vero" progresso. Graeber afferma quindi che il progresso liberale, poiché produce burocrazia, non è vero progresso; von Mises, al contrario, sostiene che quello liberale sarebbe sì vero progresso, non fosse impedito da una burocrazia che strutturalmente non gli appartiene. In ambo i casi, comunque, burocrazia fa tutt'uno con irrazionalità, inefficienza, insensatezza: in una parola: *stupidità*, tanto che lo stesso Graber arriva addirittura a parlare, per caratterizzare il mondo burocratizzato, di «structural stupidity» (Graeber [2015]: 45).

Eppure, proprio alla luce di quest'aspetto, una domanda, che rimane implicita in entrambi i contributi, sembra invece inaggirabile: poiché diagnosticamente, coerente o meno che sia con l'economia di mercato, la stupidità burocratica convive con la modernità, rimane da spiegare come ciò sia possibile, come sia cioè possibile che un mondo ad altissimo tasso di sviluppo tecnologico e scientifico, in grado di produrre ricchezze un tempo impensabili, sia caratterizzato da qualcosa di così stupidamente insensato come l'eccesso di burocrazia.

3. La breve ma acutissima conferenza di Robert Musil dedicata a *La stupidità* permette di approfondire la questione, e forse addirittura di dirimerla, poiché il centro della sua riflessione consiste esattamente nel mostrare come l'efficienza della *Wirklichkeit* moderna non si affermi nonostante la stupidità, ma quest'ultima sia essenzialmente una forma di quella.

Fin dalle prime battute, infatti, Musil, con tono paradossale, ironizza: «Se la stupidità non somigliasse tanto al progresso, al talento, alla speranza e al miglioramento, nessuno vorrebbe essere stupido» (Musil [2013]: 11). L'affondo lascia intendere che già a una prima messa a fuoco della questione emerge che il suo tratto più problematico, e perciò caratteristico, è dato dal fatto che la stupidità è una forma sostanziale intrinseca al moderno, non un suo "disavanzo" collaterale. Non si

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[3] Cfr. Graeber ([2015]: 45-52), dove l'Autore racconta un'odissea burocratica vissuta in prima persona in occasione della malattia della madre, arrivando all'amara constatazione (29) che «on a purely personal level, probably the most disturbing thing was how dealing with these forms somehow rendered me stupid, too». Conciso e inequivocabile, a riguardo, l'*incipit* di von Mises ([2007]: 1): «The terms *bureaucrat*, *bureaucratic*, and *bureaucracy* are clearly invectives. Nobody calls himself a bureaucrat or his own methods of management bureaucratic. These words are always applied with an opprobrious connotation. They always imply a disparaging criticism of persons, institutions, or procedures. Nobody doubts that bureaucracy is thoroughly bad and that it should not exist in a perfect world».

tratta, cioè, di un prodotto di scarto, di un residuo di "idiozia"[4] che resista alla *Rationalisierung*[5],

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[4] Quella dell'idiozia, da Cusano a Sartre e Deleuze, è una categoria filosofica specifica, che meriterebbe una trattazione a sé stante. Per quel che qui ci concerne, l'"idiozia" cui si fa riferimento è anzitutto quella dostoevskijana (cfr. Dostoevskij [2014⁵]), poiché, quale misterioso connubio di finezza e inettitudine, di intelligenza e ridicolaggine, di serietà e insensatezza, è forse il più lampante antecedente dell'*intelligenza senza qualità* – cioè della stupidità – su cui s'interroga Musil.

[5] Nella forma sistematica cui si fa qui riferimento, il concetto di *Rationalisierung* è di derivazione weberiana (cfr. Weber [2004]). Per una discussione del suo ruolo internamente all'opera di Weber, si veda il paragrafo *Wer vom protestantish geprägten Kapitalismus nicht reden will, der soll vom Prozeß der Rationalisierung schweigen* nel *Vorwort* di Dirk Kaesler a Weber ([2004]: 49-54). In relazione al processo di "razionalizzazione", che nella sua universalità tecnologica, economica e sociale, è forma specifica della sola episteme occidentale moderna, egli si chiede: «Welche Vorteile für die jeweilige Gesellschaft und einzelne Gruppen in ihr brachte diese "Rationalisierung", und welcher Preis wurde von der Gesellschaft, von sozialen Gruppen, und vom einzelnen Individuum für diese Entwicklung gefordert und gezahlt?» (Weber [2004]: 51). La domanda posta è per noi particolarmente pertinente. Con Musil, si potrebbe rispondere che il prezzo da pagare per la "razionalizzazione", sia individualmente che come società, è un certo, inemendabile carico di stupidità *oggettiva*. Il concetto di *Rationalisierung* è stato precipuamente sviluppato in ambito economico, e concerne tutte le misure che, nell'attività economica, vengono intraprese per incrementare produttività e profitto, riducendo al minimo i costi (cfr. Taylor [2010]; von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld [1929]; Heiner [1961]). È decisamente rilevante, anche per la prospettiva del presente contributo, comprendere come la "razionalizzazione" sia poi stata assorbita dalla sociologia per indicare la moderna sottomissione di ogni processo sociale alle forme dell'episteme aziendale (cfr. Van der Loo, van Reijen [1992]). Sul significato filosofico di questa svolta, che trova ancora una volta la sua radice in Weber, rimane essenziale Cacciari (1977). Che la burocrazia, in ambito sociologico ed economico, sia stata intesa come una delle principali forme in cui si realizza la "razionalizzazione" moderna, è ampiamente documentato, ad esempio, dall'evoluzione degli studi di Hermann Böhrs, indirizzati a un progressivo approfondimento della "declinazione" burocratica del processo di "razionalizzazione", tanto da coniare il concetto, di per sé inequivocabile, di *Bürorationalisierung* (Böhrs [1958]).

ma di una sua specifica modalità, ossia, altrimenti detto: *la stupidità* è un comportamento fondamentale della coscienza che opera la *"razionalizzazione" moderna*[6].

Per questo motivo, in un ulteriore passaggio, Musil, proprio per porre a tema la concomitanza, anzi addirittura l'ambigua – e perciò difficilissima da intendere e da giustificare – convivenza tra intelletto e stupidità, avanza il concetto, in apparenza contraddittorio, di *stupidità intelligente*. Vale la pena riportare la sua riflessione per intero:

> *Questa stupidità supponente è la vera malattia della cultura. (Ma, per evitare malintesi, ci affrettiamo a precisare che essa significa incultura, falsa cultura, cultura costruita su basi erronee, sproporzione tra contenuto e forma della cultura). Descriverla sarebbe un'impresa pressoché infinita. Essa investe i più elevati valori dello spirito, poiché se l'autentica stupidità è segretamente un'artista, quella intelligente contribuisce, certo, a vivacizzare la vita spirituale, però la rende instabile e sterile. Anni orsono mi è accaduto di scrivere: «Non vi è praticamente pensiero importante che la stupidità non sia in grado di utilizzare; essa è mobile in ogni direzione e può indossare tutte le vesti della verità. La verità ha invece una sola veste e una sola via, ed è sempre in svantaggio». La stupidità a cui mi riferisco non è una malattia mentale, eppure è la più mortale delle malattie dello spirito, pericolosa per la vita stessa.* (Musil [2013]: 42)

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[6] Sarebbe importante, a riguardo, instaurare un confronto tra il funzionario burocratico della "razionalizzazione", weberianamente pensato, e la figura del *Pflichtwicht*, il "doverante", la cui condotta, improntata su di un rigidissimo filisteismo della regola, è stata acutamente profilata da Schmitt ([1914]: 91-92), che riprende a sua volta l'immagine da Theodor Däubler. Su questa figura si confronti anche Cacciari ([2020]: 90), per noi tanto più interessante perché legge Schmitt in un'ottica coerentemente weberiana: «A un certo punto è inevitabile che il "corrompersi" dell'autorità politica dilaghi in "corruzione" degli apparati tecnico-amministrativoburocratici, che formano la struttura del moderno Stato – che essi, cioè, cessino di *funzionare*. Nel migliore dei casi avremo allora il funzionario ligio alla lettera delle norme e incapace di iniziativa, quello che Schmitt nel giovanile *Der Wert des Staates* chiamava *Pflichtwicht*, il "doverante"».

È un estratto che merita di essere vagliato nel dettaglio. La "stupidità intelligente" di cui parla non può essere ridotta a una labile simulazione dell'intelligenza, a una sua più o meno subdola contraffazione; c'è infatti, in essa, qualcosa di sorprendentemente "spirituale" – termine che qui dev'essere, si crede, inteso in chiave rigorosamente hegeliana, a dire che nella stupidità si oggettiva un movimento reale della coscienza che, quindi, non produce un apparire astratto, cioè un mero simulacro del mondo, ma un suo aspetto concreto, che determina la vera natura delle cose nella loro condizionante forma storica.

Ciò che appunto è difficile pensare è la concretezza della stupidità, cioè la sua razionalità storica, il fatto, dunque, di non essere indipendente dal movimento dialettico della ragione che "avvera" il mondo. La razionalità della stupidità è la sua oggettiva concretezza, e la sua oggettiva concretezza è il suo mistero, ciò che, appunto, è pressoché impossibile spiegare. «Descriverla – anzi, dichiara Musil – sarebbe un'impresa pressoché infinita», lasciando intendere che per render conto della *kluge Dummheit* ogni tentativo di fondazione filosofica risulta inefficace, mentre può forse assolvere il compito un'adeguata *Darstellung* letteraria. E che cos'è, infatti, *L'uomo senza qualità*, se non, appunto, l'«impresa infinita» – e come tale destinata a non poter mai compiersi del tutto, visto che la sua "materia" è inesauribile – che ambisce, in forma di digressione e racconto, a dar conto di tutte le sfaccettate variazioni comportamentali che si stagliano su quel fondo per sé equivoco, talora frivolo e sempre senza vero costrutto, ma non perciò meno reale, che potremmo chiamare: la stupidità come ambiente umano fondamentale? Se, come viene esplicitato in *Billy Budd*, al centro di un'opera come quella di Melville sta senz'altro la messa in scena dei comportamenti, fatali ed abietti, in cui, senza possibile fondamento logico, si rivela la potenza di un "male radicale" insondabile – evocato con l'espressione paolina «mysterium iniquitatis»[7] –, Musil è forse chi più

di ogni altro ha cercato con la propria opera non tanto di risolvere, ma di esporre il *mysterium stultititiae*. Converrà allora vagliare, benché facendo drastica cernita, alcuni dei luoghi dove, nel capolavoro dello scrittore austriaco, a questo mistero vien dato riscontro a partire dalla sua coerente manifestazione burocratica.

4. Nell'esilarante § 85 del primo volume dell'*Uomo senza qualità* vengono narrate *Le fatiche del generale Stumm per mettere un po' di ordine nei cervelli borghesi*. Il generale, un superiore di Ulrich quando prestava servizio nell'esercito come tenente, frequenta il salotto di Diotima e nel progetto dell'Azione Parallela – che altro, se non la parodia di un'inconcludente operazione burocratica universale? – vorrebbe assumere il compito di colui che pone ordine e imprime una sicura direzione alla volontà di celebrare i settant'anni di regno dell'Imperatore. Stumm entra in scena esibendo «il foglio catastale della cultura moderna» (Musil [1996]: I, 421), specie di "mappa concettuale", organizzata però come un perfetto formulario «in bei caratteri burocratici», «[...] diviso in quadrati mediante linee orizzontali e verticali, come un foglio d'anagrafe o un registro militare [...]» (Musil [1996]: I, 420). Col suo impacciato diagramma, dove ai nomi dei "grandi uomini" vengono corrivamente associate le teorie e le invenzioni di cui sono stati artefici, Stumm vorrebbe far ordine, eppure, proprio quando gli pare di star riuscendo nell'intento, di star per cogliere «un'idea che possa servire», egli stesso ammette: «[...] mi sento il cervello sgradevolmente vuoto; imbecillità non mi pare il caso di chiamarla, ma è certo qualcosa di molto simile» (Musil [1996]): I, 428). Poc'anzi, in effetti, questa stessa sensazione di fallimento dell'intelligenza, messa sotto scacco proprio là dove essa crede di star agendo con successo, vien definita da Ulrich «stupidità ottusa» (Musil [1996]: I, 427). Si tratta, in tutta evidenza, di qualcosa di decisamente affine alla stupidità analizzata nella conferenza del '37 – dunque, ancora una volta, è a tema la stupidità intelligente: quella, estremamente articolata, del pensiero burocratico che pur nella sua straordinaria efficienza manca comunque una

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[7] 2 Ts 2, 7. Il richiamo paolino è esplicitato in Melville ([2019]: 162-163, 207).

presa definitiva sui fenomeni con cui si confronta. Esso non è, cioè, semplicemente fallimentare: è fallimentare proprio in quanto, paradossalmente, riesce a imporre il proprio ordine con successo. Ma com'è possibile?

Nel paragrafo citato quest'aspetto è rappresentato con grande sottigliezza nei passaggi in cui l'Uomo senza qualità insiste nell'ascrivere all'atteggiamento militare un'alta forma di spiritualità[8]. Si tratta, ovviamente, di una spiritualità essenzialmente stupida. Per capire esattamente come funzioni vale allora la pena riportare uno stralcio particolarmente significativo della riflessione di Ulrich:

> *Vedi, un centinaio d'anni fa i cervelli che reggevano la borghesia tedesca credettero che il civile pensante avrebbe dedotto dalla sua mente le leggi del mondo, seduto a tavolino, così come si dimostrano i teoremi algebrici. Il pensatore a quei tempi era un uomo in calzoni di nanchino, con un ciuffo di capelli che gli cascava sulla fronte, e non conosceva ancora la lampada a petrolio, per non parlare dell'elettricità e del telegrafo. Da allora quella presunzione è stata energicamente rintuzzata; in cento anni abbiamo imparato a conoscere meglio noi stessi e la natura e tutte le cose, ma il risultato, per dir così, è che l'ordine che si guadagna nel particolare, si torna a perdere nell'insieme, cosicché abbiamo sempre più ordini e sempre meno ordine.* (Musil [1996]: I, 429)

Il passo è decisivo perché permette di identificare nell'ordinata stupidità della burocrazia («sempre più ordini») uno degli esiti della "razionalizzazione" moderna. Il mondo delle chirurgiche ripartizioni intellettuali dell'essere reale (dove *intellettuale* va inteso ancora una volta in senso rigorosamente hegeliano), in cui le relazioni particolari tra le cose vengono poste e concepite con un grado sempre crescente di determinazione, è

quello dove risulta sempre più difficile, e ormai addirittura impossibile, pervenire a una concezione generale che restituisca il senso dell'esperienza nel suo insieme, significando, cioè, il mondo come totalità. Quanto più le maglie internamente alle quali ordiniamo la realtà sono strette, quanto più cioè, gli specialismi nei diversi campi della prassi, l'analiticità delle leggi scientifiche e le procedure burocratiche sono vincolanti e determinate, tanto più ci ritroviamo incapaci di attingere alla dimensione, necessariamente sintetica, del senso. Poiché distrugge la possibilità, da parte dell'esperienza, di attingere a una verità integrale, la "razionalizzazione" operata dall'intelletto è chiaramente una potenza mortifera e distruttiva[9]. Perveniamo così a definire quello che, in effetti, è uno dei principi che regolano il comportamento moderno dell'individuo: mettendo in atto competenze precise ed efficaci "facciamo" un'infinità di cose, eppure nessuna di esse ha mai veramente senso[10].

Se ne può trarre il seguente principio: nell'atto reale della propria affermazione concreta, la "razionalizzazione" moderna, anche nel suo aspetto burocratico, è sempre necessariamente realizzazione del proprio programma ideologico ("far ordine") e del suo contrario ("incrementare l'insensatezza"). La "razionalizzazione", cioè, pur indicando il movimento spirituale della ragione che si fa storia, include nella propria messa in atto l'attivazione di comportamenti essenzialmente stupidi contrari all'ideologia, cioè al discorso sociale e istituzionale, che apparentemente la sostiene; il che è come dire che il processo di "razionalizzazione", che coincide col "motore"

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[8] Cfr. Musil ([1996]: I, 426): «[...] lo spirito non è proprio dei borghesi e la materia dei militari, come tu credi, ma precisamente il contrario! Perché lo spirito è ordine e dove c'è maggior ordine che nell'esercito?». S'interpreti questo passaggio alla luce di quanto detto in precedenza abbozzando una lettura hegeliana, cioè in questo caso realista, della spiritualità della stupidità.

[9] Conseguenza assolutamente chiara a Musil che formula così una sorta di versione epistemologica del *Todestrieb*: «In qualche modo l'ordine si trasforma in un bisogno di morte» (Musil [1996]: I, 527).

[10] Sempre Graeber (2018) ha trattato della questione, analizzando il caso di tutte quelle attività lavorative che, seppur ben remunerate e richiedenti un altissimo grado di specializzazione burocratica (necessitano cioè non tanto di vero sapere, ma di una serie infinita di attestati, diplomi, corsi di perfezionamento, *training*, ecc., atti a certificare le celebrate, quanto inconsistenti, "competenze"...), non hanno in verità alcuna sensata ragion d'essere.

spirituale che alimenta la costruzione del mondo moderno, ha come tale una componente nichilistica che lavora strutturalmente alla distruzione della stessa realtà affermata.

Che la stupidità, musilianamente intesa, finisca infine per trionfare come il comportamento fondamentale associato a questo tipo di razionalismo epistemologico, è una necessaria conseguenza del modello. Si pongono differenze fittizie per tralasciare quelle decisive. La possibilità di un senso fondato e complessivo viene abolita e «il particolare viene scambiato per l'insieme» da gente che «[...] si è sempre chiamata in tutti i secoli: i tempi moderni» (Musil [1996]: I, 520).

La convinzione che sarebbe loro compito portare l'ordine nel mondo era stranamente viva in quelle persone. Se si volesse chiamare mezza intelligenza ciò che esse intraprendevano a tal scopo, bisognerebbe notare che proprio l'altra metà innominata o, per nominarla, la metà stupida, non mai esatta e giusta di quella mezza intelligenza, possedeva una forza inesauribile di rinnovamento e una grande fertilità [...] Essi appartenevano a un'epoca di nervosismo, e c'era qualcosa che non andava, ognuno si riteneva intelligente, ma tutti insieme si sentivano sterili. (Musil [1996]: I, 520)

La «mezza intelligenza», cioè la stupidità oggettiva come esito della "razionalizzazione" moderna, è esattamente questo. – Anzitutto, non è "affare" del soggetto –. È piuttosto quella strana, indicibile consapevolezza per la quale, anche se, con grande sforzo e dispiegando capacità e cognizione, "facciamo" cose intelligenti, talora anche incredibilmente performative, sentiamo che la nostra azione è sabotata da una sterilità universale, da una sorta di condizione storica preliminare che, indipendentemente dal suo contenuto, la priva come tale di sensatezza. Se anche ci sentiamo intelligenti come individui, siamo stupidi come specie. La stupidità, in ultima analisi, non è che l'inconsistenza politica di ogni aspirazione la quale pretenda che i propri significati individuali possano valere anche per gli "altri", nel campo storico dell'esistenza collettiva.

5. L'apice di questa consapevolezza, che cioè la stupidità non sia carenza di conoscenza, ma una sorta di intelligenza perniciosa e "malfunzionante", sempre attiva e di fatto connaturata alla vita concreta degli individui; l'idea, quindi, che la stupidità, come nel casso di Stumm, abbia una sua convincente efficacia che ben si sposa con le conquiste della modernità, trova forse il massimo grado di elaborazione in *Bouvard e Pécuchet* – opera la cui incompiutezza è forse dovuta, al netto dell'insoddisfabile ambizione enciclopedica che l'alimenta, al fatto che la *bêtise* di cui parla è soggetta a infinite variazioni. Seguendo, Kundera, che commenta brillantemente così il capolavoro di Flaubert:

Bien sûr, même avant Flaubert on ne doutait pas de l'existence de la bêtise, mais on la comprenait un peu différemment: elle était considérée comme une simple absence de connaissances, un défaut corrigible par l'instruction. Or, dans les romans de Flaubert, la bêtise est une dimension inséparable de l'existence humaine [...] La bêtise ne s'efface pas devant la science, la technique, le progrès, la modernité, au contraire, avec le progrès, elle progresse elle aussi![11] (Kundera [1986]: 195)

Il passo è chiaramente in linea con quanto s'è cercato di dire a proposito della «mezza intelligenza» musiliana: non un fallimento della civilizzazione, ma una sua compiuta espressione. Di più, se c'è una cosa che nell'impietosa trattazione di Flaubert emerge con nettezza – anche, forse, al di là di quanto l'autore stesso avrebbe voluto[12] – è altresì l'elemento umano, ingenuamente benigno, che caratterizza l'agire dello stupido. Fiaschi e disfatte di *Bouvard e Pécuchet* – tutti i loro fallimenti nell'agricoltura e nella chimica, nella medicina e nell'archeologia [...] – sono sempre motiva-

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[11] Su questo passaggio si veda anche l'*Introduzione* di Franco Rella a Flaubert ([2014³]: 7-8).

[12] Flaubert, difatti, assume, rispetto alla *bêtise*, di cui pure racconta l'elemento umano, connaturato alla concretezza di ogni individuo storico, un atteggiamento di inasprita condanna (cfr. Flaubert [1973]: 689). Su questo passaggio, si veda anche Derrida ([2009]: 205).

ti dai migliori propositi, dalla volontà di aiutare qualcuno o, quantomeno, di rendersi utili al "progresso" della specie.

Non all'inferno – un inferno di tramonto e distruzione, come preconizza una (forse inutilmente apocalittica) filosofia nichilista della storia – ma a una sorta di *bêtise* trasversale, ovunque diffusa ma proprio perciò anche accettabile, porterebbe il cammino della modernità: lastricato, appunto, di "buone intenzioni".

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Aisthesis

A noble anarchy. Musil and the metaphor between Spengler and Rilke

Una nobile anarchia. Musil e la metafora tra Spengler e Rilke

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Abstract. This paper aims to examine the relationship between stupidity and massification in Robert Musil's thinking moving from the speech *Über die Dummheit* (1937). According to the definition of stupidity as a historical epidemic associated with emotions, I take into account the essays of the earlies twenties of the XX century, in which the author interrogates the connection between the "non rational sphere" and the nationalist identity in the context of civilization (*Zivilisation*). To explain this connection, I highlight the centrality that Musil ascribes to the method of "analogy" in criticizing Spengler's thought to clarify how the welding of the dimension of "feeling" (*Gefühl*) and the abstract idea of "national identity" occurs. Based on Musil's essay dedicated to Rilke (1927), I illustrate the different type of bonds produced by "metaphor" (*Gleichnis*) to define an alternative concept of community based on the common lack of quality and foundation.

Keywords: Robert Musil, critics of identity, feeling and non-rational sphere, massification, metaphor.

1. I "PRIVILEGI DEL NOI": CIVILIZZAZIONE E INVOLUZIONE IDENTITARIA

Nel dibattito filosofico riguardante la crisi delle forme tradizionali del vivere comune e i nuovi processi di soggettivazione politica, un posto di rilievo è occupato dalla questione del ritorno dei fenomeni identitari. La dialettica tra la *produzione* di un "noi" monolitico, chiuso su se stesso e la *proiezione* di un "loro" a cui contrapporsi non può che riportare alla memoria un immaginario le cui radici affondano negli anni più cupi della prima metà del Novecento, gli stessi in cui Musil enunciò il celebre discorso *Sulla stupidità* (1937). Muovendo dal testo della conferenza, tenteremo di restituire il pensiero dell'autore sulla scorta dei contributi che egli elaborò all'inizio degli anni '20. Nello specifico intendiamo far emergere un'acquisi-

zione della teorizzazione musiliana che riteniamo decisiva anche per la riflessione contemporanea, ossia la correlazione tra *chiusura identitaria* e destabilizzazione delle *matrici psicologico-pulsionali*. Ci proponiamo con ciò di ripartire dal pensiero di Musil come contributo fecondo per riaprire il problema della comunanza politica in virtù di un nuovo pensiero dell'interdipendenza e dei "legami".

Ebbene, nel discorso sulla stupidità (*Dummheit*) è dato rilevare la seguente osservazione:

> *[una] condizione medio-bassa dello spirito e dell'anima si abbandona del tutto spudoratamente alla sua presunzione, non appena può presentarsi sotto la tutela del partito, della nazione, della setta o della corrente artistica, e può dire "noi" invece di "io".*
> (Musil [2013]: 20)

Nel menzionare la *Dummheit*, Musil non soltanto non si riferisce ad una qualche malattia mentale[1], ma richiama le dinamiche stesse alla base della mobilitazione politica del suo tempo, denunciando nella fattispecie la tendenza da parte della soggettività – dell'"io" – ad abdicare alla propria autonomia ponendosi «sotto la tutela» di organismi collettivi. Fin dall'inizio, dunque, il problema sollevato non concerne una condizione patologica, bensì una testimonianza di quelle "malattie dello spirito" coestensive ai rapporti sociali e, anzi, alla base della stessa appartenenza comune. In altri termini, la stupidità in esame sottende l'esigenza stessa che muove ogni soggetto a parlare «come massa» (Musil [2013]: 20).

> *Tutti questi privilegi di un "noi" ingigantito producono ai nostri giorni l'impressione che il progressivo incivilimento ed addomesticamento del singolo sia compensato dall'imbarbarimento, direttamente proporzionale ad esso, delle nazioni, degli stati, dei gruppi uniti da una stessa ideologia. Evidentemente si manifesta in questo […] un'alterazione dell'equilibrio emotivo che in definitiva precede la distinzione tra*

> *"io" e "noi" nonché ogni forma di valutazione morale* (Musil [2013]: 23).

Come si può evincere dalla conclusione del passaggio, ciò che risulta a tutti gli effetti perturbante nei "privilegi del noi" non consiste nell'adesione ad una qualche formazione politica. L'«alterazione dell'equilibrio emotivo» non riguarda tanto la costituzione di una forza collettiva – di un "noi" – rivolta al conseguimento di un dato obiettivo: essa, piuttosto, attiene ad un livello più radicale, anteriore alla dialettica intersoggettiva così come alla condotta etica. La vera e propria minaccia su cui si incentra il discorso musiliano risiede altrove, all'altezza di quel procedimento apparentemente paradossale secondo il quale dall'«incivilimento» della soggettività consegue un movimento di segno diametralmente opposto, vale a dire l'«imbarbarimento» direttamente proporzionale dei «gruppi» costituitisi all'insegna del medesimo credo ideologico. All'infittirsi dell'«addomesticamento» individuale sembra accompagnarsi una sorta di "disturbo" che avviene in seno agli stessi processi di massificazione, ciò che delinea una stupidità *di tipo nuovo*, una delle manifestazioni di quelle «grandi epidemie storiche» (Musil [2013]: 42) da Musil già riscontrate nel corso della «nota esperienza dell'estate del 1914»[2] e di cui in questo contesto si propone di esplicitare i fattori scatenanti riconducendoli alla civiltà (*Zivilisation*) medesima. La dinamica tra disciplinamento individuale e recrudescenza collettiva non rappresenta che una delle più rilevanti declinazioni di quella fondamentale dialettica tra civilizzazione (*Zivilisation*) e cultura (*Kultur*) che aveva caratterizzato il dibattito filosofico e culturale tra la fine del diciannovesimo e l'inizio del ventesimo secolo[3].

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[1] «La stupidità a cui mi riferisco non è una malattia mentale, eppure è la più mortale delle malattie dello spirito, pericolosa per la vita stessa» (Musil [2013]: 42).

[2] «È stato un dato di fatto che la guerra abbia rappresentato un'esperienza inconsueta, assimilabile a quella religiosa […] l'umanità […] fu allora toccata da un *quid* di irrazionale, folle, mostruoso, […] che prima del manifestarsi del disinganno […] era stato già spiegato come un'allucinazione o un fantasma […] la sua natura atmosferica indefinita sfuggiva alla comprensione e alla definizione» (Musil [2019]: 139-141).

[3] Cfr. Magris (2014); Masini (1973).

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Come noto, tale processo veniva restituito nei termini di un'irrimediabile disgregazione delle sintesi della *Kultur* che avevano garantito una forma di esperienza di matrice unitaria. Con l'imporsi della *Zivilisation*, il combinato disposto tra tecnica e capitalismo finiva per travolgere quelle mediazioni che avevano permesso alla soggettività di orientarsi secondo i precedenti parametri, inaugurando una condizione inedita in cui, al dispiegamento di meccanismi vieppiù complessi che laceravano la compattezza dell'esistenza, non corrispondeva alcun "centro", alcun cardine che potesse raccordare la vita individuale e collettiva.

Veniva con ciò ad imporsi una realtà marcata da una complessità all'apparenza ingestibile, ciò che Musil negli scritti del suo *Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom* (1923)[4] aveva definito nei termini di una «frammentarietà inesprimibile» (Musil [2014b]: 81): nell'epoca della proliferazione dei "fatti", veniva a mancare il primato di un'unica ideologia, di un'«anima»[5] (Musil [2014b]: 41) che consentisse ogni criterio di orientamento.

Ebbene, uno dei caratteri più significativi dell'interrogazione musiliana consiste nella centralità attribuita alle ricadute della *Zivilisation* sulla soggettività dal punto di vista della matrice psicologico-pulsionale[6].

> [Concetti] come razza e cultura, popolo e nazione [...] accennano evidentemente a qualcosa di reale, e però [...] non designano niente di [...] comprensibile [...]. È come se in un certo punto sorgesse l'ansia per un vuoto [...] gli impulsi si trovano in contrasto tra

loro [...] mancano i grandi fondamenti e principi spirituali per darvi ordine [...] mi riferisco alla nostalgia di fede del nostro tempo di cui il nazionalismo è soltanto un caso particolare. (Musil [2014b]: 56-57)

L'efficacia dell'involuzione identitaria presieduta da concetti di per sé astratti ed indefiniti come "razza" e "nazione" deriva dunque dall'«ansia per un vuoto», dallo smarrimento provocato dallo smembramento dei «fondamenti» e dei «principi spirituali» che avevano in precedenza retto la condotta dell'individuo e gli stessi rapporti intersoggettivi: una «nostalgia di fede» per quel «fallimento dell'anima» (Musil [1986b]: 114) provocato dai processi della *Zivilisation*. Per Musil, è precisamente all'altezza dell'esigenza di mediazioni che coordinino gli «impulsi in contrasto tra loro» che pertanto si svolge la sfida decisiva di prospettare alternative alle "epidemie storiche" della massificazione[7].

E tuttavia, il capitale problema delle mediazioni si trova a questo livello a dover interagire con un epifenomeno che esorbita dalla sola ragione e che, anzi, ne denuncia l'inadeguatezza. La razionalità immanente alle inedite connessioni della civilizzazione tecnica e capitalistica mostra infatti tutta la propria criticità nell'incapacità di interagire con la dimensione pulsionale soggiacente alle "malattie dello spirito".

In tal senso, il rapporto con la sfera psicologico-pulsionale non può che acquisire un rilievo cruciale nel tempo della decomposizione dei precedenti vincoli della *Kultur*, rapporto di cui Musil, rilanciando la meditazione circa la "décadence" già avviata da Nietzsche[8], coglie il carattere costitutivamente complesso, problematico.

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[4] Per una ricostruzione teorica del contenuto dell'opera, cfr. Valagussa ([2014]: 7-30).

[5] In proposito, non risulta affatto improprio interpretare il tema musiliano della crisi dei presupposti ideologico-spirituali della *Kultur* alla luce dell'indirizzo critico-decostruttivo che, a fronte delle indubbie differenze, accomuna Nietzsche, Marx e Freud quali "maestri del sospetto".

[6] «[Ho] cercato di indicare [...] che la veemenza con cui l'entusiasmo per la guerra [...] trovava la sua causa principale in questo stato di disperazione psicologica [...]. Vorrei addurre come formula principale [...] il fatto che la vita europea e l'ideologia europea non si corrispondono» (Musil [2014b]: 37-38).

[7] Sul problema delle "mediazioni" e delle ideologie, un fecondo indirizzo di ricerca potrebbe derivare dal porre in reciproca interferenza la trattazione musiliana con quella sviluppata da Antonio Gramsci nei *Quaderni del carcere* nel solco di quanto tentato in Venturelli ([1980]: 74 e sgg.).

[8] Come noto, il pensiero nietzschiano ha esercitato un influsso determinante sulla formazione e sullo sviluppo della riflessione di Musil, il quale ancor prima della stesura del *Törless*, incominciata nel 1902, intraprende un confronto con il filosofo tedesco destinato a protrarsi nel tempo, costituendo un riferimento esplicito ed

La sfida di delineare un nuovo *medium* in grado di porre in risonanza i due piani eterogenei della "ragione" e del "sentire" si scontra infatti con un ostacolo inedito, derivato dall'onnilaterale sviluppo della *Zivilisation* tecnico-capitalistica. In altri termini, la destituzione delle sintesi tradizionali non rimanda unicamente alla crisi irrimediabile del paradigma di razionalità vigente in precedenza, ma porta allo scoperto uno sconvolgimento che intacca al contempo le stesse matrici emotive. Anche la dimensione del *sentimento*, insomma, si ritrova coinvolta dai processi *storici* in corso: le dinamiche stesse del "sentire", lungi dall'assestarsi su un livello anteriore ed incondizionato, finiscono per registrare le tendenze atomizzanti della *Zivilisation*, restituendosi in termini sclerotizzati ed acefali.

Soltanto alla luce di ciò, per Musil, si possono far emergere i fattori scatenanti delle "epidemie storiche", cogliendo nel ripiegamento *identitario* dei "privilegi del noi" un tentativo – regressivo ed inquietante – di corrispondere all'angoscia per la

dissoluzione delle mediazioni passate. È dunque a partire dal rapporto con il *sentimento* che Musil intende muovere al fine di prospettare un'alternativa alla malattia spirituale della *stupidità*.

2. IL SINTOMO-SPENGLER: SFERA NON RAZIOIDE E BATTAGLIA SULLE ANALOGIE

Al fine di comprendere il carattere decisivo della matrice psicologico-pulsionale nel dilagare delle epidemie storiche, non si può che prendere in considerazione quanto Musil asserisce in uno scritto del 1921 sul problema dell'entusiasmo nazionalistico che ha preceduto la Grande Guerra, ciò che ci conduce direttamente al punto nevralgico della questione, ossia al *rapporto* con la dimensione, irriducibile all'intelletto, del sentimento (*Gefühl*)[9]:

> [questo] *sentimento implicò l'inebriante sensazione di avere avuto per la prima volta qualcosa in comune con ogni tedesco [...] eravamo mutati in umili particelle disciolte in un evento sovrapersonale, e sperimentavamo la nazione, in cui eravamo incapsulati in termini assolutamente corporei; come se le originarie qualità mistiche che, racchiuse in una parola, erano rimaste latenti, improvvisamente si fossero svegliate, concrete come le fabbriche e gli uffici al mattino.* (Musil [2019]: 141)

Che cosa ha determinato la saldatura tra un elemento concreto come il *Gefühl* ed una componente impossibile da esperire nella propria quotidianità quale la nazione (*Nation*), suggellando la nuova "sintesi" tra incommensurabili del "sentimento nazionale" (*Nationalgefühl*)? Per rispondere al quesito, occorre volgere l'attenzione alla sensazione di avere «qualcosa in comune», di non essere che parti di un organismo superiore entro il quale sperimentare quei legami che la *Zivilisation* aveva lacerato.

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imprescindibile all'interno dell'*Uomo senza qualità*. Ai fini del nostro ragionamento, risulta di particolare rilevanza la tematizzazione musiliana del concetto di "décadence", assunto in tutta la sua portata epocale. Nel *Quaderno 4* (1899-1904) dei *Diari*, per esempio, è riportato un passaggio che Musil deriva dal *Caso Wagner* e che compendia la sua riflessione sulla crisi delle forme unitarie di mediazione a livello individuale e collettivo: «Sul concetto di décadence [...] domanda: Ci sono [...] in Nietzsche dei passi che consentano di trarre conclusioni su un'idea assoluta di décadence – su un'idea di décadence assoluta? [...] Da cosa è caratterizzata ogni décadence letteraria? [...] Dal fatto che la vita non risiede più nell'intero. La parola diventa sovrana e salta fuori dalla frase, la frase prevarica e oscura il senso della pagina, la pagina acquista vita a spese dell'intero, – l'intero non è più un intero [...] ogni volta anarchia di atomi [...]. La vita [...] respinta nelle forme più piccole, il resto povero di vita. Dovunque paralisi, pena, irrigidimento o inimicizia e caos: entrambe le cose saltano sempre più agli occhi quanto più si sale nelle forme di organizzazione. L'intero non vive più affatto: è composto, artificioso, un artefatto» (cfr. Musil [1980]: 41-45). Sul rapporto tra Musil e Nietzsche, cfr. Rzehak (1993); Venturelli ([2012]: 667-674); De Angelis ([1982]: 27-36 e 59-83); Mazzarella ([1991]: 70-95); Gambaro ([2019]: 115-131).

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[9] In riferimento alla teorizzazione musiliana del *Gefühl* ed alle sue decisive implicazioni filosofiche, cfr. Mulligan ([1995]: 87-110).

Si tratta di un bisogno di *comunanza*[10], dell'esigenza di "sentire" la comune interdipendenza, che afferisce ad una sfera altra rispetto alla razionalità e che Musil definisce "sfera non razioide".

Come noto, a differenza dell'emisfero *razioide*, vertente sul principio dell'univocità della logica e dell'intelletto, quello *non razioide* risulta animato dal primato del *Gefühl* e della sua capacità di fluidificare i vincoli per ricomporli in relazioni impreviste, ciò di cui è testimonianza l'espressione poetica con la sua valorizzazione delle similitudini[11].

Al riguardo, il riferimento alla dinamica delle similitudini non risulta affatto di secondaria importanza, tanto più che Musil stesso ne approfondisce la centralità anche dal punto di vista delle sue implicazioni storiche e politiche[12].

Non a caso, nel saggio *Spirito ed esperienza* (1921) l'autore conduce una serrata critica al *Tramonto dell'Occidente* di Spengler[13] in cui il rapporto tra non razioide ed identità collettive rimanda al *medium* dell'analogia (*Analogie*). La potenzialità dell'*Analogie* di congiungere le realtà più dissimili, infatti, consente di far luce sul problema dell'enigmatica saldatura tra la concretezza del "sentire" e l'astrazione di un'ipostasi identitaria quale la "nazione".

Spengler […] lavora a forza di analogie; in questo modo chiunque può aver sempre ragione […]. Gli esempi che ho addotto […] non sono errori di dettaglio: sono un modo di pensare! Ci sono farfalle giallo limone, ci sono cinesi giallo limone […] possiamo dire: la farfalla è il cinese nano alato dell'Europa centrale […]. Ecco che per la prima volta ad affacciarsi è l'idea di una corrispondenza […] un relitto, difficile da spiegare all'intelletto diurno, del loro rapporto morfologico con la cinesità. (Musil [1986c]: 82)

Per quanto dissacrante, la critica a Spengler è tutto fuorché estrinseca, giacché individua ciò che è realmente emblematico nel *Tramonto dell'Occidente* o, se si vuole, ciò che rende il suo autore un vero e proprio *sintomo* del tempo[14].

Ebbene, che cosa testimonia per Musil il "sintomo-Spengler" se non del ruolo fondamentale giocato dal sentimento (*Gefühl*), dal *desiderio di comunanza* che si libra dal nucleo non razioide della condizione umana?

La prospettiva storica assunta nel *Tramonto*, benché per Musil totalmente illusoria, è tesa a rilevare la possibilità di una «corrispondenza» – il cosiddetto «rapporto morfologico» – atta a conferire un senso al corso degli eventi. Spengler è *sintomatico*, insomma, in quanto è stato uno dei pochi ad essersi inoltrato nella regione, inaccessibile all'«intelletto diurno», della sfera non razioide[15], cimentandosi con la «logica del procedimento analogico» (*Logik des Analogischen*), con la «logica dell'irrazionale»[16] (Musil [1986c]: 92). Tuttavia, la sua funzionalizzazione dell'analogia

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[10] Musil vi si riferisce anche nei termini di un «bisogno di univocità» (*Bedürfnis nach Eindeutigkeit*), (Musil [2019]: 185), locuzione che ritorna emblematicamente anche nel già citato *Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom*, cfr. Musil ([2014b]: 93).

[11] In proposito, nel *Quaderno 31* (1930-1936) dei *Diari*, Musil dichiara: «Ciò che una volta ho chiamato […] il comportamento razioide e non razioide rappresenta i due comportamenti fondamentali […] della univocità e dell'analogia. Univocità […] è il principio fondamentale della logica […]. Il secondo principio […] è l'analogia. La deduzione logica del sogno, del sentimento religioso, della visione religiosa (intuizione), dell'altro stato, della morale, della poesia» (Musil [1980]: 1207).

[12] In riferimento al rapporto intercorrente tra la dimensione del "sentimento" ed il *medium* delle similitudini, cfr. Pott ([2013]: in particolare 167-192).

[13] Sul confronto tra Musil e Spengler, cfr. Bouveresse ([2001]: 147-171); Salzani (2010); De Cauwer, Fielding ([2015]: 73-86).

[14] «[Il] mio non è un giudizio su Spengler ma un attacco a Spengler. Un attacco a ciò che egli ha di tipico […]. Chi attacca Spengler, attacca il tempo dal quale esso è nato, e che lo apprezza. Gli errori di Spengler […] sono gli errori del suo tempo» (Musil [1986c]: 88).

[15] «Che cosa facciamo per chiarire tali questioni di fondo? Ben poco. I filosofi non hanno nessuna voglia di studiare i metodi del pensiero di una sfera [quella non razioide] nella quale i "fatti" sono esperienze vissute» (Musil [1986c]: 91).

[16] Sul nesso tra dimensione storica e procedimento analogico: «nella storia esistono solo somiglianze e analogie» (Musil [1986b]: 109). Sulla centralità dell'"analogia" nello scontro con Spengler, cfr. Ottaviani ([2019]: 23 e ss.). In

(*Analogie*) è indicativa al contempo di un altro elemento tipico del tempo, vale a dire di quella morsa identitaria che sta alla base delle "epidemie storiche" del nazionalismo[17] e del razzismo quali nuove forme di *Dummheit*:

> [l'] intimo nucleo vitale di un'epoca, una massa nebulosa in espansione, si incanala entro forme che sono il precipitato storico di epoche assai più antiche. Ogni "presente" è qui e al tempo stesso ancora indietro di millenni. Il presente [...] si muove su anelli politici, economici, culturali, biologici e così [...] all'infinito; ma ogni anello ha tempi e ritmi diversi [...]. Tutto ciò può essere abbracciato da un'immagine unitaria e ricondotto a un unico fondamento [...]. Spengler fa proprio questo. (Musil [1986c]: 99)

Se è certo che l'impostazione spengleriana corrisponde all'esigenza di appartenere ad un orizzonte comune, parimenti vero è che per Musil l'esito cui essa conduce non soltanto non è l'unico, ma anzi rappresenta esso stesso parte del problema. La torsione identitaria, il ridurre la complessità della condizione contemporanea ad un«immagine unitaria», non a caso, testimonia di un'operazione indebita, giacché reintroduce per così dire un principio di univocità (*Eindeutigkeit*), distintivo della sfera razioide, all'interno della dimensione non razioide[18].

Le catene di equivalenza prodotte dalle similitudini, insomma, possono essere valorizzate altrimenti, rendendo *simili* gli elementi coinvolti non poiché sorretti da un unico «fondamento»[19] – come il destino, la cultura o l'identità –, ma esattamente all'opposto *in virtù della sua assenza*.

Proprio all'altezza di una tale "battaglia sulle analogie", per Musil, deve posizionarsi la *poesia* nel tempo della massificazione e delle ideologie identitarie, scoprendo così un compito nuovo, quello di sprigionare un *sentimento* alternativo dell'interdipendenza e dei *legami*.

3. UNA NOBILE ANARCHIA: METAFORA E LEGAMI

Il *Discorso in onore di Rainer Maria Rilke* (1927), nel restituire la molteplicità di elementi finora posti a tema, consente di compiere un passo avanti. Nell'omaggiare il grande poeta, infatti, Musil non soltanto interagisce con la questione della sfera non razioide, ma prospetta un'alternativa rispetto all'impianto identitario sotteso alla saldatura tra *Gefühl* e *Nation*. Anche in questo caso, il problema delle *mediazioni* si dimostra cruciale e rinviene proprio nella valenza dei rapporti di similitudine il proprio fulcro. Tuttavia, in questo frangente il procedimento analogico non

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riferimento al problema della storia all'interno del pensiero musiliano, cfr. Bouveresse ([1993]: 171-262).

[17] Sulla questione del nazionalismo e delle ideologie identitarie in riferimento al pensiero di Musil, cfr. Jonsson (2000).

[18] La pretesa di restaurare il principio della *Eindeutigkeit* al fine di neutralizzare ogni complessità, assunta come minaccia esiziale, perviene ad un esito tanto nostalgico, quanto delirante nell'opera di Otto Weininger intitolata *Sesso e carattere* (1903), il cui contenuto ha profondamente influenzato la temperie culturale – non soltanto mitteleuropea – dell'epoca, come attestato dalle venticinque edizioni del volume susseguitesi nell'arco di un ventennio. In questo caso, il carattere *reazionario* con cui si denunciano le trasformazioni della *Zivilisation* giunge esplicitamente a connotarsi nei termini della misoginia e dell'antisemitismo. In proposito, illuminanti ci appaiono le considerazioni seguenti: «[in] *Sesso e carattere* si cerca un ultimo tentativo di ricomposizione unitaria, a prezzo dell'esclusione di ogni

differenza e di ogni pluralità, che viene attribuita come una *colpa* alla donna e all'ebreo [...]. Per Weininger [...] la pluralità del reale e dei suoi significati, [...] diventa un abisso vertiginoso» (Rella [2012]: 11, contributo di cui si consiglia la lettura anche per approfondire l'orizzonte teorico entro il quale si colloca la produzione dello stesso Musil).

[19] Si consideri la contestazione dell'utilizzo dei binomi tra componenti opposte, quali vita-morte o proprio-estraneo: «[ecco] riunite al completo le idee costruttive di Spengler; egli le usa come piani geometrici per tracciare profili di un solo fatto fondamentale, che [...] rimane lo stesso da qualunque lato egli lo affronti» (Musil [1986c]: 94). Tali dicotomie, nel costituirsi sulla base del procedimento analogico, si concludono difatti in termini gerarchico-identitari, ciò che è significativamente testimoniato dal fatto che le connessioni istituite convergono tutte in un'*unica* direzione, facendo con ciò trapelare l'illecito innesto di un rapporto di univocità su di un orizzonte per principio differente qual è la sfera non razioide.

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si conforma sull'assetto fondazionale criticato in Spengler, ma si rivolge ad un uso alternativo della *metafora* (*Gleichnis*). Nella poesia di Rilke

> *gli esseri umani diventano [...] esseri senza nome, e raggiungono [...] la propria definitiva umanità, agitata da un soffio che resta anch'esso senza nome. Nel sentimento di questo grande poeta [...] tutto è metafora e – nulla è soltanto metafora. Le diverse specie biologiche [...] sembrano unificarsi in una sfera sola. Una cosa non viene mai paragonata a un'altra [...] come se fossero due cose distinte [...] dove si dice che una cosa qualsiasi è "come" un'altra cosa, nello stesso tempo è come se [...] essa fosse sempre stata quell'altra cosa. Le proprietà di una cosa diventano proprietà comune di tutte le cose [...] si sono separate dalle cose e dalle situazioni e si librano sostenute dal vento caldo del fuoco.* (Musil [1986a]: 217)

Dal punto di vista di Musil, se la valorizzazione spengleriana dell'analogia (*Analogie*) convalidava nessi di equivalenza culminanti in un *univoco* ripiegamento identitario, lo stesso non può dirsi per la capacità della metafora (*Gleichnis*) nella poesia di Rilke. Nel caso del *Gleichnis*, i concatenamenti scorrono certamente da una determinazione all'altra appuntandosi sulle loro «proprietà», ma questo non avviene al fine di rinsaldare l'identità dei termini connessi, ma al contrario per destituirla, denunciandone l'illusorietà.

Quali che siano le qualità (*Eigenschaften*) assunte[20], esse si ritrovano tutte trascinate dal «vento caldo del fuoco» alimentato dai rapporti metaforici e, divincolandosi dai loro presunti detentori, si trasvalutano in «proprietà comune» di tutte le cose.

In questo modo, però, coloro che in precedenza possedevano le *Eigenschaften* si riscoprono tutti «esseri senza nome» ed una volta privati di ciò che li qualificava nel segno della demarcazio-

ne identitaria arrivano a rivelarsi tutti inaspettatamente congiunti l'un l'altro dalla stessa *mancanza* di qualità, dallo stesso "vuoto" di fondamenti[21].

> *L'apice della poesia non è una vetta sulla quale si salga sempre più in alto, ma è un cerchio; e tutto ciò che esso contiene è inegualmente eguale, unico, insostituibile. Una nobile anarchia, la fratellanza di un ordine religioso.* (Musil [1986a]: 208)

Il sentimento (*Gefühl*) sprigionato dall'intreccio delle nuove relazioni disvelato dal *Gleichnis* approda in tal senso ad una forma inedita di «fratellanza», incommensurabile rispetto al "noi" identitario delle "malattie dello spirito" della massificazione e del nazionalismo.

Così, la destituzione della strutturazione gerarchica permessa dalla «poesia» indica una via imprevista per corrispondere al bisogno di sentire qualcosa in comune: come un «cerchio» che stringe assieme tutto ciò che è «inegualmente eguale», la condivisione dell'infondatezza – la comune *anarchia ontologica* – si rivela la premessa per intessere altre tipologie di *legame*[22].

In virtù di questa «nobile anarchia» come precondizione per realizzare l'interdipendenza, il

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[20] Tale uso de-reificante del procedimento metaforico, secondo il quale la mancanza di *qualità* consustanziali predispone alla *possibilità* che ogni ente si connetta con ogni altra realtà verrà valorizzato nel *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* mediante la caratterizzazione di Ulrich come soggettività *senza qualità* animata dal "senso del possibile" (*Möglichkeitssinn*), cfr. Gargani ([1982]: 15-36).

[21] Come noto, tale comunanza tra gli enti disvelata ed al contempo custodita dal sentimento lirico rappresenta un tema fondamentale della poetica di Rilke, massimamente presente, per esempio, nel componimento risalente al 1914 noto come *Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen* e nella significativa immagine dello "spazio interno del mondo" (*Weltinnenraum*) cui sembra rinviare il passaggio seguente: «[mi] domando: invece di dire che la sera di novembre è come un panno, *oppure* che il panno è come la sera di novembre, non potremmo dire tutte e due le cose in una? Rilke non ha fatto altro. In lui tutte le cose sono come intessute su un arazzo. Se guardiamo *le cose* una per una, esse sono separate; ma se concentriamo l'attenzione sullo sfondo, le cose sono unite dallo sfondo stesso. Il loro aspetto muta, e fra esse nascono strane relazioni» (Musil [1986a]: 219).

[22] L'idea del "cerchio" che pone in relazione sulla base della condivisa vacuità sembra rinviare alla celebre immagine dell'"anello" nell'*Uomo senza qualità*: «se si potesse sezionarci, forse tutta la nostra vita avrebbe l'aspetto di un anello [...] che [...] nel centro non ha nulla» (Musil [2014a], vol. I: 418).

pensiero di Musil offre le risorse per ripensare lo statuto della comunanza non più come il "privilegio del noi", ma al contrario come un *"noi" senza privilegi*, lo stesso al quale l'autore sembra ancora rivolgersi nel discorso del '37 come al compito che egli stesso si attribuiva, come all'unico antidoto rimasto al dilagare dell'epidemia storica della stupidità.

Da questo punto di vista, non può sorprendere che le acquisizioni finora conseguite nel corso del nostro attraversamento di alcuni dei contributi musiliani degli anni '20 si ripropongano anche nel discorso del 1937 da cui avevamo preso le mosse. In particolare, la centralità attribuita alla sfera non razioide del *Gefühl* e la necessità di valorizzare il *Gleichnis* quale inedita tipologia di mediazione in grado di delineare un'esperienza alternativa dell'interdipendenza – un "noi" senza privilegi – si impongono, ancora una volta, in tutta la loro cogenza.

Al riguardo, Musil sostiene che il vero e proprio antagonista della massificazione come nuovo tipo di stupidità

> *non è tanto l'intelletto, quanto lo spirito e anche il carattere […]. Pensieri e sentimenti agiscono all'unisono […]. Concetti come vastità, ristrettezza, mobilità, semplicità, fedeltà, sono applicabili sia al pensiero che al sentimento. E se anche il rapporto che ne risulta non è del tutto chiaro, basta tuttavia per poter affermare che del "carattere" fa parte anche l'intelletto, e che i nostri sentimenti sono in rapporto con l'intelligenza e con la stupidità. Contro questa stupidità bisogna agire con l'esempio e con la critica.* (Musil [2013]: 45)

Al fine di contrastare il fenomeno morboso dell'involuzione identitaria l'«intelletto», di per sé, non è sufficiente, giacché come abbiamo illustrato la *Dummheit* in esame, lungi dal consistere in una qualche mancanza di ordine mentale, si radica in una fibrillazione che avviene in seno al "sentire" e che, di qui, giunge ad irretire l'intelligenza medesima. Di contro, occorre dilatare la prospettiva, chiamando in causa l'interezza delle capacità umane, tanto più che tra «pensiero» e «sentimenti» non sussiste alcuna divaricazione incolmabi-

le. Nella misura in cui la nuova stupidità discende dall'interferenza tra l'instabilità psicologico-pulsionale e la crisi delle forme tradizionali della razionalità, nessuna via di uscita risulta praticabile senza la realizzazione di un movimento speculare, ma contrario che a partire dalla risonanza tra i due emisferi del razioide e del non razioide prefiguri un sentimento differente di comunanza, irriducibile all'appartenenza alla "massa"[23].

È alla luce di quest'ultimo assunto che Musil avanza un concetto ulteriore che, come lo «spirito», consenta di pensare la compartecipazione del "sentimento" e dell'"intelletto".

> *Il "significativo" unisce in sé la verità che possiamo riconoscere in esso e le qualità del sentimento in cui riponiamo la nostra fiducia. In tal modo si origina qualcosa di nuovo: una nuova comprensione, ma anche una decisione, un tener duro, ma gioioso […]. Potremmo ad esempio dire – e in rapporto alla stupidità questo è l'essenziale – che il significativo è passibile della critica sia dell'intelletto che del sentimento, ed è anche l'antagonista comune sia della stupidità che della rozzezza. E la sproporzione generale a causa della quale l'elemento emotivo soffoca oggi la ragione invece di darle le sue ali si attenua nel concetto di significatività.* (Musil [2013]: 46)

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[23] In riferimento alla massificazione, Musil restituisce i caratteri della nuova tipologia di stupidità avanzando il seguente paragone: «[si] potrebbe anche parlare di uno stato di panico in procinto di sostituire un'antica sicurezza, ossia quella di essere in grado di operare nella libertà e secondo ragione» (Musil [2013]: 35). Un simile confronto viene esplicitamente svolto allo scopo di far affiorare ciò che accomuna una condizione psicologica di spaesamento e paura – qual è lo "stato di panico" – al meccanismo che prelude alla spersonalizzazione con cui l'individuo "si fonde" nelle formazioni gregarie. In relazione a quest'ultimo caso, Musil osserva quanto segue: «in tali casi la paralisi e la sospensione dell'intelletto non conducono a una vera ricaduta nell'azione istintiva quanto piuttosto, attraverso di essa, al recupero di un istinto dell'estrema necessità e di un'estrema forma di azione che la situazione esige. Questo modo di agire assume il carattere della confusione totale, non segue alcun piano e apparentemente è abbandonato sia dalla ragione che da ogni istinto di conservazione» (Musil [2013]: 31).

Dalla tangenza tra il versante razionale della «verità» e quello emotivo delle «qualità» del *Gefühl* si inaugura «qualcosa di nuovo», di cui il "significativo" rappresenta la testimonianza: una «nuova comprensione», la quale tuttavia non si esaurisce all'interno del solo ambito del raziocinio, ma che si accompagna ad una «decisione». Si giunge in tal modo a rischiarare un indirizzo alternativo alla malattia spirituale della *Dummheit* che, contemplando tanto la «ragione», quanto l'«elemento emotivo», risulta all'altezza del compito di contrastare al contempo la «stupidità» e la «rozzezza».

In questo senso, la riflessione che Musil sviluppa in una fase storica in cui alla «crisi di fiducia» (Musil [2013]: 35) nell'umanità sarebbero subentrate nuove tragedie, si conclude rivolgendosi ad una nuova tipologia di *intelligenza* il cui tratto distintivo, a ben guardare, non consiste che nella potenzialità di congiungere le eterogeneità – nella fattispecie, di congiungere i due emisferi distinti del *Gefühl* e dell'intelletto – senza ricondurli *univocamente* l'uno all'altro.

Si tratta di quella stessa capacità di cui per Musil è depositaria la metafora (*Gleichnis*), della capacità di intessere "legami" tra differenze all'apparenza abissali in virtù della *mancanza di qualità* essenziali ed identitarie che invero le *accomuna* e che il fenomeno della stupidità, al contrario, non può che offuscare.

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Aisthesis

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The idea of substantive arts

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Abstract. The Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno coined the expression "substantive arts" to refer to those arts that do not serve any immediate, mundane or practical purpose. In this paper, I briefly present this idea and put forward a definition of the substantive arts as an alternative to those used until now. Starting from the assumption that since the end of the 18th century there has been a set of arts that have their own substantivity, I expound on certain criteria widely used as distinctive features to define the substantive arts. I subsequently put forward an alternative intensional criterion to characterize the substantive arts. To end, I draw some corollaries following from the application of this criterion.

Keywords: fine arts, definition, substantive arts, distinctive features.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I make the supposition that the idea of substantive arts emerged at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century to designate arts that ceased to serve practical worldly interests external to them. Having reached their own autonomy, they apparently would have no other meaning than the aesthetic enjoyment of their own content. Such art has been called fine art, noble art, pure art, useless art, aesthetic art, contemplative art and superfluous art. I prefer "substantive arts", coined by the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno (Bueno [2000a]), since it best reflects the fact that these arts no longer conceive of themselves as servants of some other cultural institution – thus ceasing to be deemed as adjective arts – but are self-understood as endowed with their own substantivity.

In the first section, I take up Paul Oskar Kristeller's thesis that the emancipation of these arts came at the end of a long historical process that did not culminate until the 18th century (Kristeller [1951], [1952]). The arts began as adjective arts serving the pur-

poses of religion, politics, the army, the interests of specific social classes, morality and entertainment, and were gradually emancipated from these adjective functions. Theories of art in antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance sought to understand the arts in historical moments insofar as they were adjectives serving other institutions, but they ceased to be applicable once emancipated, since their autonomy enabled expansion in unforeseen directions. I will comment briefly on some of the most influential theories in the arts that have been put forward to account for the new reality of the substantive arts. This review does not intend to make a detailed critique of all such theories, but simply to place my definition within the context of the others.

The second section lays out an alternative proposal that starts by recognizing that an intensional definition of the arts is possible. While extensional definitions list everything falling under the definition by enumerating the extension of the set, intensional definitions specify the necessary and sufficient conditions to fall under such definition by indicating the internal content of the defined concept. The set A = (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) can be defined either by listing the items (extensionally) or by giving its distinctive characteristic (intensionally): "odd natural numbers less than ten". In this paper, I hold that the substantive arts are a species within the genus of techniques that have certain special distinctive characteristics. Contrary to formalist theories, I argue that artwork and art performances can never achieve total disconnection from other parts of the world and that the purpose of the substantive arts is not autonomous or self-referential, but depends on that connection with the world external to the arts. This connection is first genetic and then structural since it supposes that there is a more or less close analogy between works of art and these other parts of the world. If so, based on the theory of analogy proposed by David Alvargonzález, the substantive arts fulfill the two functions typical of analogies: to analyze this analogous world and to explore ways to extend and vary it freely (Alvargonzález [2020]).

In the third section, I draw certain corollaries following the proposed criteria to characterize the substantive arts.

1. THE IDEA OF SUBSTANTIVE ARTS

Paul Oskar Kristeller argued that the fine arts are recent in origin, which he located in 18th-century Western Europe (Kristeller [1951], [1952]). As his thesis goes, in classical antiquity and the Middle Ages the aesthetic qualities of artworks were not separated from other practical functions typical of the techniques also sustaining that the artworks that today we place within the group of fine arts were dispersed and classified in highly heterogeneous groups. Poetry, grammar and rhetoric appeared together, whereas music was always accompanied by mathematics and astronomy and the visual arts were considered purely technical and artisanal: painters were associated with pharmacists, sculptors with goldsmiths and architects with masons and carpenters. In the Renaissance, the visual arts were linked with geometry, perspective and anatomy, and were championed so that painters, sculptors and architects could be emancipated from artisans and grouped into what Vasari called *arti del disegno*. The development of modern sciences in the 17th and 18th centuries led to a progressive separation of the sciences (geometry, optics, astronomy) from the arts, paving the way for the appearance of the modern pre-Romantic system of the arts, such as Batteux's five fine arts (1746): music, poetry, painting, sculpture and dance. For Batteux, architecture and eloquence were "mixed arts" since they pursue both utility and aesthetic pleasure (Kristeller [1951], [1952]).

According to Wilcox and Murphy, in the early 19th century Benjamin Constant, Victor Cousin and Théophile Gautier first used the formula of "art for art's sake", albeit with different meanings, contending that the arts have no other purpose than their very own cultivation and that all purposes pervert art (Wilcox [1953]; Murphy [2018]).

The arts were defined as an end in themselves, as "pure art", as the free, independent, autonomous construction of specific works, as superfluous, non-useful, non-utilitarian, contemplative arts removed from the contingencies of everyday life. In my view, as introduced by the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno (Bueno [2000a]), the label "substantive arts" has the advantage of focusing on the difference between the arts understood as serving other institutions and pursuing practical purposes external to them ("adjective arts") and the arts self-conceived as sovereign, independent, autonomous and therefore endowed with their own substantivity. My preference for the label "substantive arts" rests on the drawbacks carried by other alternative denominations. These substantive arts do not always embody the value of beauty (they are not, therefore, "fine arts") and may be neutral from an aesthetic point of view (they are not, therefore, always "aesthetic arts"). Their usefulness can only be evaluated ex post facto, with which they are not adequately coined as "useless", "contemplative" or "superfluous" arts. Nor are they activities to be characterized as more "noble" or "purer" than others.

1.1. Limitations of classical and medieval aesthetic theories when characterizing the substantive arts

During the long period in which the arts fulfilled adjective functions, there were fundamentally three philosophies accompanying them:
1. The idea of the arts as bearers of positive aesthetic values: beauty, grace, serenity, pleasure, intensity, balance, virtuosity. This theory was defended by Plato, Alberti, and Moses Mendelssohn.
2. The conception of the arts as an imitation of nature. This theory was formulated by Aristotle and by Leonardo da Vinci. At the same time as the emancipation of what he called "fine arts" began, Batteux defined art as the imitation of nature selecting the beautiful (Batteux [1746])
3. The metaphysical conceptions that the arts reflected specific attributes of God (*Summa Theologica* I, q.5).

The expansion of the substantive arts invalidated the classical ideas used to characterize the adjective arts as a way to understand the now emancipated arts. Characterizing substantive works of art as bearers of positive aesthetic values (what we could call the "aestheticist" theory of art) ceased to be effective for three reasons. Firstly, because aesthetic values, especially beauty, are also present in many artifacts and performances of human etiology having immediate practical utility. Aesthetic values do not then serve as a distinctive feature of the substantive arts since the deliberate search for aesthetic values can occur in both substantive and servile works of art. Secondly, because aesthetic values also appear as predicated aesthetic values (not constructed or acted upon), insofar as we predicate them on the works of nature which, however, are not works of substantive art. Thirdly, in some cases the newly emancipated substantive arts claimed to cultivate negative aesthetic values (deformed, disproportionate, gloomy, grotesque, dirty, disgusting, rude, clumsy, vulgar, imperfect and incomplete, to cite but a few), as Karl Rosenkranz (1853) studied in *Aesthetics of Ugliness*. On the other hand, the existence of artworks with neutral aesthetic values must also be taken into account: Marcel Duchamp considered readymades to be appearances being beyond good and bad taste.

As "mimicry" or "naturalism", the theory of art as an imitation or recreation of nature also reached its limits when it came to the new substantive arts once they entered the field of abstract art and tried to cut off any reference to the ordinary figurative world (Osborne [1979]). Futurism, surrealism, Dadaism, minimalism and conceptualism are ways of making art that test the classical doctrine of imitation.

With their emphasis on the participation of specific divine attributes (beauty, truth, goodness), the metaphysical theories about art found their *raison d'être* in times when the arts were adjectives of religion, but they fell from grace once the arts were emancipated from those liturgical functions and from such a transcendent genesis.

Agnostics, atheists, materialists, positivists and nihilists rejected such metaphysical theories since they did not need transcendent hypotheses to justify the existence of the arts.

1.2. A brief consideration of theories about art following the constitution of the substantive arts

The arts' emancipation from their earlier adjective functions generated new proposals which sought to characterize this new group of fine arts, now understood as substantive, autonomous and removed from any practical purpose beyond the cultivation of art itself.

While not exhaustively, I will briefly refer to certain theories that deal with the definition of what I call substantive arts. Table 1 includes eight situations. The first two deal with those that deny the existence of substantive arts (1) and those that affirm their existence but deny the possibility of defining them (2). Positions (3-6) put forward various criteria to define them (historical, subjective, aesthetic, formal, metaphysical). To end, position (7) includes specific disjunctive definitions and position (8) accounts for definitional pluralism, defending that there are different definitions for various contexts. The purpose of this classification is not to make an exhaustive analysis of such theories, but rather to place the theory advanced in the second section within a dialectical context to make it intelligible.

A. Evolutionism and functionalism

Evolutionary theories argue that the arts arose in the Paleolithic as a consequence of the biological evolution leading to the appearance of

Table 1. Definitions of substantive arts.

type of definition	identification label of the theory	core thesis	authors
A. There is no substantive arts	Evolutionism Cultural and social functionalism	All the arts are adjectives and fulfill adaptive, cultural or ideological functions	Dissanayake Miller Eibl-Eibesfeldt Mattick Clowney
B. Definition is not possible	Skepticism	We know how to use the word "art" in certain contexts	Ziff Weitz Goodman
C. Extensional definition	Historicism Institutionalism	Historical definition: connection with previous arts Institutional definition: group of experts	Levinson Carney Dickie Fokt Danto
D. Intensional, subjetual definition	Expressivism Experiencism	Author's expression Author's intention Spectator's aesthetic experience	Tolstoi Ducasse Collingwood Croce Beardsley
E. Intensional, formal definition	Formalism	Exclusive consideration of pure aesthetic forms	Hanslick, Bell, Greenberg, Zamoyski
F. Intensional, trascendent definition	Metaphysical theories	The realization of freedom The apprehension of noumenon The phases of the dialectic of the spirit Art as "bringing-into-being"	Novalis Schopenhauer Schiller Hegel Heidegger Souriau
G. Disjunctive definition	Cluster theories	C v D v E v …	Tatarkiewicz, Gaut, Andreev & Kuznetsova Davies
H. Definitional pluralism	Contextualism	A different definition for each context	Uidhir & Magnus

Homo sapiens. Since all cultures have practices and products that we recognize as artistic, evolutionists infer that aesthetic preferences, interests and capacities are innate and result from natural and sexual selection (Dissanayake [1992]; Miller [2000]: 258-92).

Functionalist theories of art share the common objective of determining the function of the arts in each society, culture and historical moment so as to explain their origin and their persistence. Ethological and ethnological functionalism studied the role of arts in the pre-state societies of our primitive contemporaries: Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt argued that the artistic components of those cultures serve to enhance myths, legends, beliefs and rituals (Eibl-Eibesfeldt [1988]). When applied to historical societies, functionalist theories connect the arts to social, political and economic factors. According to Paul Mattick, the institution of the autonomous fine arts typical of Western societies in the last two centuries has a social function as well: museums and concert halls are the reliquaries where these societies keep the material performances of their higher self (Mattick [2003]: 133). For Clowney, the autonomous fine arts fulfill a purely ideological function consisting of differentiating the domain of the "intellectual" – along with law, morality and philosophy – from the productive forces of ordinary everyday life (Clowney [2011]: 316).

Evolutionism and functionalism are relevant insofar as they gain an understanding of the external purposes of the arts in their adjective function, as they study pre-state societies and the uses of the arts prior to the 19th-century in Europe. Their understanding of modern arts assumes that their unity or similarity is limited to their merely adjective function at the service of the sexual selection or the ideology of specific elites, whilst undervaluing the production processes of ordinary consumer goods. On the contrary, without denying the adjective origin of the arts, in this paper I defend the existence of substantive arts.

B. Skepticism

Paul Ziff contended that we must renounce a definition of art as a set of characteristics that provides a suite of adequate conditions and settle for reference to some paradigmatic or characteristic "clear cases" of what is considered a "work of art". Ziff highlights the differences between the various arts, especially between poetry and the visual arts, arguing that the uses of the expression "work of art" are changing, especially in the times of artistic revolutions, and no aesthetician is an oracle capable of anticipating the future of art. Furthermore, such uses, like so many others, depend on the context in which the expression "work of art" is determined. He concludes that no definition can ever account for all these heterogeneous uses (Ziff [1953]).

Morris Weitz argued that the question «What is the nature of art?» cannot be defined in any manner since a definition of art is logically impossible. Taking cues from Wittgenstein, Weitz concluded that there is no set of common properties of art, but only a number of similarities, since "art" is an open concept and its conditions of application are amendable and correctable. Art is subject to changes, expansions, novel creations, innovations and originalities. Only in logic and mathematics is it possible to establish the conditions necessary for the application of a concept (Weitz [1956]). The analytic philosopher Nelson Goodman also formulated an anti-essentialist claim with respect to art. Ordinary knowledge, sciences and the arts are systems of symbols contributing to understanding the world and requiring interpretation in line with various syntactic and semantic rules (Goodman [1968]; Goodman and Elgin [1988]). His attempt to specify the "symptoms of the aesthetic" is not distinctive since he recognizes that a work of art can occur in which these "symptoms" do not appear (Goodman [1978]: 67-68). Contrary to this position, in this article I defend that it is possible to propose an intensional definition of the substantive arts.

C. Historicism

From a historicist perspective, Jerrold Levinson also recognized that modern art has no spe-

cific purpose and «is purely historically constituted practice» (Levinson [1993]: 414). Historicist positions argue that the only way to characterize art is through its connection with other artwork of the past (Levinson [1979], [1989], [1993], [2002]; Carroll [1988], [1997], Stecker [1990], [2000]). James Carney advocates for a historicism centered on the study of the various styles so as to understand the causal influence of the past on the present (Carney [1994]: 114).

Stephen Davies calls this recursive way of defining substantive art the «cladistic theory of art» due to the resemblance to cladistic theories of biological species (Davies [2012]: 379) and advocates for its utility, while still recognizing that this type of theory is indeed incomplete as a definition of art (Davies [1997], [2004], [2010], [2015]).

A theory adjacent to this historicist approach is the theory of art as a cultural institution. Once it has been established that the present-day fine arts have no clear purpose, the only practical way to know what art is would be by reference to what an authorized elite or some culturally competent person labels, dubs and honors as art. Applying this criterion, Duchamp's readymades and Warhol's Brillo Boxes clearly qualify as art. (Dickie [1974]; Fokt [2014], [2017]). In this vein, Arthur C. Danto's concept of "artword" underlies an institutionalist theory of art (Danto [1973], [1998])

As with functionalists, historicist, cladistic and institutionalist interpretations also deny that the modern arts have an objective purpose of their own. To characterize the arts they resort to recursive procedures and deictic, extensional definitions, pointing to institutions either as historical processes or as social groups. As already stated, I will defend that an intensional definition of arts is possible.

D. Expressivism and experiencialism

Leo Tolstoy (1897) formulated the idea of art as an expression of emotions and as the language of feelings, and Curt J. Ducasse (1929) worked this idea out, defining aesthetic arts as a skilled objectification, a language of feelings. In a different sense, Collingwood's idea of art is expressivist since, for him, art is an imaginary experience through which we express our emotions (Collingwood [1958]: 142). In Benedetto Croce's philosophy, aesthetic intuition grounds all other mental activity, although intuition cannot be analyzed in parts. Ordinary intuition is no different than the artwork-based intuition, although artists are able to express their intuitions. Furthermore, artwork-based intuition is created within the spectator's mind. Arts are expressive and thus proximate to human languages (Croce [1902]). The analytic philosopher Monroe Beardsley defined a work of art based on its capacity to afford an aesthetic experience (1982, 299), and Richard Kamber defined art as a kind of technique whose intent is to aesthetically construct interesting objects, events and designs (Kamber [1993]: 316, 319). John Dewey also located the core of the idea of art in the idea of experience and emphasized the continuity between everyday experience and the fine arts (Dewey [2005]). Wary that Dewey's idea of experience was not precise enough to explain the nature of art, Richard Shusterman recalled that Dewey himself considered the aesthetic experience to be impossible to define (Shusterman [1994]). Following Dewey, Mark Johnson has defended that all experiences, and not just those that have to do with the arts, have aesthetic dimensions and are, therefore, "aesthetic" (Johnson [2007]). In my view, Johnson and Dewey's arguments are highly compelling, but they imply that the idea of aesthetic experience does not serve as a distinctive feature to characterize the substantive arts.

Harold Osborne has argued that the idea of aesthetic experience is a vague and ambiguous notion (Osborne [1981], 10). Regarding expressivism, Osborne considers that, on the one hand, many works of art are neither more nor less expressive than many of the things we do or create and, on the other hand, there are many things that express and evoke emotions that we never would classify as works of art (Osborne [1981]: 9).

E. Formalism

Under the label of formalism, I refer to a group of authors postulating that everything nec-

essary to understanding a work of art is within itself and, specifically, in its forms, its elements and its relationships in space and time. The issues relating to the author, viewers and historical, cultural and social contexts are secondary. Eduard Hanslick found that music has no content external to itself because it is only «tonally moving forms» (Hanslick [1986]: 29). Similarly, Clive Bell defined the essence of art as "significant form", arguing that in painting the only relevant things are the relationships and harmonies of lines and colors (Bell 1913). Clement Greenberg defined painting as a combination of «flatness, pigment and shape» (Greenberg [1986]: 86-87).

In the 20th century, the stream of art critics grouped under the label of "New Criticism" shared this conception about the disinterested nature of art and advocated for a pure, autonomous art freed from any purpose and any external influence. Artists such as the writer and painter Stanislav I. Witkiewicz and the sculptor August Zamoyski formulated a formalist theory of art (Witkiewicz [1992], Zamoyski [1975]).

Arthur Danto has been one of the most incisive critics of formalism. For Danto, the aesthetic value of an artwork depends largely on the context and, therefore, form alone does not make a work of art. Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Warhol's Brillo Boxes are examples of "mere things" that, introduced in a specific context, may constitute artworks (Danto [1973], [1998]). It is impossible for Walton to correctly adjudge an artwork in the correct categories if we do not know anything about its origins or its historical context since aesthetic properties do not only depend on shapes, colors or rhythms (Walton 1970). Conversely, in contexts far from the substantive arts, engineers and illustrators themselves make artifacts implying forms (Osborne [1981]: 9).

F. Metaphysical theories

Metaphysical theories about art, in which the ideal of beauty pursued by the arts was considered to be of divine origin, were prevalent in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Such is the case of the philosophy of Plotinus (3rd century CE), with his idea of beauty as divine essence and the imitative and emanative nature of arts. In the late 5th and early 6th century CE, Pseudo-Dionysios posited that truth and beauty coincide and are the cause of anything beautiful that exists. Thomas Aquinas explicitly asserted that the source of all beauty is God and derived the primary standards of beauty (actuality, radiance, proportion and integrity) from the mystery of the Trinity.

In the Renaissance, Michelangelo believed that visible beauty was the path by which the soul reached immortal Beauty, which is the reflection of God himself since the source of all beauty is divine.

Novalis conceived of art as the vision of God in Nature, and Schopenhauer elaborated a philosophy of music in which the arts were pure forms since they express no specific passion, but rather their general forms. Schiller defined beauty as freedom and autonomy in appearance and deemed freedom as something noumenal. In this vein, Hegel stated that the distinctive function of the arts is to provide a sensuous, individual manifestation of the freedom of absolute spirit. Hegel's philosophy of art constitutes the first sub-section of the third part of his philosophy of spirit, which is devoted to the absolute spirit (the other sub-sections being about religion and philosophy). Art is the lowest phase in the development of the absolute spirit: in an ascendant trajectory, the absolute spirit reaches its self-understanding and spiritual freedom through figurative objects in the arts, through images of faith in religion and through pure concepts in philosophy. Far removed from Hegelian idealism, in the philosophy of George W. Bertram, the characterization of the arts as "a practice of freedom" is enigmatic, since such "freedom" seems to reside in the noumenal background of the artist's will (Bertram [2019]: ch. 4).

Étienne Souriau compared the artist to Leibniz's God, who chooses from among all possible worlds to create a concrete and singular work the existence of which is sufficient for itself and constitutes its own purpose (Souriau [1947]: 50; 56). The arts constitute the human experience of

God's "ontogonical" activity since the sculptor, the painter, the poet and the musician perform a task of divine creation (Souriau [1947]: 62-64). This not being sufficient, Souriau affirms that the arts, through the sensitive qualia of certain physical bodies, lead us towards an impression of transcendence (Souriau [1947]: 96). In the same vein, Martin Heidegger defined art as "bringing-into being", even though such "being" will never be completely revealed (Heidegger [2008])

Another example of a metaphysical theory of art is Ayn Rand's theory whereby art is the recreation or concretization, in an aesthetic microcosm, of the author's metaphysical value-judgments, the expression and emotional resonance of a "sense of life" that in turn defines as «a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics» (Rand [1975]: 25).

G. Eclecticism

The definition of art put forward by Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz may serve as an illustration of a disjunctive definition. For Tatarkiewicz, «art is a conscious human activity of either reproducing things, or constructing forms, or expressing experiences if the product of this reproduction, construction, or expression is capable of evoking delight, or emotion, or shock» (Tatarkiewicz [1971]: 150). The disjunctive structure of his formula is evident: either imitation, or construction or expression.

Berys Gaut (Gaut [2000], [2005]) held that art cannot be defined, since the concept of art is a "cluster concept", and put forward ten criteria counting towards an object's being deemed art:

(i) possessing positive aesthetic qualities […]; (ii) being expressive of emotion; (iii) being intellectually challenging; (iv) being formally complex and coherent; (v) having a capacity to convey complex meanings; (vi) exhibiting an individual point of view; (vii) being an exercise of creative imagination; (viii) being an artifact or performance that is the product of a high degree of skill; (ix) belonging to an established artistic form; and (x) being the product of an intention to make a work of art. (Gaut [2005]: 274)

More recently, Andreev and Kuznetsova highlighted the main components of art as a complex conceptual system. The aesthetic attitude includes the following:

spiritual specificity; semiotic trait; a system of features associated with usual forms of the social organization of artistic culture; the system of psychological characteristics (art as a sphere of personal perception, art as figurative thinking); nature of activity in art (art as a fundamentally innovative, non-algorithmic activity); and, finally, a technical attribute, the tendency to reduce art to a fixed, traditional set of techniques: pictorial, sculptural, technique of organizing verbal texts, etc. (Andreev and Kuznetsova [2019]: 72).

In my view, the dichotomy between the "single criterion" and the cluster account is false. The characterization based on genus and difference always makes use of a plurality of criteria, most of which are generic (such as criteria I-VIII in Gaut's cluster). I do not deny that Gaut's ten criteria can be predicated on the arts, but, except for IX and X, they are all generic. Irrespective, the disjunctive definitions imply the recognition of the lack of unity in the concept of art, of its "equivocity". This theory borders on the aforementioned skepticism. In the second section, I will put forward an intensional definition of substantive arts that challenges this equivocity; if this proposal is successful, the limits of cluster theories can be better appreciated.

H. Contextualism

Christy M. Uidhir and P.D. Magnus compare the concept of art with the species concept in biology: just as there are various concepts (phenotypic, biological, taxonomic, phylogenetics), they propose the formulation of various art concepts, each serving different purposes and useful in specific contexts. Specifically, they put forward four concepts of art:

Historical art: Those artifacts emerging from, belonging to, embedded in, art-historical traditions or narratives […], productive for historical inquiries.

Conventional art: Those artifacts recognized, accepted, targeted, governed by artworld conven-

tions, institutions, and practices […], productive for sociological and anthropological inquiries (as well as for legal and economic issues).

Aesthetic art: Those artifacts satisfying some aesthetic function; for example, affording some aesthetic attitude, experience, interest, value […], productive for value inquiry and certain cognitive inquiries involving perception.

Communicative art: Those artifacts that are (act as) vehicles for the communication of certain contents; «for example, representational, semantic, or expressive content […], productive for certain cognitive inquiries involving learning and emotions, as well as for moral evaluation.» (Uidhir and Magnus [2011]: 91-92). As with the definitions constructed using the disjunction of features, the disjunction of concepts is proof of the inexistence of a univocal concept. In previous paragraphs, I have already made some considerations about the scope of institutional, historical, and aesthetic definitions.

As regards the aesthetics of hermeneutics (Adorno [1970], Gadamer [1986]), it is widely accepted that it is not directly focused either on categorizing the nature of art or on proposing a concept of art; rather, it looks to deepen the contemplation of specific works for the sake of phenomenological engagement.

2. THE SUBSTANTIVE ARTS AS A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES

2.1. All techniques and technologies follow objective aims. The distinction between objective and subjective aims

In this section, I assume that we approximately know the extension of the set of substantive arts and put forward an intensional definition of the substantive arts that bears the classic format of the *generus proximus* and the specific or distinctive difference. I defend that the substantive arts are a product of human doing and making and, therefore, belong to the genus of techniques (in which I include technologies). Following Aristotle's philosophy, I characterize the techniques as human practices involving a violent transforma-

tion of the environment in order to accomplish specific purposes (*Metaphysics* 1033a ff., *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a ff., *Physics* 192b ff.). The trait that makes it possible to distinguish a specific technique from others is always the objective aim pursued: medical techniques seek to cure the infirm, the goal of aeronautical techniques is to transport air cargo, the military techniques aim to win wars, and so on. In this paper, I hold that the substantive arts also have purposes and that the feature that enables them to be distinguished from the other techniques is precisely the objective aim that they pursue. Irrespective, I retain the label "substantive arts" since I am interested in underlining that those arts are not adjective arts. Even though they organize themselves based on aims, those aims are not external to themselves, as psychological, political, religious, military, social, economic, entertainment and other purposes are. Rather, it is my view that the fine arts can be deemed "substantive" since they have their very specific aims. My proposal is directly opposed to theories positing that arts have no definite purpose (that are "purposiveless"), running from Kant to Dipert (Kant [1790]: §44; Dipert [1993]: 187).

When talking about aims, the distinction must be made between objective aims (*finis operis*) and subjective aims (*finis operantis*). This distinction appears explicitly formulated in Aquinas and in scholasticism. In Aquinas, the *finis operis* (translated as the aim of the action performed) is also called the "natural aim" and is the ultimate inherent end or goal of human action or output, it is the inner constructive aim. Any act or output always entails a *finis operis*. The *finis operantis* (translated as the aim of the moral agent) is also called the "willing aim" and is the subjective motive, purpose or willing intention of a human agent in acting. Scholastics applied this distinction to the study of human moral actions and concluded that bad subjective motives cannot change a good *finis operis*, as in the case of the person who gives money to the poor in search of vainglory. Conversely, good subjective motives cannot change a bad *finis operis*, as in the case

of compassion-based euthanasia, since God alone can dispose of human lives.

When referring to a historical institution such as modern substantive art, it seems reasonable to suspect that, if that institution has stayed alive for several centuries, it must have some objective aims (*finis operis*), some objective interests that are above the will of certain individual subjects. Additionally, if substantive arts can be extensionally differentiated from other proximate institutions (techniques, crafts, decoration, science, philosophy), it seems possible to hypothesize that they should have certain *distinctive* objective aims. In my view, the idea of "proper function", proposed by Ruth G. Millikan (1987) and applied by Beth Preston to human-made artifacts (1998: 237-38), refers mainly to these distinctive *finis operis*. Anthropological and historical functionalism is a methodology based on the assumption that there cannot be durable human institution separated from objective aims. Should those aims disappear, the institution may be maintained by inertia for a certain time but, if it is not co-opted for other aims, it will tend to become a survival of mere archaeological interest, similarly to vestigial organs in biological evolution. Once the particular aims of the arts disappear as they existed in their adjective moment (religious, military, political aims, etc.), those arts now conceived of as substantive are seen in the need to co-opt new specific aims.

In this paper, insofar as I propose a specific *finis operis* for the substantive arts, I do not mean to say that this purpose excludes the other subjective aims, which may continue to be present: the artist very often needs to sell his work to live, and whoever finances him pursues other ends. However, this does not exclude the existence of distinctive or characteristic objective aims in the substantive arts, even though these distinctive purposes may occur in the context of and even through subjective ends. The *finis operis* may exist without the artist being distinctly conscious of it and without being able to express it in words.

2.2. Proposal for a distinctive intensional criterion of the substantive arts

The demarcation criterion that I put forward to differentiate what we call techniques and technologies from what we call substantive arts is as follows: substantive works of art always have analog contents with respect to other configurations and processes of reality, and these analogies always imply certain objective exploratory or analytical purposes. The substantive arts take their forms from the real world, from the categories of being (the categories of the natural sciences) and of doing and making (the categories of *poiesis* and human praxis). In the substantive arts, the analogy can affect either the work of art as a whole or its formal parts. This proposal entails a recognition that the essence of the substantive arts is ultimately cognitive, be it exploratory or analytical.

The theory put forward here makes use of the theory of analogy formulated by Alvargonzález (Alvargonzález [2020]) whereby the distinctive characteristics of any analogy are as follows:

1. There must be a certain asymmetry between the analogues. This asymmetry means that analogies can have various purposes depending on the directionality of the relationship: analogies aim at extrapolation or exploration when moving from a familiar source to a relatively unknown target; their purpose is to analyze reality when they make use of specific characteristics of an invented analogue, partially known, to shed light on the real source.

In an "extrapolative" analogy, the analogy starts from the most familiar source to the least known target. In the 19th century, physicists drew an analogy between the relatively well-known flow of a liquid and the unfamiliar flow of an electric current, to explore the structure of the latter. Scientists did not know exactly what an electric current was, but they imagined it as liquid flow, such that voltage was aligned with flow pressure. In the common law system, the familiar prior cases are frequently used in deciding the new ones.

The function of an analogy is deemed "analytical" when the less familiar part of the analogy is used to identify and analyze the relevant constituents of a familiar domain since the former is easier to manipulate or to understand. The experimentation with scale model planes in wind tunnels or the maps of a given terrain may serve as illustrations of analogies done with an analytical purpose.

2. The relationship between analogues must be on the same level: either it goes from the particular to the particular or goes from the general to the general. The substantive arts do not establish general or universal principles or theorems since they are concrete products of human doing. Since the analogues always have to be at the same level of generality, it will be necessary to consider that the works of substantive art are particular constructions that present a specific analogy with other particular constructions or situations occurring outside these arts.

3. Analogues can be relationships, operations or terms. The analogy between the map and the terrain, like the analogy of realistic painting, is mainly an analogy of terms and relations, while the analogy between the flight simulator and the real airplane also implies an analogy of operations, as also happens in the analogy of the theater or the cinema regarding real life.

Leonardo da Vinci indirectly advocated for the analytical function of the arts insofar as he asserted that the purpose of sculpture and painting was none other than "knowing how to see". Works of art that are allegorical such as a portrait, sculpture, painted landscape or literary work always involve an analysis of the reality to which they refer. Frequent is the argument that painting supposes a level of analysis of painted reality much higher than that of photography, without prejudice to the fact that the latter may, in certain aspects, be more precise. Connections of external reality to art can include human actions and psychological processes. I defend that the anti-referentialist ideology accompanying conceptual art, with its idea that works of art are self-referential

and its rejection of external associative connections, is purely intentional since concepts are also constructions made in the reality external to the arts.

In their extrapolative or exploratory role, artists start with specific real-world configurations, whether natural or human, and attempt to explore new compositions of parts and morphologies. In this task, they need not adhere to any special constraints, beyond those set by the material determinants of their art (the canvas in painting, gravity and the conditions of static balance in architecture and sculpture, and tonality in music). This exploratory sense stands out when it is affirmed that works of substantive art open new worlds (or universes, as is sometimes said). As already stated, works of art cannot be segregated from the rest of existing realities as separate, self-referential "worlds" or "universes", and this designation ("worlds", "universes") should be understood as a hyperbolic way of referring to the exploratory function of the arts.

The exploratory and analytical functions of the arts also make it possible to provide positive content to the demand for novel works of art, since the mere repetition of works based on traditional norms means that these functions are lost.

The argument that substantive works of art, with their analogical structure with respect to other parts of reality, fulfill an analytical or exploratory objective aim does not imply the reciprocal argument that all analogy is a substantive work of art. The use of analogies is frequent in techniques, in technologies, in the sciences, in philosophy, in law, in religions, in ethical, political and moral practice, in rhetoric, in war and in many other contexts (Alvargonzález [2020]). In such contexts, the exploratory and analytical purposes of analogies serve other aims: the aim of the technical artifact, the purpose of warfare, etc.

Artifacts and performances that are substantive art involve analogies with other parts of reality that lie outside the artwork. This is always so since no artwork is completely self-referential. As already stated, following functionalism, I suppose that there can be no enduring, specific human

institution without objective finality (*finis operis*). Substantive works of art lack an immediate practical purpose in everyday life (and the *finis operantis* of the artists are not distinctive of the arts), but, insofar as they bear an analogical component, they must consequently retain the objective purposes typical of analogies. Insofar as we have already stripped all possible practical purposes and made them autonomous and free of practical commitments, they still have the objective purpose (*finis operis*) of being analogies since that purpose cannot be shed (they would only lose it if they were transcendent works made by God outside the world).

Substantive works of art are realities of human etiology. Not having to fulfill an immediate practical purpose and bearing an exclusively objective exploratory or analytical function, the activity of the arts is constrained by reality to a much lesser extent than in the rest of the techniques and technologies. Accordingly, the formal parts of the work of art can be chosen, varied and composed with a great deal of freedom. Thus, works of art conform a "depicted reality" that is always a function of reality, just as a dream relates to wakefulness. In this "depicted world" (be it pictorial, sculptural, narrative or cinematographic), the agent does not operate on reality: the depicted lion – sculpted, narrated – does not bite. It is a puppet handled by the author, and the depicted processes do not have efficient causality: depicted fire does not burn, pistols in cinema do not kill and a tempest in music does not drench.

At any rate, although this "depicted world" is a sui generis, weak mode of reality, this does not mean that it can also be the cause of real processes. Such is the case of legal fiction, fake news and counterfeits such as the famous Donation of Constantine. Parallelly, works of art, even if they are fiction, can have effects, such as the propaganda effects in *Guernica* and *Battleship Potemkin*.

In any case, the characteristic that works of art (portraits, sculptures, novels, etc.) are fictions is not a distinctive feature since it does not imply that all fictions are artistic fictions. There are also fictions in the sciences: Maxwell's classi-

fying demon and Laplace's demon. For materialist philosophy, the gods in the Egyptian, Greek and Roman pantheon are fictional entities, but they are not constructions whose essence is a substantive art. Those fictions pursue other aims, such as the construction of scientific theorems and principles, and the operation of the States.

2.3. The difference between the theory of analogy and other theories of art

The aforementioned theory of analogy draws away from the theory that puts the essence of art in the imitation of the works of nature or God. Firstly, it states that the substantive arts occur in continuity with other highly heterogeneous techniques and technologies the nature of which is not always imitative. Secondly, analogy is not imitation, but rather a reasoned comparison of configurations and processes used in various contexts to explore new territories and analyze reality (Alvargonzález [2020]). Thirdly, the analogies built by the substantive arts do not only take entities in nature (the categories of being) as analogues, but also the things and processes made by humans – categories that we could call anthropic.

The proposed theory acknowledges the presence of positive and negative aesthetic values in the arts, but those same values can be present as constructed values in other human techniques. Furthermore, as I have already said, we discern those values as predicated values in the works of nature.

The proposed theory on substantive arts seeks to understand the distinctive features of the autonomous arts, but can be retrospectively applied to understanding the artistic content of the adjective arts prior to the 18th century. At no time do I deny the phylogenetic relationships of works of art of any historical moment with their predecessors. Rather, this empirical, historical manner of defining a work of art is purely indicative, deictic and extensional, even though it can be very useful in many contexts.

The philosophy of the substantive arts put forward herein is also wholly removed from subjec-

tivism since it assumes that works of art are made from things that are outside and that the work of art itself is an intersubjective, external object or performance. Arts are not conceived of as communicative devices, as varieties of languages the function of which is representational or expressive, such as systems of communication (Dilworth [2005]). Countering Ayn Rand ([1975]: 25), even though art inevitably involves the viewer, the arts are not sufficiently defined as an act of contemplation, since many things and processes, both natural and artificial, that are not works of art are also contemplated.

Also running counter to formalism, the art-analogy theory assumes that works of art are not self-referential for two reasons: one, since they necessarily imply reference to the world outside the artwork to which they are genealogically and analogically connected, and two, since they cannot be understood apart from the anthropic, pursued objective aims and, therefore, apart from the author and spectators. Following Gadamer, the nature of works of art is interrogative and appellative, and their contents could be partially enigmatic and open to interpretation (Gadamer [1986]).

The theory presented also lies far from Ayn Rand's philosophy, which considers the work of art as an aesthetic microcosm representing, recreating or concretizing a metaphysical view (Rand [1975]: 20, 25). Rather, the artist's metaphysical value-judgments may be reflected in certain works of art, but they are not a distinctive and necessary essential content of the arts, for there are many works of art in which such contents are not present.

George W. Bertram defined arts as rational, human, self-determined, unassured practices embedded in tradition and related to an open future (Bertram [2019]: chp.4). Undoubtedly, substantive arts are rational, open practices embedded in tradition, but it is not as clear that they are "self-determined practices", since they have to be embedded in specific material conditions (for example, they depend on the state of techniques and technologies at each historical moment). In any case, arts share the characteristic of being rational, open, human practices embedded in tradition with many other non-artistic activities, such as political, economic, technical, technological and scientific activities, among others. Thus, Bertram's criteria are not distinctive to substantive arts. The criterion proposed by Alva Noë, who considers that artworks' main aims are confrontation, intervention, subversion and re-organization, is not distinctive either, although it may be constitutive (Noë [2015]: 29). Again, it can be argued that political activity can meet all of those purposes without being considered a substantive art. Noë puts forward certain similarities between the arts and philosophy (as «reorganizational practices») but he does not establish distinctive features to understand their differences. On the contrary, his characterization of artworks as strange tools to study ourselves and to investigate what makes us human (Noë [2015]: 30; 101) is excessively restrictive and anthropocentric since it must be taken into account the existence of artworks that have no direct anthropic reference, analogy or meaning, and contribute to investigate things and processes other than ourselves.

3. SOME COROLLARIES OF THE PROPOSED THEORY

3.1. On the uselessness of the theory about the essence of the arts

Making or commenting on a work of art does not require a proportionate aesthetic theory about what art is. Knowledge of the objective aims of the arts can be completely irrelevant and even detrimental to the artist and the critic. Artists whose *finis operantis* are the inspiration of God or the ascent to the Absolute Spirit through their art may be more motivated for their work than those possessing a non-metaphysical philosophy of art. Critics skeptical about the possibility of defining art can make many interesting considerations about a particular work of art while the philosophy of art I have defended here could inhibit them from making many of those insightful comments.

3.2. If the arts are technical, then it is worth drawing distinctions between the arts of poiesis and the arts of praxis

If we take into account the distinction between techniques of praxis (*agere*) and *poiesis* (*facere*), we could also speak by extension of practical arts and *poietic* or productive arts. There are substantive arts requiring the actual execution of a process by one or more interpreters, as in theater, music and dance, while there are other arts that give rise to a product that separates itself from its possible interpreters, as in painting, sculpture, architecture and literature. Furthermore, this criterion shows us the internal connection between the substantive arts and the servile arts or the earlier adjective arts. Slaves and servants cultivated the servile arts by developing technical skills, both in the realm of *praxis* and *poiesis*. Free men cultivated the liberal arts so as to become wise and virtuous. The substantive arts are genetically connected with the servile arts and techniques (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance and theater), for no one considers a wise and virtuous man to be a work of substantive art. Servile arts were also adjective arts since they served certain external purposes (religious, political, military, social, economic, etc.).

3.3. If the arts are techniques, then they involve various degrees of destruction and reconstruction of reality

The techniques can be classified based on the degree of destruction and violence that they produce in reality, which ranges from absolute destruction (hunting, war) to the mere harnessing of natural processes (a sailing ship, a wind power station) (Bueno [2000b]).

Works of art can always be broken into formal parts such that there is no abstract art in the strict sense. Even the so-called abstract works, where the degree of deconstruction is maximal, cannot be made without forms, even though these forms are parts of the result of the destruction of the real at various scales, and even if these formal parts are strangely combined. All arts suppose the analogy, more or less recombined and varied, of earlier geometric, biological, technical, technological and other forms.

Irrespective, it is interesting to note that there are arts that do not admit the variety of "abstract art". Relatively speaking, sculpture, painting, music and dance may lose references to specific morphologies external to the artwork and may lead to abstract sculpture, painting and (non-vocal) music. Literature, theater, vocal music and cinema cannot reach this disconnection. The function of the works of abstract art will have to be understood to a greater extent as an exploratory function such that the substantive work of art appears as a construction that invites us to explore it, as also happens so often with the abstract structures in the formal sciences that lack any application in other areas.

3.4. The analogy can affect terms, relationships, and operations: a reinterpretation of Lessing's criterion

In *Laocoon,* Lessing classified the arts based on the role that time plays. There are certain exclusively static arts (plastic arts, especially painting) in which time does not play a major role since it is about perceiving a fixed image. On the contrary, in other arts (singularly, poetry and theater) the succession of the parts of the work is a constituent part thereof: they are arts that have to manage time and, therefore, are somehow "narrative arts". In *Laocoon*, he refers to poetry, but it seems that the proposed criterion would put music, dance and cinema together with poetry and not painting (Lessing [1762]: 66).

Lessing's criterion relates to the procedural nature of the work of art. When the process of its reception is governed only by the viewer, the situation is different than when that process is narratively guided by the artist. In my view, the fundamentals of Lessing's distinction are as follows. In painting and sculpture, the understanding of analogies only requires the consideration of the similarities between terms and relations. In literature, dance and music, it is essential to also keep in mind the similarities between the operations of the subjects involved (musicians, dancers, narra-

tors, dramatic characters) since those arts include the deployment of a narrative time.

3.5. The psychagogical function of the processual arts

In certain arts, the artist leads the viewer to see, hear and read at all times what the author imposes. The spectator or reader agrees to be guided, to be exposed at all times to the stimuli that the author wants, to be led by the hand. The author manages the audience's emotions, awakens and dulls their desires and alters their feelings and passions, building a narration given in time. The author acts a *psychagogist*, a conductor or guider of souls.

The question that should be discussed is whether or not the *psychagogical* function of the arts turns these arts into servile arts at the service of that sentimental drive. On the contrary, it can be defended that they remain substantive arts attempting to explore subjective and social contents so as to carry out this liberating catharsis, which allows us to take some distance from that psychological and social world.

The *psychagogical* function of the arts is a specification of the aforementioned analytical and exploratory functions where the understanding of specific analogies requires not only considering the similarities between terms and relations but also between the operations of the involved subjects. In painting and sculpture, we mostly have terms and relationships and, consequently, their *psychagogical* effect is comparatively weak, whereas in the narrative arts we have to take into account the analogy of operations and their unfolding in time. Accordingly, in those processual arts, the *psychagogical* effect is inescapable.

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Aisthesis

To Brecht and Back. Notes on Clement Greenberg's *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*

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Abstract. Clement Greenberg's international reputation is partly due to the success of one of his first and most perceptive essays, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, published in the Fall 1939 issue of "Partisan Review". Despite its unsurpassed importance, the article still requires a broader comprehension of its origins: according to Greenberg's personal papers, the essay's main concepts began to take form during the Winter 1939, when the author was involved in the drafting of a new essay on Bertolt Brecht, still unpublished today, at that time submitted to the "Partisan Review"'s editorial board but rejected. A second document enables to trace back *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*'s roots even further: according to a letter by Greenberg, one of the editors, Dwight Macdonald, plagiarized the rejected script as his last essay, *Soviet Society and Its Cinema*, clearly seemed to prove. The varied topics articulated in the letter, as well as in the draft on Brecht, would be at the basis of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, becoming crucial and early components of the editorial process of the well-known essay.

Keywords: Clement Greenberg, Avant-Garde and Kitsch, Bertolt Brecht, Dwight Macdonald, Marxist Criticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

After eighty years since its first publication on "Partisan Review" in 1939, Clement Greenberg's *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* is still regarded as one of the most influential essays of the twentieth century. By addressing urgent cultural concerns, the text's resonance moved far beyond the confines of the New York intellectual community and immediately reached the European shores. Still today Greenberg's work is surrounded by attention and interest: it is not an exaggeration to state that *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* has now achieved the high canonical status of a *classic* (Decter et al. [1986]; Ostrow [1989]; Greenberg, Schneller [2017]: 226). Through the elaboration of the essay's main thesis, that is the dialectical relationship between popular culture (kitsch) and avant-garde, Greenberg already developed the vocabulary and the conceptual framework of his model

of thinking and writing. In a sort of way, with *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* the author already outlined the main direction of his future criticism, making this essay a paradigm of his critical and aesthetic perspective.

The historical and ideological context in which Greenberg's ideas flourished was deeply influenced by Marxist theory, which provided the main intellectual criteria for the evaluation and revaluation of twentieth-century cultural development (Clark [1961]: 71-73; Greenberg, Schneller [2017]: 19-21). From the second half of the 1930s, "Partisan Review" became one of the chief publishing forums for the Leftist intellectuals and a lively context for debate, especially during the war years (Orton, Pollock [1981]: 211-219; Gilbert [1968]; Bloom [1986]; Cooney [1986]; Wald [1987]; Froio [2018]: 30-38). At that time, the journal espoused a particular ideology by openly advocating Leon Trockij's intellectual and political stances, a disposition that was especially enforced after the Moscow trials, when the revolutionary was sentenced to death (1936-1937)[1]. Greenberg's initial formation as a Marxist art critic should be considered against the backdrop of his early years as a contributor for "Partisan Review" between 1939 and 1942: the journal was the primary vehicle through which the young writer's ideas were introduced to the American, then the European, *Inteligencija* (Clark [1961]: 71-74; Noyes-Platt [1989]; Rubenfeld [1997]: 42-67; Noyes-Platt [1999]: 239-250; Goldfarb Marquis [2006]: 33-34, 48-58). *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, published in the Fall 1939 issue, at the very outset of Greenberg's collaboration with "Partisan Review", has its roots in the debates and commitments of the 1930s, becoming the visible product of a peculiar histori-

cal circumstance: the paper discussed many of the issues at the core of "Partisan Review"'s cultural agenda of those years, especially the shared concern about the emergence of an insidious counter-culture, reinforced by the totalitarian regimes, the one that Greenberg later identified with the word *kitsch* (Noyes-Platt [1999]: 87-159).

The principal aim of the present study is to open *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* to a different form of close interpretation and analysis, strongly based on the critical survey of Greenberg's personal papers held by the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (California). The paper especially seeks to address problems and issues related to the essay's genesis and editing process: through questioning the archival materials, it becomes possible to form a clearer picture of both the intellectual and the *physical* development of the essay. Alongside this central intent stands an additional one, which is the purpose of providing a firm textual basis for a better understanding of Greenberg's methodology at the very beginning of his debut as an art critic.

2. A NEW ESSAY ON BERTOLT BRECHT (1938-1939)

At the end of the Thirties, Greenberg's interest in the so-called *ersatz* culture was encouraged by the high resonance of Kurt London's volume, *The Seven Soviet Arts*, published in 1938 and soon reviewed by Dwight Macdonald, one of the editors of "Partisan Review" (Macdonald [1939]); at the same time, Greenberg's concern was inspired and vitalized by his personal passion for Bertolt Brecht's poetry. As it is commonly known, the critic reached a turning point in his career with the publication of a brief review of Brecht's *A Penny for the Poor* (also known as the *Threepenny Novel*, the English translation of the *Dreigroschenroman*, first published in 1934, then translated in 1937), that appeared on "Partisan Review" in the Winter 1939 issue (Greenberg [1939a]; Clark [1961]: 73-74; O'Brian [1988]: XVIII-XIX). But, as the critic's personal correspondence points out, the beginning of the work on Brecht

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[1] "Partisan Review" formalized its ideological alliance with Trockij by publishing *Art and Politics in Our Epoch* (formerly known as *Art and Revolution*), an essay written by the Russian revolutionary (August 1938), and *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art* (translated by Macdonald, Fall 1938), a manifesto signed by Diego Rivera and André Breton but strongly based on Trockij's reflections and observations on the revolutionary role of art. See Trockij, Siegel (1972): 104-114, 115-121.

can be traced back to the early Thirties: in a letter date-stamped May 2, 1933 and addressed to a close friend, Harold Lazarus, Greenberg confided his desire to write a short story on Brecht's life: «I have an idea for a good story – the Nazi ransacking Brecht's apartment, then Brecht in the RR station about to take a train to Bodensee in Schweiz. But to appreciate the idea you'll have to read the two *Versuche*, I and II, that I read» (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 92-93). This passionate involvement in Brecht's works seemed to be inspired by a sudden interest in Oswald Spengler's cultural pessimism: between December 1931 and October 1932, Greenberg focused his attention on *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918-1922) and on *Man and Technics* (*Der Mensch und die Technik*, 1931) (Greenberg [1928-1932]; Jones [2005]: 79). According to a second letter, date-stamped April 1, 1933 and a third one, May 2, both addressed to Lazarus (Greenberg [1933-1937]), Greenberg had already begun to outline an article on Brecht's poetry, which remained, as we may presume, incomplete. Few years later, thanks to his new friendship with Macdonald, who was introduced to him by Harold Rosenberg (O'Brian [1988]: XXI; Rubenfeld [1997]: 51; Goldfarb Marquis [2006]: 37, 48-51), Greenberg finally had the chance to publish the aforementioned review of Brecht's *A Penny for the Poor*, the critic's very first piece for "Partisan Review". The connection between Greenberg's personal ideas about Brecht's literature, developed at the beginning of the decade, and the following definition of kitsch, cannot be underestimated: informed by his interest in the German author, the young intellectual began to consider the existence of a contradictory affinity between *ersatz* culture and folk art, a link that soon became one of his major concerns.

Greenberg's incisive definition of kitsch is still much quoted by international critics and scholars: kitsch is, as the author claims, «a product of the industrial revolution» and the direct result of «what is called universal literacy» (Greenberg [1939b]: 11); kitsch is the immediate answer to the new demands of the capitalist market and it is addressed to «those who, insensible to the values

of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide» (Greenberg [1939b]: 12). Kitsch's main source of images and clichés is the avant-garde, its ideas and representations: governed by the totalitarian ideology and the capitalist logic, this modern phenomenon is a passive mirroring of high cultural values, whose primary impulse is to assimilate the avant-garde's images and contents in order to become its trivial surrogate; as Greenberg claims, kitsch draws upon «the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture» (Greenberg [1939b]: 12; Greenberg, Schneller [2017]: 21-25). Because of its inner capacity to parody Western society's traditions and precepts, kitsch immediately became the preferred vehicle through which the totalitarian states could propagandize their own political values and repressive cultural standards. Greenberg's concerns about the use of kitsch by the totalitarian regimes as the primary medium for the manipulation of people's choices and preferences, were clearly mediated by Brecht's work but also influenced by the publication of new researches about the Nazi's propaganda. During that time, Greenberg's study of the Brechtian work went hand in hand with the translation of *The Brown Network: The Activities of the Nazi in Foreign Country* (*Das braune Netz: Wie Hitlers Agenten im Auslande arbeiten und den Krieg vorbereiten*, 1936), published in New York in 1936 and edited by W.F. Hare. As Greenberg wrote in a letter date-stamped December 14, 1936, during that time he was in charge of translating «half a German book about the Nazi for Burt Hoffman, who's gone into publishing on his own» (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 148; O'Brian [1988]: XX; Goldfarb Marquis [2006]: 30; Greenberg, Schneller [2017]: 24). Between 1938 and 1939, after the publication of his review of Brecht's *A Penny for the Poor* and before *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Greenberg was working on a second and longer article on the German writer: according to an additional letter (January 16, 1939), at that time the critic already finished the piece on Brecht and submitted it to Philip Rahv, one of the editors of "Partisan Review", who suggested him

to revise it and to focus on two main topics, «popular poetry, Stalinist politics»:

> *About Brecht – you'll disagree with my review [The Beggar's Opera – After Marx: Review of A Penny for the Poor by Bertolt Brecht]. As to my other piece, the article – it's about Brecht's poetry, not about himself. Of course, my consideration of his poems is inadequate, but I don't agree that it's ineffectual. But how can any good poetry be introduced adequately? Shall I, like you, give an impressionistic description of it? No. I must explain its public significance. As for [Philip] Rahv's remark, in rewriting the piece I shall have to follow more or less the same directives I started with: popular poetry, Stalinist politics.* (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 191-192)

The scrutiny of Greenberg's personal papers held by the Getty Research Institute, led to the identification of the mentioned paper, which can be recognized in a still unknown draft entitled *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* (Greenberg [1938-1939?]). The article, twenty-two pages long, bears the signs of handwritten corrections and annotations, surely made by Greenberg before or after the submission to Rahv. *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* was conceived as an analysis of Brecht's work and, at the same time, as an ideological and politicized intervention on the pervasive force of popular culture under late capitalism. Therefore, Greenberg's primary intentions were to examine in depth the prevailing popular culture narrative (not yet called kitsch) and the modern conditions of both visual and verbal art practices. Still today the relevance and significance of this unknown essay has not been acknowledged or recognized by scholars yet: on one side, the paper documents the strong interdependence between the critic's reflections on Brecht and the further definition of kitsch; but on the other, the essay enables to visualize Greenberg's critical methodology.

Given that *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* is at the core of the critic's observations on the relation between high and low (popular) culture, namely the essential assumption at the basis of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, the connection between the two essays is much stronger: we may state that

Aspects of Bertolt Brecht constitutes the *primary genetic space* of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. One persistent thread in Greenberg's early works is the tendency to combine or layer different drafts in order to create one complete essay: the germ of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* can be traced back to an articulated process of selection and stratification of entire paragraphs from the piece about Brecht, then combined with other scatter notes that represent the first tentative definition of the main features of Western popular culture, finally designated with the word kitsch. Therefore, *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* immediately became for Greenberg the arena for the experimentation with new crucial themes and for the development of a more *effective* vocabulary.

The main difference between the two essays concerns the importance given to Brecht's literary works: in the first one, the German author is the leading subject of Greenberg's reflections about the contradictory coexistence of high art with popular culture; in the second one, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, as the title immediately highlights, the main topic is the arduous survival of avant-garde art, oppressed by the rise of Nazi-Fascism and the emergence of new standards resulting from the modern homogenization of culture. As the leading contents of *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* display, it was Greenberg's ambition to demonstrate and then analyze the extensive interdependence between Brecht's poetry and the cultural consequences of the preeminence of the capitalist market. By positioning the German author's thoughts in relation to their social and political context, it was possible for Greenberg to determine the dialectical correlation between progressive/avant-garde art and popular culture. Therefore, the analysis of Brecht's work gradually became an open arena in which the problem of kitsch could be defined and qualified[2]. Considering the future

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[2] Greenberg's interest in the social and political context that gave rise to kitsch, was shared with other American intellectuals, especially with Meyer Schapiro. It is quite impossible to underestimate Schapiro's contribution to the definition of an effective critical methodology rooted in the Marxist model of thinking and writing, and com-

definition of kitsch as a *crossbreeding* of popular culture and vanguard forms, Greenberg's interest in Brecht comes with no surprise: in the opening pages of the essay, the critic immediately emphasized an original feature of Brecht's literary works, that is the experimental interaction between a refined style and an informal register. As Greenberg underlined, this original coexistence of both types of rhetoric, a quite prominent feature of Brecht's literary work, was deeply rooted in the tradition of the German folk ballad: namely a cultural hybrid, it provided an effective example of the combination and stratification of two opposing genres of literary structures, the folklike rhyme and the lyric poetry, and it soon became the perfect testing ground for Brecht's literary practices. According to Greenberg's essay, this creative position required to be interpreted as a political gesture: Brecht's insistence on the colloquial lexicon was not a mean to attract a mass audience, as many misinterpreted it, but was the clear sign of his aversion for the bourgeois set of beliefs and general cultural attitude.

At that time, the emphasis on the synthetic character of Brechtian writing soon became Greenberg's leading interest: two opposed elements, the popular-folk culture and the vanguard, managed to coexist in an original hybrid creature, that is Brecht's art. These observations, at the core of Greenberg's essay, went hand in hand with other considerations about the relationship between folk art and *ersatz* culture: six groups of loose notes bridge the gap between *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* and the forthcoming *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, mediating between the two essays (Greenberg [1938-1939]). The scholars have not properly

acknowledged this aspect of Greenberg's interest in *ersatz* culture yet: according to these notes, the critic was deeply immersed in the reconstruction of the gradual conversion of folk art into kitsch, a topic that is not fully developed in *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, conceivably because the critic preferred to expand his considerations on the origins and progression of avant-garde art[3].

At the very beginning of his reflections on Brecht, Greenberg conceptualized the polarity between folk art and high-elitist culture, which clearly foreshadowed the future dichotomy between kitsch and vanguard. The critic wrote down that native art had to be considered as the immediate precursor of kitsch and as the main opponent to high culture before the emergence of capitalism. Still untouched by the development of the capitalist market, the rural communities could find diversion and entertainment only in the native traditions: the forms and substance of this kind of art were simple and familiar, deeply rooted in the farmers' habits and way of living. But with the urbanization of the masses and the spread of literacy, these social and cultural circumstances drastically changed: the traditional background, the country, was replaced by the city, and the rural communities were gradually employed by the industries. The change of both the social system and the working context went hand in hand with the development of new forms of diversion: since the folklike traditions could not satiate an unprecedented appetite for diversion, the masses searched for new sources of entertainment; according to the supply and demand mechanism, at the core of the capitalist system, the cultural market immediately provided a suitable set of commodities. An increasing appetite for new cultural products character-

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patible with the issues and questions raised by the historical and formal development of the visual arts across the centuries. As two of Schapiro's early essays clearly exhibit (Schapiro [1936]; Schapiro [1937]), the critic read the cultural and political turmoil of those years through the lens of Marxist traditional assumptions about the relation between class and capital, base and superstructure. Apropos of Schapiro's critical methodology and frame of references, see Hemingway [1994]; Hills [1994]; Noyes-Platt [1999]: 157-159; Froio [2018]: 101-109.

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[3] Alice Goldfarb Marquis has already stressed the presence of some peripheral informal documents, mainly notes and other scattered sheets of paper, related to Greenberg's gradual conceptualization of kitsch art and preserved by the Getty Research Institute. Despite her emphasis, these documents have not received the proper attention they actually deserve. See Goldfarb Marquis [2006]: 52-54.

ized the modern era: commercial literature, radio programs, Hollywood movies, catchy music etc. soon became the new attractions for the working class community. These genres of art, popular and inexpensive, were gradually replacing the native art expressions, creating, as Greenberg noticed, the first form of universal, in the sense of global, culture. The peasant only apparently abandoned his native traditions: instead, he could recognize the same pleasant design and pattern in the commodities the capitalist market was now offering him in exchange for money. For this reason, kitsch couldn't be defined as a *new* form of art: it exploited the preexisting cultural expressions and strategically converted them into a commodity, suitable for the routines and cultural level of the working class. Greenberg noted that several elements that characterized Russian folk art (i.e. the enjoyable use of colors, the pleasing spatial organization and the figures arrangement) simply migrated from the traditional sacred images to create the exemplary scheme of the so-called Socialist Realism, the official art style of Soviet Russia under Stalinist totalitarianism. For the very first time in history, the peasant found himself deeply attracted to this genre of images rather than to the traditional icons: more gratifying and pleasant, these commodities satiated the spectator's sheer appetite for thrill and emotion, a kind of diversion that the native religious images were unable to provide.

3. DWIGHT MACDONALD'S PLAGIARISM AND THE GERM OF *AVANT-GARDE AND KITSCH*

According to the already mentioned letter written by Greenberg and addressed to his friend Harold Lazarus, *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht*, once submitted to the Partisan Review's editorial board, didn't satisfy Philip Rahv's expectations (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 191-192). Therefore, the author abandoned his project but attempted to outline a new article few years later (1941), entitled *Bertolt Brecht's Poetry*, largely based on the previous draft and then finally pub-

lished by "Partisan Review" (Greenberg [1941]).

Around February 1939, Greenberg unfortunately noticed that *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht*, already proposed to the magazine, had been plagiarized by Macdonald, who used it as the starting point for his new piece, *Soviet Society and Its Cinema* (Macdonald [1939]). Greenberg confided his suspects to Lazarus (February 16, 1939):

Did you read Macdonald's piece yet? I smelled something familiar about it, something that came from my piece on Brecht's poetry [Aspects of Bertolt Brecht], and sure enough it turns out that the other editors of the magazine objected to Macdonald that he had taken my ideas. He himself told this to Sol [Greenberg, Clement's brother]. (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 194)

Notwithstanding his doubts, Greenberg finally decided to write a missive addressed to the editor: «I sent him a long letter pointing out certain things I disagreed with in his article and my own ideas on the subject – nothing at all to do with his having taken them, for I'm still not sure that he has, or if he has, he's garbled them beyond recognition» (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 194; Jones [2005]: 22). As Greenberg later reported in the same missive, Macdonald not only replied to his letter but encouraged him to use it as the foundation for a new essay: «So he answered by saying that he thought my letter was wonderful and that he wants to publish it as an article in the next "Partisan Review" [issue]» (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 194). According to a survey of Greenberg's personal papers, the critic preserved the aforementioned missive: the original letter is eight pages long, typewritten and annotated, and dated February 6, 1939 by the author himself (Greenberg [1939]). As the pages exhibit, Greenberg took notes in the margins of the document: the visible signs of a process of revision demonstrate that the missive was actually used as a draft for a further plan, conceivably the arrangement of the forthcoming *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. Several elements confirm this hypothesis: besides the proximity of the two letters, the first one addressed to Macdonald (February 6, 1939) and the second one to Lazarus (February 16), the *literal* similarity

between the former missive and several passages of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* is quite unmistakable. If *Aspects of Bertolt Brecht* represents the former draft of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, as the previous paragraph proved, then the letter addressed to Macdonald clearly stands between the two essays. According to this theory, the missive should be defined as a meaningful *palimpsest*: the overlappings of several notes and amendments, especially the erasure of the second person singular, formerly the direct reference to the addressee, demonstrate that Greenberg resumed the letter after Macdonald's encouraging answer and considered it as a suitable *working space*.

Since the beginning of the letter, Greenberg took up the questions raised by Macdonald in his essay, *Soviet Society and Its Cinema*, but at the same time he dissented from his opinion, shared with Kurt London, about the masses' predilection for commercial culture and their rejection of the modernist art movements, as Cubism and abstract art in general. Despite the shared assumption that the emergence of a new counterculture was threatening the survival of the avant-garde, Greenberg disagreed with Macdonald's statement about the nature of the relationship between the ruling class and the masses: according to the editor's viewpoint, the historical development of Western art moved forward without coming into contact with the masses and strictly followed its own path, dictated by the social and economic interest of the middle class. As Greenberg asserted in the letter, for too long the vicarious influence of the working class on the direction of Western art had been neglected by the leftist intellectuals: Macdonald's piece perfectly exemplified the rooted inclination to give a one-sided perspective on a much more complicated and multifaceted phenomenon. In Greenberg's opinion, for centuries the dominant class had exerted a pressure on the masses by imposing a *raw* version of its own cultural values and forms of entertainment. These two main strands, high art and popular art, had always been entwined, Greenberg noted, and a German word, kitsch, here used for the very first time by the critic, represented the more suitable

expression to define this complex crossbreeding phenomenon.

Following on from this crucial argumentation, Greenberg tried to provide an explanation for the masses' attitude towards art, especially their predilection for kitsch instead of other cultural expressions, like Cubism or Fauvism. Macdonald, still quoting from London's volume, stated that the Russian uncultivated working class favored the realism of Ilya Repin's paintings and disdained Picasso's still lives because it was instructed to do so by the regime. But the Western school system, Greenberg replied, taught to respect the so-called classical art, like Rembrandt's masterpieces or Ingres's paintings, and to avoid trivial and commercial styles, such as Maxfield Parrish's affected art. The reason why the masses were attracted to kitsch depended on the formal characteristics of kitsch itself: a commodity produced by the capitalist market and perfectly planned to beckon the uncultivated masses, kitsch had no competitors, it immediately gratified the working class' tastes and provided inexpensive sources of amusement. The audience's reaction to kitsch was both *sympathetic* and deeply *impulsive*: since it was not mediated by cultural constructs, the relationship between consumer and commodity was strictly instinctive and immediate.

In addition, Greenberg did not agree with Macdonald and London about a further issue: according to both critics, Nazi-Fascism and Stalinism represented the roots of the phenomenon of kitsch, and consequently the masses were only passive victims of the regimes' persuasive propaganda against the avant-garde. Greenberg's opinion was exactly the opposite: the dictators reinforced their supremacy by satisfying *a collective demand* and providing the working class with its object of desire, i.e. kitsch commodities. The letter argues already for what was to become Greenberg's main concern and commitment as an art critic: following the Marxist assumptions about the mechanism of base and superstructure, Greenberg diverged from Macdonald's argumentation and, instead of blaming the totalitarian regime's high control over art and education,

stressed the connection between social-economic imbalance and cultural dissolution. As the critic asserted both in the missive and in the essay, during the last decades, Western society gradually became uncertain of its own values and beliefs: in these particular conditions of ideological confusion and collective weariness, the capitalist system took advantage of the masses' ignorance and poverty, and presented itself as the only possible solution to their despair by offering means of instant satisfaction and temporary joy.

4. CONCLUSION

As we tried to highlight, Greenberg's letter to Macdonald shares certain fundamental assumptions with the forthcoming *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*: entire paragraphs are literally reproduced in the essay and several passages outline the main topics later pursued by the critic. Besides the several cross references, the two documents especially share the same conclusion: they both claim that the only solution to the decay of avant-garde art is the establishment of a socialist regime. The following quotation comes from *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*:

> *Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word.*

> *Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture – as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.* (Greenberg [1939b]: 22)

In spite of his political ideology and declared faith in Socialism, Greenberg never believed in the *messianic* role attributed to the working class: he always doubted Trockij's prediction about a bright and rich cultural era governed by the dic-

tatorship of the proletariat, mainly because he couldn't trust the idea of the potential intellectual superiority of the masses[4]. In the same way, Greenberg wasn't certain about Brecht's expectations for the forthcoming dismantle of the bourgeois system of values: he couldn't agree with the idea of an extreme cultural democratization controlled by the working class, who would finally have access to a cultural dimension that had always been limited to the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie[5]. Consequently Greenberg's assumptions were quite the opposite: as he declared in *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* and then, only one year later, in the following essay, *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (Greenberg [1940]), the avant-garde culture had always belonged to the middle class *inteligencija*, which soon became its social and economic base; but, with the gradual appearance of late capitalism, came a new era of cultural uniformity, misinterpreted as an unprecedented achievement of Western democracy[6]. In Greenberg's opinion, the working class' new cultural power constituted a threat to the survival of the avant-

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[4] Apropos of Trockij's theory about the necessity of a «revolutionary mass base», see Trockij, Siegel [1972]: 104-114; about the critical reception of Trockij's ideas by the New York intellectuals, see Orton, Pollock [1981]: 214-217.

[5] Greenberg's admiration for Brecht seems quite contradictory once we have evaluated their divergent perspectives on modern art: since his first essays for "Partisan Review", Greenberg had always advocated abstractionism and condemned representational art, especially Socialist Realism, the one notably fostered by Brecht.

[6] Greenberg reinforced his cultural and political stance with his later essay, *Towards a Newer Laocoon*, generally regarded as the extension of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. The author here displayed an elitist point of view about the fate of art by stressing the connection between avant-garde art (i.e. abstract art) and its exclusive intellectual audience. About Greenberg's cultural elitism see Goldfarb Marquis [2006]: 57-58; in relation to *Towards a Newer Laocoon*, see Greenberg, Schneller [2017]: 27-30; about Greenberg's cultural pessimism, see ibid: 35-37. An extensive analysis of Greenberg's *Laocoon* is provided by Froio [2020], a monographic study focused on the scrutiny of the essay's primary drafts held by the Getty Research Institute.

garde: the bourgeois élite, a culturally progressive and wealthy ruling-class, was now replaced by a new *unintelligentsia*, a reactionary and indigent social group, which was actually destroying the Western cultural heritage by demanding a massified pseudo-art. The traditional social basis of the avant-garde, the middle class, found itself definitively pushed out and banished. Greenberg's personal answer to the modern cultural decline was extremely clear: he truly believed that the avant-garde required to be isolated from the capitalist voracity and from the sight of the culturally undeveloped masses; only the enlargement of the distance between the two social classes, the middle and the working class, and their respective art forms, would prevent the definitive assimilation of the avant-garde into kitsch[7].

Considering Greenberg's negative opinion about a future working-class sovranity, the one predicted by Marxism, his conclusion that only a Socialist government could be the answer to the decline of Western culture, seems quite contradictory. Therefore this persistent calling upon Socialism, both in the essays and in the letter to Macdonald, instead of a demonstration of Greenberg's belief in Marxism, should be considered as a sort of *deus ex machina*, a narrative expedient that at the time constituted the best suitable explanation for the rising power of Nazi-Fascist ideology and its subsequent cultural consequences. Greenberg's remark, «we look to socialism simply *for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now*» (Greenberg [1939b]: 22, author's italics), is quite significant: it is not difficult to posit a link between this statement and its probable source, most likely Rosa Luxemburg's known maxim «Socialism or Barbarism» (Luxemburg, Basso [1967]: 447; Clark [1961]: 78). Written immedi-

ately after the outbreak of the First World War, these words clearly reflected Luxemburg's concern about the fate of both the international proletariat and the future of Western civilization, threatened by the primary diseases of the modern age, namely the capitalist economic system and the imperialist ideology. By 1939, at the eve of the Second World War, when *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* was conceived and then published, Luxemburg's sentence regained its original significance, especially for those who, like Greenberg, were looking for inspiration from the words of the leading Marxist theorists[8]. But, by indirectly referring to Luxemburg's aphorism, Greenberg implied something different: the choice remained the same, Socialism or barbarism, but the meaning of those two words inextricably changed. For Greenberg it was not an alternative between the Nazi-Fascist dominance and the future coming of the proletarian revolution: the alternative was between the final triumph of a misleading counterculture, inspired by the working class' cultural needs, namely the new potential social and political force of the future, as Luxemburg saw it; and the preservation of the only form of art that could be called progressive, politically independent and aesthetically autonomous: the avant-garde.

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[7] T. J. Clark in his essay entitled *Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art*, defined Greenberg's contradictory attitude towards art and politics as «Eliotic Trotskyism», meaning an original combination of Marxist stances with a conservative viewpoint, mainly inspired by T.S. Eliot's cultural perspective (Clark [1961]: 74). See also Leja [1993]: 222-225; about Greenberg's connection with T.S. Eliot, see Golub [1997].

[8] At that time, Greenberg was extremely fascinated by Luxemburg's writings and shared this interest with the journal's editorial board. As a matter of fact, only one year before the publication of Greenberg's *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, "Partisan Review" reprinted some of Luxemburg's letters addressed to her friend Sonia Liebknecht, which documented her life during the imprisonment in Lispia, then Wronke and Breslavia. Macdonald and Greenberg worked together on the translation of the missives, published in the Summer 1938 issue of the journal (Greenberg, Van Horne [2000]: 211).

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Aisthesis

Firefly. Aesthetics of transition

Vaga lume. Estetica della transizione[1]

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Abstract. This essay starts with the assumption that philosophical practice is defined as an exercise of linguistic clarification. Whether in oral or written form, philosophy stems from the need to explicate and objectify the logós, formulating concepts. In the particular case of artistic practice, on the other hand, the signifier is more visible than the signified and the impermanence of objectivity is more clearly shown. In art, language is thus open to multiplicity and inexpressibility and the word is no longer logically or syntactically objectified. The truth which develops within art is not universal but the embodiment of an engaging and embryonic form. Art is the place where truth is in motion, a form of resistance, an all-embracing, unifying experience intimately close to world-changing practices.

Keywords: Transit, Truth, Logós, Clarification, Objectivity.

> O dolce lucciola, bubola o borboleta fosforica,
> che t'industri ad accecarmi con pirotecnie
> di fantascienza da quattro soldi –
> nelle penombre che più non valgono un soldo –
> per non dire quando ti atteggi a fiamma ossidrica tu
> drago che basta il fiato d'un bimbo a estinguere
> (Zanzotto [2011]: 629)

1. LE FILOSOFIE EDIFICANTI. PRECISAZIONE E SIGNIFICATO.

Uno dei caratteri che intimamente muove la pratica filosofica è il tentativo di *precisare* concetti. Precisare è scavare nel linguaggio,

[1] Il saggio nasce dal gentile invito di Roberta Corvi a tenere una lezione con Roberto Diodato sulla questione dell'*oggettività nell'arte*, nell'ambito delle lezioni di *Teoria della conoscenza in età contemporanea* presso l'Università Cattolica del S. Cuore di Milano, il 9 aprile 2019. Da tale sollecitazione germoglia questa riflessione contenuta nel presente saggio che vuole essere un timido ringraziamento per gli stimoli espressi in quell'occasione.

descrivere le tracce antropiche, aprirsi all'archeologia del significato, astrarre dal mondo i concetti che ne rappresentano il senso, definire il luogo della parola. A partire dagli antichi sistemi fonetici orientali (*hiragana* e *katakana*)[2], passando dal logocentrismo occidentale di matrice socratica o dal verbo vivo evangelico (*kèrygma*), il *logós* che si muta in scrittura delinea un orizzonte metafisico in cui la parola fonetica in presenza si trasforma in traccia dell'assenza. Si tratta di un'assenza che pesa, come ricorda Derrida, perché mette potenzialmente in crisi il sistema metafisico tradizionale resosi visibile nella traccia scritta come alterità irrappresentabile. «Se il momento non-fonetico minaccia la storia e la vita dello spirito come presenza a sé nel soffio, è perché minaccia la sostanzialità, altro nome metafisico della presenza, dell'*ousìa*». (Derrida [1967]: 30). Che sia voce (*phoné*) o iscrizione (*gràmma*) nella filosofia vi è comunque il desiderio di precisare il *logós*, creando concetti e concatenazione di concetti, scoprendo nuove e inattese curvature lungo gli assi cartesiani della domanda.

> *Il concetto è sì una soluzione, ma il problema a cui risponde risiede nelle sue condizioni di consistenza intensionale e non, come nella scienza, nelle condizioni di referenza delle proposizioni estensionali. Se il concetto è una soluzione, le condizioni del problema filosofico devono stare sul piano di immanenza che esso presuppone (a quale movimento infinito rinvia nell'immagine del pensiero?) e le incognite del problema nei personaggi concettuali che esso mobilita (quale personaggio precisamente?)* (Deleuze, Guattari [1991]: 72).

In tali incognite risiede la complessità dei personaggi concettuali creati e, benché la filosofia

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2 Per approfondimenti sullo sviluppo dei due sistemi sillabici indicati, si rimanda in modo specifico alla storia del pensiero tradizionale sino-giapponese (Ghilardi [2018]: 25-72), nonché all'analisi della costruzione ideografica nel pensiero giapponese classico (Raveri [2014]: 13-17). In modo particolare, l'impiego del sillabario *katakana* per trascrivere foneticamente le parole straniere ha portato la lingua giapponese a essere molto permeabile all'influsso di altri linguaggi, soprattutto nell'ultimo secolo.

non contempli, non rifletta né comunichi, essa non può fare a meno di *precisare* e chiarificare la contemplazione, la riflessione e la comunicazione. Anche per Wittgenstein lo scopo della filosofia è il rischiaramento logico dei pensieri. Non possiamo pensare a questa pratica come a una dottrina ma come un'attività. «Un'opera filosofica consta essenzialmente di chiarificazioni. Il risultato della filosofia sono "non proposizioni filosofiche", ma il chiarificarsi di proposizioni. La filosofia deve chiarire e delimitare nettamente i pensieri che altrimenti sarebbero torbidi e indistinti» (Wittgenstein [1961]: 50).

Buona parte della tradizione filosofica occidentale ci mostra il filosofo come un soggetto che si aggira nel labirinto dei *significati*, una figura che abita la crisi permanente del *logós* e che da tale pratica risulta vincolato. Wittgenstein ricordava bene che non possiamo uscire dalla gabbia del linguaggio poiché «i limiti del mio linguaggio significano i limiti del mio mondo» (Wittgenstein [1961]: 88). Da questo punto di vista la filosofia, dopo aver assolto alla sua funzione di delimitare l'ambito del dicibile e dell'indicibile, deve essere abbandonata come un attrezzo che ha svolto il suo compito.

Ciò non significa che tutto quello che non si può esprimere con la precisione della scienza o della logica filosofica sia da rifiutare e ignorare. Wittgenstein è anzi convinto che quello che trascende l'orizzonte definito dalla scienza e dalle precisazioni linguistiche, in un rapporto di verificabilità con i fatti del mondo, comporti questioni fondamentali per l'uomo. Infine, la precisazione linguistica è inadeguata per dire l'inesprimibile e l'ineffabile e, tuttavia, questi oggetti del pensiero restano come sospesi nella mente quali concetti che infinitamente chiedono precisazione.

In Nietzsche la questione della precisazione si fa critica, poiché il genio costruttivo dell'uomo, e in particolare del filosofo, è certamente capace di determinare notevoli e complicatissimi edifici teoretici e tuttavia, in questa fitta ragnatela di speculazioni, egli non deve scordarsi che tale ricerca è una sorta di adeguamento del mondo ai concetti che lui stesso crea, in una costante metamorfosi del mondo nell'uomo.

La grande costruzione dei concetti mostra la rigida regolarità di un colombario romano e manifesta nella logica quel rigore e quella freddezza che sono propri della matematica. Chi è ispirato da questa freddezza difficilmente crederà che anche il concetto – osseo come un dado, spostabile e munito di otto vertici come questo – sussiste unicamente come il residuo di una metafora, perché l'illusione del trasferimento artistico di uno stimolo nervoso in immagini, se non è la madre, (è) tuttavia la nonna di ogni concetto (Nietzsche [1873]: 22).

Vi sono filosofi che, avendo compreso tale rischio e tale potenzialità linguistica, hanno sospinto la parola verso un orizzonte evocativo generando e rigenerando concetti in modo quasi poetico. Platone, la cui opera è attraversata dalla consapevolezza della necessità di tale scardinamento linguistico, è tra gli esempi più potenti prodotti dall'Occidente. La filosofia non aiuta a rivelare ma a ricordare (*anàmnesi*). Nella pratica filosofica l'idea si libera come parola dal nucleo più intimo della realtà e rivendica il suo statuto di nominazione attingendo a una memoria originaria e fondativa.

Platone chiarisce in due opere quanto possano essere potenti l'idea e il linguaggio nel loro farsi precisazione, nel loro sviluppo di verità all'interno del dialogo filosofico. Nel *Cratilo*, in cui il filosofo ritiene il linguaggio una produzione umana diretta alla conoscenza delle idee e, in particolare, nel *Fedro* ove lo si mostra come una mirabile invenzione: «Ecco una conoscenza, mio re, che renderà gli Egiziani più sapienti e più abili a ricordare; grazie ad essa è stato trovato il farmaco per la memoria e per la sapienza» (Platone [2015]: 181). Tuttavia, è proprio la scrittura come *pharmakon* a essere messa in discussione poiché, come tutte le medicine, possiede terribili controindicazioni: è cura e veleno e ripete senza sapere.

Lo ricorda bene Derrida in alcune parti de *La Dissémination* (Derrida [1972]: 103-197). Nella rivisitazione del mito di Teuth e Thamus il filosofo francese fa parlare personaggi concettuali, frammenta le immagini di verità, semina tracce. Si tratta di una polisemia irregimentabile che vede nel *logós* il volto nascosto della verità e del suo mistero. «Il *logós* è dunque la risorsa, bisogna volgersi verso di esso, e non solo quando la sorgente solare è presente e rischia di bruciare gli occhi se li fissiamo in essa; bisogna rivolgersi verso il *logós* anche quando il sole sembra assentarsi nella sua eclisse. Morto, spento o nascosto, quell'astro è più pericoloso che mai» (Derrida [1972]: 120). Dunque per Platone, da questa particolare prospettiva, il *logós* diviene "soggetto" e "argomento"[3], e le idee sono delle stelle attorno alle quali orbitano infiniti astri. In questo cosmo ideale ogni stella è legata (*lèghein*) al tutto.

Nel suo *precisare*, che si esprime nella trasformazione delle "cose" del mondo sensibile in paradigmi ideali, il *logós* si trasfigura nel *mythos*, arginando il rischio della delimitazione nominale, della chiusura del linguaggio in un unico significato monolitico. Nonostante Platone proponga una sorta di oggettivizzazione della realtà sensibile nelle idee riesce, attraverso il dialogo poetico, a far fiorire concetti complessi evocando immagini eterne quali oggetti puri della logica. Come la natura proteiforme delle immagini suggerisce, esse restano aperte, operative, potenziali. Tali figure concettuali non possono fare a meno dell'immagine da cui tali concetti nascono. Così, non possiamo più scindere i concetti originari di mimesi, metessi, giustizia, parusia, bene, dal *Mito della caverna*. Il supporto dell'immagine poetica è il veicolo della necessità del concetto.

In questo caso, la potenzialità di un siffatto linguaggio filosofico tenta di evadere dalla mera precisazione per divenire attenzione, un nuovo modo di avvicinarsi spontaneamente all'anima. In Platone il significato è in equilibrio col significante, lo abita e lo dischiude e il concetto sublima il suo precisarsi linguistico nell'oggetto figurale. Questa particolare prassi filosofica edificante, come direbbe Rorty, la ritroviamo anche in Eraclito di Efeso. Ogni radice ama nascondersi e nel crinale che unisce il dentro e il fuori di ogni

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[3] In questo caso Derrida si conforma alla traduzione che Léon Robin fa del termine "idea". Si rimanda per maggior chiarezza ad alcune pagine del testo *Platon* (Robin [1968]: 77-82).

pratica teorica conficcata nella realtà si giunge al perpetuo mutare delle cose e con esse della loro verità. Filosofi come Bergson, Deleuze, Kierke-gaard, Nietzsche, Derrida, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Benjamin attraverso racconti, aforismi e dissemi-nazioni stanno sul bordo del linguaggio filoso-fico e accarezzano quello poetico. È questo luo-go di confine che si affaccia sul buio del mondo che presenta la metamorfosi di cui l'arte ci parla, dischiudendo la piccola luce che sempre vacilla.

Lo stile filosofico, come lo chiamava Deleuze, è etica che vive nell'estetica. Pensare questa con-giuntura in una trasposizione allusiva è un'a-pertura all'imprevisto e una via di fuga da ogni registrazione definitiva. Si tratta dunque del-la necessità di stare sulla linea del pensiero e di saperla spezzare, ritrovandosi in mare aperto, per inventare di nuovo l'impensabile, per raccogliere i bagliori fuggevoli di una vita.

2. POTENZIALITÀ ACQUATICA. SIGNIFICANTE E TRANSITO.

La pratica artistica manifesta con maggior chiarezza il transitare dell'oggettività (intesa come *eìdos*, forma, idea) perché apre il linguaggio al molteplice e all'indicibile (*Das Mystische*) e non ferma la parola, non vuole oggettivarla o preci-sarla in termini logici e sintattici. La parola divie-ne figura, si trasforma in un'immagine intima, potenziale e solitaria che si apre alla relazione.

Nell'esperienza artistica incontriamo la poten-za sospesa del gesto, della parola e della sua con-templazione. Viviamo un'esperienza originaria del mondo in cui soggetto e oggetto, essere e non-essere sono riassorbiti in un'unità da cui lo stes-so pensiero nasce. Si tratta di un luogo (*basho*)[4]

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[4] Come indica puntualmente M. Ghilardi, questo oriz-zonte illimitato di accoglienza ricorda, in un rapporto di analogia, il concetto occidentale di "place", "lieu", "topos", "Ort", "lugar" a partire dalla tradizione platonica relativa al concetto di *chóra*. Per approfondimenti si vedano alcu-ni passaggi del testo di Ghilardi sull'unità di buono, vero e bello nell'estetica di Nishida Kitarō (Ghilardi [2009]: 219).

inoggettivabile, un fondo senza sfondo pronto a raccogliere ogni forma. Il filosofo giapponese Nishida Kitarō ricorda acutamente che «affinché la coscienza e l'oggetto stiano in relazione, deve esserci qualcosa che contiene entrambi in sé. Deve esserci qualcosa come un luogo in cui entram-bi stanno in relazione. La vera forma delle forme deve essere il luogo delle forme» (Nishida [2012]: 31-32).

Tale territorio è la casa d'origine, «ove tutte le metafore e tutti i tropi vogliono essere condotti *ad absurdum*» (Celan [1983]: 17) e dove il significan-te risalta sul significato. È, secondo l'espressione della prima lettera ai Corinzi (15, 28) la "restaura-zione di tutte le cose" (*apokatàstasis pànton*), ossia il tentativo di trovare nella nostra esperienza del mondo qualcosa d'immateriale e terrestre insie-me, qualcosa di circolare, un luogo in cui essere e nulla si costituiscono infinitamente al suo inter-no. Edgar Morin ricorda un discorso dello scrit-tore francese Patrick Chamoiseau, tenuto il 2 giu-gno 2016 in occasione dell'esposizione dell'opera di Ernest Breleur alla Fondation Clémant, in cui si parla del gesto artistico come di un qualcosa di radicale e fondamentale; un qualcosa che è «una porta che si apre, che mai più si richiuderà, e che (ci) trasmetterà senza fine le energie dell'impos-sibile-da-concepire» (Morin [2016]: 112). L'arte è dunque un evento costruito da relazioni, un luogo di sintesi radicale che potenzialmente può essere ovunque e che porta con sé, attraverso una forma in transito, la radice delle forme.

Senza fenomeni, senza opere non ci sarebbe luogo, ma tali fenomeni esistono in virtù del luo-go e del loro accadere. L'opera d'arte è come il fiore descritto da Angelus Silesius nel *Pellegrino cheru-bico*: «La rosa è senza perché (*ohne Warum*), fiori-sce perché fiorisce; non pensa a sé, non si chiede se la si veda oppure no» (Silesius [1905]: 157). È quel mistero che rende muti, è l'immagine di un tremito che manifesta silenziosamente ogni verità, è quella figura inquieta che presenta l'incanto di ogni appa-renza. Si tratta di una verità che non è mai inten-zionale. Benché l'artista costruisca un progetto, egli non produce verità o bellezza con l'intenzione di generare o possedere bellezza e verità. La veri-

tà, ampliando il concetto benjaminiano, è apertura alla relazione e morte dell'intenzione.

«La struttura della verità esige pertanto un essere che, per sua estraneità all'intenzione, somigli a quello puro e semplice delle cose, ma che lo superi per consistenza. La verità non consiste in un intendere che troverebbe nell'empiria la sua determinazione, ma è la potenza che plasma l'essenza di quell'empiria» (Benjamin [1926]: 11) [5]. Come ricorda Raimon Panikkar, stiamo parlando di una verità che non si potrà mai possedere oggettivandola, ma abitare accettando il cambiamento con la massima pienezza nel rapporto con il tutto. La grande difficoltà è cogliere nel cambiamento una verità mutevole, la sua forma che genera forme. L'enigma rimane e noi scorriamo con lui nella vita.

La verità connota sempre una relazione. Quando si distrugge la relazione, si uccide la verità. Se la ricerca della verità non si accompagna a una messa in gioco di quello che io stesso sono, di me che la cerco, allora non è una vera ricerca della verità; è la ricerca di una concettualizzazione o di una dottrina […]. Ma non è questa verità che ci fa vivere. Quando la verità cessa di essere personale, viva, soggettiva altrettanto che oggettiva, cessa di essere verità. Nessuno ha il monopolio della verità, poiché la verità è pluralista, e non plurale. La verità, come oggetto, non esiste; poiché la verità di una cosa, quando mi sforzo di dirla, è inseparabile dagli interlocutori (Panikkar [1998]: 21).

Vi è un'eloquente metafora che dalle culture persiane, indiane, cristiane ed ebraiche, giunge sino alle geometrie filosofiche spinoziane. È l'immagine della goccia d'acqua come luogo di verità e autenticità, in stretto rapporto con l'eternità e la transitorietà dell'esistenza[6]. Se consideriamo un

mare infinito come il luogo inoggettivabile dell'arte, l'essere umano può essere considerato una goccia in questo infinito. Se rimaniamo in ascolto profondo della nostra natura, noi siamo acqua. Le gocce che si perdono nel mare non fanno scomparire l'acqua di cui sono fatte. Quest'acqua che non posso più differenziare dal tutto ma vivere interiormente non cessa di essere acqua, la mia acqua, l'acqua che io sono. In tale infinito non vi è quindi nessun pericolo di dissoluzione. Sono una goccia d'acqua e nello stesso tempo l'acqua della goccia. L'arte, se così possiamo dire, fa vivere la vita eterna qui e ora in questo infinito mare. E così, nell'accadere di ogni transito, saremo contenuti nella vita eterna di questo infinito. Aristotele ricorda che l'essere umano è un animale in cui transita il *logós*, è «tõn zõon lógon **échon**» (Aristotele [2017]: 77), un essere vivente attraversato dalla verità che mai si potrà cogliere in modo definitivo. La grandezza dell'uomo, diceva Nietzsche è di essere infatti «un ponte e non uno scopo: nell'uomo si può amare che egli sia una *transizione* e un *tramonto*» (Nietzsche [1885]: 8).

Nel momento in cui la mia transizione si fonde col mio tramontare nasce l'opera d'arte che infiamma questa relazione e nel mio vivere incarno la verità e l'autenticità di questo transito, di questa combustione drammatica che può divenire poetica. Le opere d'arte sono la continua incarnazione di tale verità. L'oggettività che si disegna all'interno della pratica artistica è sempre transitoria ed essendo sempre transito è anche verità del transitare. L'arte è dunque il *luogo della verità che transita*, è un particolare evento inclusivo, solidale e paticamente vicino alle pratiche che si legano alla trasformazione degli eventi del mondo. Essa stessa è verità contenuta nel bello, nel dolore, nell'autenticità del gesto poetico e in tutte quelle forme che raggiungono il massimo della loro bruciante luminosità[7].

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[5] L'indicazione bibliografica e notazionale rimanda all'edizione qui adottata de *Il dramma barocco tedesco* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1926). Tuttavia si precisa che è stato operato un confronto sinottico con la più recente edizione italiana del testo benjaminiano a cura di A. Barale con prefazione di F. Desideri, Carocci, Roma 2018. Da ora in poi, ogni nota relativa al *Dramma* benjaminiano farà comunque riferimento all'edizione Einaudi.

[6] Il riferimento va alle ricerche transculturali e interreligiose di Raimon Panikkar. In un dialogo con Gwendoline

Jarczyk, il teologo racconta, in sintesi, la storia culturale della metafora della goccia d'acqua (Panikkar [1998]: 74-75).

[7] Volendo approfondire il complesso tema della verità in Benjamin rimando al saggio di F. Desideri *Apocalissi profana: figure della verità in Walter Benjamin* in W. Benja-

Nella verità il momento rappresentativo è il rifugio della bellezza in generale. E infatti il bello rimane provvisto di apparenza, tangibile, finché si riconosce senz'altro come tale. Il suo apparire, che seduce finché non si propone altro che di apparire, si fa perseguitare dall'intelletto, e dà a riconoscere la sua innocenza soltanto laddove si rifugia presso l'altare della verità. Eros lo segue in questa fuga, non persecutore bensì amante, e in modo tale che la bellezza, per salvare il proprio apparire, li fugge entrambi: l'intelletto che la perseguita per timore, l'amante per ansietà. È solo quest'ultimo può testimoniare che la verità non è un disvelamento che distrugga il mistero, bensì una rivelazione che gli rende giustizia (Benjamin [1926]: 7).

La verità che fiorisce nel luogo dell'arte non esiste come idea assoluta e oggettivabile poiché quando cerco di dirla è già nel luogo abitato dalla relazione in cui questa verità si muove. Essa è dunque l'incarnazione di una forma partecipativa e potenziale. Grazie a questa forma sensibile riconosciamo le nostre varietà più autentiche e vediamo fuggire questa immagine in un luogo che diffonde dentro sé la propria ombra. Uno specchio nero che illumina se stesso e accoglie le forme nel loro eterno farsi e disfarsi. Una superficie riflettente che ha il coraggio di accettare l'esplosione interna che la attende.

3. UNA DOLCE RESISTENZA. FORMA E VERITÀ.

Si fa arte per liberare la vita dalle sue prigioni. Infinite le gabbie in mutevoli verità. Attraverso il linguaggio dell'arte si scava un solco che è differenza di potenziale tra un tutto possibile e i suoi accadimenti. Un bagliore che illumina ciò che stava nell'oscurità, che leviga, che arricchisce le condizioni di possibilità di una vita esausta o rigogliosa. E tuttavia un artista non si può accontentare di una vita sfibrata né di una vita personale. Come ricorda Deleuze nell'atto di fare arte c'è il tentativo di fare della vita qualcosa di più di

un fatto personale, di arricchire la vita attraverso una vita.

L'artista o il filosofo hanno spesso una salute fragile, un organismo debole, un equilibrio mal fermo: Spinoza, Nietzsche, Lawrence. Ma non è la morte che li spezza, è bensì l'eccesso di vita che hanno vissuto, provato, pensato. Una vita troppo grande per loro, ma è grazie a loro che "il segno è vicino" (…). Creare non è comunicare, ma resistere (Deleuze [1990]: 163).

Resistere al paradigma informativo dell'attualità, resistere alla mera descrizione della vita, resistere alla morte, al compiacimento dell'arte, alle seduzioni mortifere della violenza. L'artista cerca la verità la cui «fiamma continua ad ardere sui ceppi pesanti del passato e sulla cenere lieve del vissuto» (Benjamin [1962]: 164). In questa fiamma vi è il segreto che avvampa perché l'aria e il legno che ne fanno parte svaniscono per amor di verità. Mentre questa fiamma vacilla, l'artista resiste dolcemente all'accadere del tempo e scompare nella sua opera.

L'artista è dunque trafitto dall'evento e dalla sua potenzialità, dalla verità che transita. In questo passaggio cerca di cogliere l'eterno, poiché l'eterno è nel tempo, è potenza di tempo. È un processo di sintesi che muta e si moltiplica attraverso un'immagine cristallina. Ma l'artista nasconde il significato mostrando il significante di ciò che possiamo chiamare "verità", la sua eterna struttura che continua a ripresentarsi sotto nuova luce. Ogni verità in transito sta in ciò che viene ascoltato non in ciò che viene rivelato, sta nell'abbandonarsi totalmente alla vita, alla poesia che ci parla e che appende ogni preghiera al muro del tempo.

Quando vuoi pregare,
quando vuoi sapere
quel che sa la poesia
sporgiti,
e senza esitazione
cerca il gesto più piccolo che hai,
piegalo all'infinito,
piegalo fino a terra,
al suo batticuore.

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min, *Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti* (1962) a cura di R. Solmi, Einaudi, Torino 2014.

Quando hai fame di luce
e l'amore è cinghia serrata
e il cuore stracolmo
di voli che allacciano troppo
al leggero del cielo,
istruisciti alla pura verità,
quella che non vuoi
e nemmeno immagini,
quella della "polvere sul pavimento
e pane sulla tavola",
ginocchia sbucciate
e pane che parla,
dice la fame giusta (Candiani [2014]: 17).

La vita non muore mai, sono piuttosto gli organismi a morire. La vita è un fluire continuo che crea e ricrea se stessa. L'arte illumina sì la vita di un essere umano, ma la trascende perché viene attraversata da infinite vite. Vite che si succedono e in cui ogni accidente singolare mostra la continuità di un'essenza e di un pulsare che sentiamo sconfinati. Si tratta di stare tra la vita e la morte, in una terra di mezzo in cui le nostre esperienze individuali si trasfigurano e la natura umana appare tramontare meravigliosamente. L'artista non ha un volto, poiché la sua opera è nell'immagine di un eterno divenire.

Una vita è ovunque in tutti i momenti attraversati da questo o quel soggetto vivente e misurati da tali oggetti vissuti: la vita immanente porta in sé gli eventi o le singolarità, e questi non fanno che attualizzarsi nei soggetti e negli oggetti. Questa vita indefinita non ha momenti, per quanto vicini siano gli uni gli altri, ma soltanto fra-tempi, fra-momenti. Non sopraggiunge né succede, ma, presenta l'immensità del tempo vuoto dove si vede l'evento ancora a venire e già arrivato, nell'assoluto di una coscienza immediata (Deleuze [1995]: 11).

In una tale immediatezza si configura una verità che sta nella resistenza potenziale di ogni atto creativo, di ogni singolarità e nel medesimo tempo nella dimenticanza di essere soggetti creativi. L'artisticità diviene nel transito, trova "verità" in questo passare, in questo lasciare andare alla vita. È l'umano che si rigenera inesauribilmente nella forma di ogni forma. Per questo motivo «l'artista e l'uomo morale, nella creazione e nell'agire, possono l'uno vedere un nuovo mondo artistico e l'altro procedere verso un nuovo mondo morale soltanto agendo in modo autentico (*shinshi*)» (Nishida [1965]: 453-454).

Tale autenticità ci porta a guardare un altro volto della *verità*, in un legame consustanziale tra etica ed estetica. Perdere o negare questo legame significa negare le radici dell'arte, smarrire la relazione con le forme di vita, dimenticare la contemplazione proprio perché trasfigurata nella sua estrema semplicità originaria. Le opere d'arte, in fondo, negano l'arte per riaffermare la vita, nei gesti quotidiani apparentemente banali che possono divenire per noi plurali e politici. L'arte è l'esile filo d'oro che esplode nella vita, un dolce veleggiare ai limiti dell'umano per provare a essere il più umani possibile. Non resta che continuare la ricerca dei fosfeni[8], accecata memoria di una luce stellare, ai confini di ogni cecità.

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[8] Fantasmatiche apparizioni luminose che si manifestano alla chiusura o alla compressione delle palpebre. L'occhio guarda se stesso nel buio e il lume razionale del *logós* si fa più vicino ai barlumi fosfenici del poetico.

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Aisthesis

OPEN ACCESS

Stets seh' ich mich mir winken, dem Winkenden entschweben. Robert Walser: to disappear in writing

Stets seh' ich mich mir winken, dem Winkenden entschweben. Robert Walser: scomparire nella scrittura

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Abstract. In Robert Walser's work any intention of meaning would seem to be revoked in doubt, in favour of blatant mannerism. This, in turn, would take the actual form of a proclaimed abstention from the pursuit of any purpose, so as to be similar to a simple graphic texture. The aim of this article is to show how this peculiar textual economy favours the invention of a subject capable of giving rise to a fictitious identity to the point of no longer being able to distinguish any gap between reality and fiction.

Keywords: Robert Walser, Writing, Reality, Fiction, Caducity.

1. Per sua costituzione Walter Benjamin ha sempre esposto le proprie riflessioni nella forma di un esercizio esegetico. Com'egli stesso ammise in una corrispondenza a Max Rychner del marzo 1931, non gli riuscì mai di studiare e di pensare altrimenti che «in conformità con la dottrina talmudista dei quarantanove livelli di significato» (Benjamin [1966]: 524). Questo – continuava – avrebbe dovuto risultare particolarmente evidente nel saggio dedicato a Gottfried Keller, apparso sulla *Literarische Welt* nel 1927. Qui infatti il punto nodale è costituito dal voler situare lo scrittore svizzero «in prossimità di una generazione in preda alla morte, desolata: di come sia propriamente un nonnulla nella forma linguistica, una trama capricciosa, oscura a lui stesso» a decretare la perfezione delle sue novelle (Benjamin [1927a]: 286). Si tratta insomma di porre in chiaro il peculiare «pudore nei confronti del linguaggio (*Sprachscham*)», proprio di autori come Keller o, più ancora, come Robert Walser (Benjamin [1929]: 326). Un rilievo, questo, che a sua volta non intende fermarsi a porre l'accento su una mera *Verschwiegenheit*, quanto

piuttosto a far risaltare l'incapacità del linguaggio di rendere possibile questo riserbo, non riuscendo esso a sottrarsi al registro della predicazione. Al contrario, nelle prose e nei versi di Walser parrebbe osservarsi la messa in opera di una sorta di «esperimento senza verità», per il quale il linguaggio si rifiuterebbe di «riconoscere l'essere di qualcosa come qualcosa» (Lüssi [1977]: 9), con la conseguenza che la stessa possibilità di procedere nella loro interpretazione non tollererebbe di svolgersi in modo convenzionale, attraversandone e delucidandone il dettato.

Se ci si pone in questa prospettiva, ad assumere significato si mostra in primo luogo «il come (*das Wie*)» in Walser si concreta il lavoro sulla parola, il quale parrebbe subordinare «tutto ciò ch'egli ha da dire» (Benjamin [1929]: 325) al semplice gesto con il quale la mano appoggia lo stilo su una superficie, vi avanza premendo o carezzando, e quindi traccia forme regolari, ricorrenti, ritmate. Non dovrebbe, tuttavia, farsi discendere da questa osservazione la conclusione che vuole che in lui ciò che il linguaggio esprime differisca da ciò che esso significa, come se ogni suo asserto possedesse unicamente un'inclinazione a volatizzarsi. Occorrerebbe piuttosto avvertire la portata del diallelo innescato dall'evocare quella crisi del significato del significato alla quale Walser stesso parrebbe alludere là dove dichiara che ciò che lo attrae non è cercare un determinato argomento e darvi uno specifico contenuto, «ma scegliere parole raffinate, belle. Da un'idea posso formare dieci, anzi cento idee, ma non mi viene in mente un'idea centrale. Che so, scrivo perché trovo bello riempire così le righe di lettere aggraziate. Il "che cosa" (*das Was*) mi è del tutto indifferente» (Walser [1904]: 24). L'affermare che tutto quanto è detto deve essere in un medesimo tempo dis-detto implicherebbe una coincidenza di ogni significato linguistico con la sua propria revoca. Sicché Walser attribuirebbe al linguaggio un significato ch'esso non potrebbe in alcun modo esprimere (Plug [2016]: 20), se non – come è stato ritenuto – nella forma della «fantasticheria» (Canetti [1973]: 289) esaltata dalla «dissociazione» (Calasso [1970]: 187). Lo stesso Benjamin sembrerebbe

a questo proposito convenire sull'idea che, nello scrittore elvetico, venga in ultima istanza alla luce «una loquace profondità che ricorda antichi brontolii e scherzi, come le fiabe assurde» (Benjamin [1927b]: 76), così da indurre a lasciare ininterrogato il *che cosa*, a partire dai *dramolets Aschenbrödel* e *Schneewittchen*, Walser esprimerebbe. Non a caso, l'esibito contrasto fra scrittura calligrafica di chiara matrice *Jugendstil* ed una materia fiabesca stravisata da una lacerante angoscia ha per lungo tempo indotto ad interpretare, in special modo il *Märchenspiel* dedicato a Biancaneve, unicamente come un prezioso quanto singolare pezzo di bravura, ispirato da una puro «sentire capriccioso e lubrico» (Bieber [1921]); con ciò mancando di considerare che fin da questi primi esercizi di scrittura il «significante arabescato e cesellato» da Walser non sembra riuscire a coabitare con il significato, come se tra questi due elementi sussistesse una sorta di disagio che porta il segno a frantumarsi (Fattori [2008]: 176), e che porrebbe l'atto stesso dello scrivere sotto una «*Desperadostimmung*» (Benjamin [1929]: 325).

Se questo stato di disperazione rappresenta l'immediata conseguenza dell'indulgere di Walser nella *maniera*, intesa come processo di dismissione d'ogni cifra stilistica e di conseguente esaurirsi d'ogni autentico contenuto, parrebbe in pari tempo potersi in ciò rilevare un processo di messa in parentesi del linguaggio, per mezzo del quale esso si porrebbe nella condizione non già di dire un *qualche-cosa*, ma di esprimere unicamente se stesso (Benjamin [1916]: 144), estrinsecandosi in una forma di rifiuto che tende all'incondizionato. Suggestivamente, Benjamin nota che, in Walser, è come se ogni frase avesse quale unico compito di far dimenticare quella precedente (Benjamin [1929]: 325), perché nei suoi incessanti esercizi di scrittura ad essere infirmato non sarebbe soltanto il rendersi manifesto di qualcosa nel linguaggio, ma la stessa intenzione di significare, quale elemento che sempre anticipa e rende possibile la significazione in generale.

2. Nel tentativo di rendere percepibile tale preterizione di ogni significare, si è ritenuto di

poter scorgere qualche affinità fra i personaggi di Walser ed il Bartleby di Melville (cfr. Vila-Matas [2000]: 15 sgg.), a motivo d'un progressivo trascorrere della parola puramente ornamentale dei primi verso il silenzio del secondo. Nell'«avrei preferenza di no (*I would prefer not to*)» (Melville [1856]: 11) pronunciato dallo scrivano descritto da Melville, benché si dia luogo ad una peculiare economia dell'implicito (cfr. McCall [1989]), è pur vero che ciò avverrebbe a motivo di un rifiuto, di una *preferenza* per una decisione, ancorché negativa, assunta deliberatamente; al contrario, il «nodo del rifiuto» che caratterizza i personaggi di Walser, a partire dallo Jakob von Gunten dell'omonimo racconto, sembra equivalere ad un'astensione che ha fagocitato la coscienza stessa del rifiuto, e che perciò più che una negazione si palesa come un'abdicazione, come la rinuncia – mai pronunciata, mai chiarita – a dire qualcosa o, ancora, come «l'abbandono dell'io, il rilassamento dell'identità, il rifiuto di sé che non si ripiega sul rifiuto, ma apre al cedimento, alla perdita d'essere» (Blanchot [1980]: 33). Il «non voler pensare a nulla» (Walser [1909]: 114) di Jakob von Gunten, non diversamente dal «non voler sapere di nulla» (Walser [1910]: 143) di Kineast, nella omonima prosa del 1910, possiedono un'inesorabilità non condivisa da Bartleby, «creatura di preferenze, non di assunti (*a man of preferences than assumptions*)» (Melville [1856]: 39), votata sì ad un'inerzia sulla quale il gioco delle intenzioni non sembra avere alcuna presa, ma che nondimeno appare essere l'estrema strategia di un soggetto che cerca di salvare dalle spire della totalità sociale un residuo di senso (Magris [1999]: 20).

Bartleby più che non *voler* copiare, *preferirebbe* non copiare: il suo parrebbe essere non già soltanto un mantenersi nell'incertezza, quanto il tentativo di sottrarsi alla cogenza dell'eterno ritorno, inteso come movimento che conferisce esistenza attuale ad ogni possibilità (Blanqui [1872]: 74). Fra la reiterazione dell'impennatura insita nel gesto di copiare e l'attualità eternizzata dall'eterno ritorno sussisterebbe infatti un'analogia sulla quale già Benjamin ha richiamato l'attenzione

(Benjamin [1940]: 1234), e rispetto alla quale la presa di congedo dalle sue mansioni di *law-copist* da parte di Bartleby si porrebbe come una cesura investita della funzione di destituire tale assoluta attualità, in favore di una sua esposizione alla pura potenza come tale. In Walser, al contrario, le figure che popolano le sue prose sembrano precedere la stessa distinzione fra potenza ed atto: esse appaiono avvolte da un baluginio tremolante che rende impossibile coglierne anche solo i contorni – come se si trovassero perennemente sull'*orlo* dell'imperfetto, dell'incompiuto, dell'inquietudine. Forse è questo loro carattere intrinsecamente frammentario ed incompleto a dare l'impressione che ci sia sempre la possibilità di perfezionarne la creazione, e per conseguenza a suggellare la pura artificialità delle opere ch'essi animano. In questo senso la simpatia che, in una pagina del 1917, Walser ammette di provare verso una lettrice di Gottfried Keller, «delusa e seccata (*enttäuscht und mißmutig*)» (Walser [1917]: 185) perché la vita era cosa diversa rispetto a quanto ella leggeva, deporrebbe – è stato osservato (Celati [2004]: 187; Celati [1989]) – a favore di una sua preferenza per l'artificialità di tutte le parole e le immagini. Ma in Walser il laborioso esercizio per fare un buon uso dell'inautenticità non parrebbe seguire l'imperativo dell'esatta deformazione, quale principio cardine di un mondo linguistico incompatibile con la *realtà*, come, invece, accade ad esempio in *The Island of the Fay* di Poe, in cui nulla accade che non possa accadere ininterrottamente, eternamente, simbolicamente, in virtù di un *parlare* senza *dire* (Manganelli [1981]: 114). Quello di Walser sembra piuttosto un simpatizzare per l'irrealtà, in quanto dimensione priva di qualsiasi prospettiva temporale. A giusta ragione W.G. Sebald ha potuto avvicinare Walser a Gogol', in particolare per la mancanza da parte dei loro personaggi di qualsiasi *ubi consistam* (Sebald [1998]: 120): in entrambi, dietro una folla di maschere, si celerebbe il desiderio di portare a compimento una forma di spersonalizzazione che ricorda quella di cui è esempio l'Akakij Akakievič di *Šinel'*, tangibile fantasma di cui è impossibile sapere se si trovi in mezzo alla strada o nel mezzo d'una frase.

Ma qualora ci si soffermasse a considerare certe inclinazioni dandistiche, alle quali peraltro non sarebbe mai del tutto estraneo un qualcosa di convulso e di stravolto (Benjamin [2012]: 466), che traspaiono da alcune note di carattere autobiografico (Walser [1915a]: 36), ovvero da alcune fra le figure più grottesche tratteggiate da Walser, come lo scimmiotto dell'omonima prosa (Walser [1925a]), potrebbe soprattutto essere il Puškin di *Graf Nulin* (*Conte Nulin*), ad essergli accostato. Non soltanto perché vi trova espressione l'esperimento di ridurre i materiali posseduti alla loro grandezza inversa; quanto in ragione di un'inveterata passione per i bottoni, che tanto il protagonista di quella che Nikolaj Nadeždin riteneva essere la migliore opera di Puškin (Puškin [1827]: 25-26; cfr. Tynjanov [1929]: 99), quanto Walser sembrano nutrire. Mentre, però, è possibile attardarsi a scorgere nell'ubbia del personaggio puskiniano «un irridente significato simbolico, un sorridente messaggio in cifra mandato fino a noi dall'ultimo dandy dell'Impero russo» (Vitale [1995]: 149); dallo scrittore svizzero – la cui persona, trasfigurata in quella del protagonista di *Der Gehülfe*, già dava l'impressione d'essere «soltanto un lembo, una fuggevole appendice […], un bottone penzolante che nessuno si prendeva la premura di attaccare» (Walser [1908]: 23) – quei piccoli dischetti destinati generalmente a trovare posto all'interno d'un'asola o d'un occhiello sono tenuti in gran conto soltanto per il loro sapersi tenere nella «più discreta delle discrezioni» (Walser [1915b]: 109).

3. La *capacità di essere inappariscente* (*unauffällig*) di cui il bottone sarebbe emblema (e che i microgrammi, vergati con l'esile punta d'un lapis, lo «stupendo camuffamento calligrafico destinato a nascondere a lui stesso le proprie idee» (Morlang [2005]) impiegato da Walser fin dagli anni Dieci per arginare uno «spaventoso odio verso la penna» (Walser [1979]: 301; cfr. Morlang [1994]: 74), sembrano voler imitare, rendendo ogni manoscritto la fantasmagoria di una piccolezza incantata) parrebbe definire il peculiare spazio fenomenico ch'egli nomina e traccia insieme, affidando la scrittura unicamente «al gioco

della casualità» (Walser [1926]: 65). Un'indicazione, questa consegnata al *Tagebuch-Fragment von 1926*, da prendere letteralmente, ammettendo uno scrivere che vorticosamente e senza alcun orientamento annerisce lo spazio vergine della pagina, quasi si trattasse di lasciar tornare la scrittura alla sua originaria dimensione di disegno (cfr. Walser [1927]: 232), ed il foglio alla sua genuina bellezza (cfr. Walser [1928-1929b]: 183). Lo spazio della scrittura comincerebbe infatti non già con dei segni tracciati sulla pagina bianca, ma esso innanzitutto coinciderebbe coi centimetri quadrati del foglio di carta. Come ha efficacemente notato Ermanno Cavazzoni, Walser pare mettersi «al servizio della carta, la cosa più povera e scontata, ubbidendo ai limiti della carta, ai margini della carta» (Cavazzoni [2006]).

In questa sottomissione alla carta nella sua immediata materialità parrebbe giungere al proprio apice quella forma di esaltazione dell'obbedienza come massima virtù che è stata riconosciuta essere uno dei tratti distintivi dei personaggi di Walser (Walser [1909]: 36, 90; cfr. Coetzee [2007]: 23; Sontag [2009]: 90). Lungi dall'essere affine al *ressentiment* nietzscheano (cfr. Nietzsche [1888]: 26), la subordinazione descritta da Walser sembra piuttosto l'ultimo risultato a cui, non diversamente da quanto avviene in Kafka, arriva il suo studio delle cose (cfr. Benjamin [1929]: 325; Benjamin [1934]: 415; Rendi [1961]: 31 sgg.). Ma sembra pure segnare l'inevitabile approdo d'una scrittura che presuppone, insieme alla estenuazione del soggetto-agente, qualcosa di perennemente incompiuto. Sotto questo riguardo si potrebbe cogliere più d'un profilo di convergenza con la nozione di *Blödigkeit* di cui Benjamin analizza il significato nel suo saggio su Hölderlin (Benjamin [1914-1915]: 125; cfr. Symons [2018]: 224-225). La *goffaggine*, la *semplicità*, ovvero la *timidezza* di cui il poeta svevo aveva parlato in un componimento del 1803, riflettendo sul problema della «missione poetica» (Hölderlin [1803]), è tratto che Walser – come testimonia nel suo libro di memorie anche Carl Seelig (Seelig [1977]: 54) – sente a sé molto affine. La *Blödigkeit* – termine che Hölderlin usa nella sua originaria accezione di "esitazione", di *timiditas* (cfr. Grimm [1854-1960]: 141-

142; Reitani [2001]: 1481) – è da Benjamin definito come «l'atteggiamento peculiare del poeta», quale si concreta in una «esistenza immota (*regloses Dasein*)», in una «completa passività (*völlige Passivität*)» (Benjamin [1914-1915]: 125). Quanto è qui posto in discussione è la pretesa di pervenire ad una forma di scrittura che ambisce ad «accertare gli ultimi elementi» (Benjamin [1914-1915]: 122), ossia i principi fondamentali che dovrebbero regolare e dare forma al mondo, in favore d'una poetica «in cui la figura, la forma viene ad identificarsi con l'informe» (Benjamin [1914-1915]: 120). Analogamente, l'accondiscendenza dei personaggi walseriani impedirebbe loro di acquistare qualsiasi specifico connotato se non quello proprio d'un *non fare* che elude, schiva, disorienta ogni azione dettata dalla volontà di perseguire uno scopo. Essi parrebbero collocarsi «molto vicini a quel nulla che solo rende servibile il qualcosa» di cui si ha espressione nella tradizione taoista (Benjamin [1934]: 435). L'«energia» spesa nel «non far nulla e mantenere un contegno» – di cui si legge nello *Jakob von Gunten* (Walser [1909]: 71) – coinciderebbe infatti con quell'attività fluttuante che non produce assolutamente niente, e che segna il punto di arrivo dell'esperienza totale (e finale) dell'oziosità.

4. «Fantasmare una certa esperienza, se non del niente (è troppo enfatico, troppo metafisico), almeno del *Nulla*» (Barthes [2003]: 260; Barthes [2002]: 222-227): così Barthes descrive l'esperienza del *Wou-wei*, del *Non-agire* orientale. Se in quest'ultimo universo culturale il significato dell'astensione da ogni attività intenzionale distingue «"una specie di passività umile", lontana da ogni desiderio di violenza, ma al fondo una specie di "attività spontanea ed instancabile"» (Barthes [2003]: 261); «in una maniera più occidentale» – prosegue Barthes, richiamando a sostegno una pagina di Heidegger (Heidegger [1936-1946]: 96) – questa oziosità radicale è da avvicinare alla «*Natura*», a motivo del suo mantenersi sempre e soltanto entro i limiti della possibilità. Ed è ad una tale rivelazione che, in uno dei vertici della sua opera, il fulminante *Ich habe nichts*, Walser fa partecipare il «*dummer Bursche*» che con la sua

aria bonaria e trasognata impersonerebbe colui che costituisce con ciò che lo circonda una relazione di puro *sapere* non trasformabile in profitto, e come tale opposta a qualsiasi libido dei sensi e quindi della dominazione (cfr. Walser [1909]: 50).

È alla luce di un tale sapere, capace di ammettere che ogni esistenza sia «fragile, indifesa (*hilflos*)» (Walser [1916a]: 125; cfr. Cacciari [1980]: 188-189), che Walser sembra riuscire a realizzare un atto di totale identificazione con la sostanza dell'effimero. Allo stesso modo del suo *alter ego* Fritz Kocher, egli ha la straordinaria capacità di «veder chiaro nel piccolo» (Walser [1904]: 8), o, meglio, nell'insignificante. Esemplare è al riguardo la prosa *Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen*, nella quale è anzitutto la cenere ad essere descritta nella sua assoluta inconsistenza. Infatti «dove vi è cenere non vi è in fondo proprio nulla (*wo Asche ist, da ist eigentlich überhaupt nichts*). Metti il piede sulla cenere e quasi non ti accorgerai di aver calcato qualcosa» (Walser [1915c]: 328). L'affermazione, più che prestarsi a letture biografiche, che vedrebbero in questa *contemplatio cineris* gli effetti dell'autodafé allestito da Walser per compiere il proprio martirio (Sebald [1998]: 12), parrebbe voler compendiare il movimento inintenzionale che dissemina ogni significato, ogni segno, ogni scrittura. La cenere non si risolve mai in un *lekton* (cfr. Bréhier [1997]: 14-15), poiché essa è pur sempre stata una cosa non soltanto *esprimibile* nel discorso e nel pensiero; essa non è neppure un segno, almeno nel senso di un rimando inferenziale: la cenere è sempre una cosa che, ad un tempo, serba e perde la sua origine. Essa richiama il fuoco, prendendone il posto, ma senza mai coincidervi perfettamente: «se un luogo medesimo si cinge di fuoco […], quel luogo non è più. Resta (come resto) la cenere (*Reste la cendre*)» (Derrida [1987]: 23) – ha scritto Jacques Derrida –, precisando che il termine «resto» va inteso come il tedesco *Rest*, «residuo», e dunque come ciò che può «sparire radicalmente», in quanto estraneo ad ogni sostanzializzazione (Derrida [1990]: 269). Ma la cenere ha, per Walser, anche, forse soprattutto, una vaghezza che l'accomuna alla scrittura decostruita dei microgrammi, i quali si presentano come segni scritturali che non fan-

no, però, quasi più parte d'un codice, ma soltanto d'una testura grafica[1].

5. Se si valuta questa incinerazione della scrittura, capace di sospendere le sue motivazioni anche estetiche, con il *metodo alchemico* al quale Benjamin assimila l'esercizio ermeneutico, deputato a svelare il *cinereo* nucleo nascosto proprio d'ogni opera (Benjamin [1966]: 132; cfr. Benjamin [1922]: 126), parrebbe giungere a compimento quel processo di «evocazione dell'autocoscienza e dell'autocoscienza nella cosa osservata» in cui si adempie la *Beobachtung* critica, in quanto scoperta dell'intenzione interna dell'opera (Benjamin [1919]: 60, 69; cfr. Desideri, Baldi [2010]: 45 sgg.). La quale se stilisticamente, nel caso di Walser, si impernia su un'ironia che trova la sua manifestazione sia in caratterizzazioni soffusamente negative[2], sia – come notò già Kafka – in un «uso evanescente di metafore astratte» (Kafka [1951]: 536), e che produce una dissoluzione della sua forma empirica tale da mostrarne le condizioni del disfacimento, dal punto di vista della sua costruzione immanente rivela, attraverso l'«emblema (*Sinnbild*)» della cenere, la inappropriabilità del proprio nulla.

In una lettera del marzo 1926, nella quale Walser si sofferma a considerare le figure femminili nelle opere di Shakespeare, egli dichiara ch'esse appaiono così vivide perché il drammaturgo «era trasportato (*hinriß*) a non proferire alcunché. Dall'inespresso si sviluppa il figurale (*Aus den Unausgesprochenheiten entwickelt sich das Gestaltliche*)» (*Walser* [1979]: 267). In quest'ultima espressione sarebbe compendiata la necessità di rico-

noscere nel figurale quanto *prende forma*[3] nelle aposiopesi che costellano il dettato e lo sospendono, così da lasciare intendere assai più di quanto esso non dica, ovvero – come in *Der Spaziergang* (Walser [1916b]: 61-62) – facendo emergere dalla trama lo scrittore stesso, incerto e sperduto nel suo medesimo testo e pronto a disfarvisi, simile a un ragno che si dissolva da sé nelle secrezioni costruttive della sua tela. «Queste noterelle intercalate (*Zwischenbemerkungen*)» (Walser [1926]: 71) – sintomo eclatante di una ricorsività linguistica che cela le inquietudini d'una psiche alterata[4] – sembrerebbero essere le commessure testuali attraverso le quali traluce, vaga, indistinta, l'identità di Walser. «A volte mi par d'essere una figura di sogno (*Traumgestalt*), un personaggio chimerico (*Phantasiefigur*). Non vivo, eppure esisto (*Ich lebe nicht und bin dennoch lebendig*), come può essere?» (Walser [1916c]: 73) – si legge in una delle prose che compongono *Poetenleben*, attestando quanto labili siano i confini del suo «Ich-Hier», della sua spazialità esistenziale; e, più in generale, quanto, nella sua opera, siano friabili le distinzioni fra realtà e finzione.

Affrancandosi da ogni riferimento alla realtà effettuale, al punto da sembrare ad Adorno (Adorno [1955]: 260) affetto da una forma di demenza (cfr. Bernstein [2018]), Walser trasformerebbe ogni orizzonte percettivo nel proprio funambolico fantasticare. Come esemplarmente accade in *Das Theater, ein Traum* (Walser [1907b]), testo oniricamente trasfigurato nel sogno stesso di cui parla, Walser elide le frontiere fra descrizione reale e racconto di finzione, trasfondendole in un'unica esperienza di scrittura, che tiene insieme ogni genere letterario, pur disperdendosi in ogni direzione.

I miei pezzi in prosa costituiscono, a mio avviso, null'altro che parti di una lunga, realistica storia priva d'azione. Per me sono gli schizzi ch'io realizzo di tempo in tempo, sono capitoli brevi o lunghi d'un

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[1] Significativo è al riguardo l'accostamento dei *Microgrammi* walseriani con le opere di CY Twombly proposto, con altri, in una mostra, *Scrivere disegnando*, allestita nel 2020 dal Centre d'Art Contemporain di Ginevra, e che si rivela altresì particolarmente coerente con le osservazioni che R. Barthes (Barthes [1982]) svolse attorno all'opera dell'artista statunitense.

[2] Cfr. ad es. Walser (1909): 10: «È privo di carattere, perché non sa ancora cosa sia un carattere»; e 43: «Parla come un capitombolo andato storto, si comporta come una grossa improbabilità impastata in forme umane».

[3] Cfr. Walser (1979): 266: «Le parole formano la pelle che avvolge strettamente il contenuto, cioè il corpo».

[4] Walser (1907a): 39: «Ho finito la frase oppure no? Se non l'ho finita è davvero una bella faccenda che va continuata»; cfr. Middleton (1985).

romanzo. *Il romanzo (Der Roman), che io scrivo ancora e ancora, rimane sempre lo stesso, e potrebbe essere definito come un Io-Libro (Ich-Buch) variamente fatto a pezzi e strappato.* (Walser [1928-1929a]: 322)

Così osserva Walser in un brano composto alla fine degli anni Venti, nel quale vengono rese esplicite le intenzioni della sua poetica, volta a fare del testo la forma in cavo nella quale il *soggetto* fa luogo al fittizio dell'identità, affidandosi alle risorse di un significante capace di dispiegarsi senza o quasi il sostegno del significato (cfr. Tofi [1995]: 169-257). Non si tratta tuttavia soltanto di constatare la giocosa complicità che Walser instaura con i suoi *alter ego* o di misurare la maestria con la quale egli riannoda i fili di ciò che nella sua narrazione sembra sul punto di disfarsi (cfr. Walser [1925b]: 9, 93; Antonowicz [1995]); si tratta piuttosto di osservare la sublimazione dell'*insensato gioco di scrivere*, nel suo riuscire ad esigere da colui che vi partecipa un gesto di definitiva sottomissione: ch'egli rinunci a sé e cessi di designarsi, come se dovesse incorporare la morte, guardarla, leggerla quale sua verità più segreta.

Il giorno di Natale del 1956 ad Herisau, nella Svizzera orientale, alcuni bambini inciamparono nel cadavere di Robert Walser steso sulla nave. Quarantanove anni prima egli ne aveva scritto:

L'uomo giaceva immobile [...]. Era morto assiderato, senza alcun dubbio, e doveva giacere lì da molto tempo, sul sentiero. Nella neve non si scorgevano impronte [...]. Solo le stelle cantavano piano vicino al suo capo, e gli uccelli notturni stridevano: è la musica migliore per uno che non ha più udito né sensi. (Walser [1907c]: 130-131).

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Aisthesis

Social Control and Submission in Edward Bond's *The War Plays*

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Abstract. Reading Edward Bond's *The War Plays* in light of Theodor Adorno and Sigmund Freud, the writers of this article intend to investigate the interconnection between the mechanisms of social control and the psychology of submission. To this end, socio-political institutions in *The War Plays*, represented by *the army* and *the state,* are seen drawing on Adorno's concept of *identity-thinking* (*Identitätsdenken*), by which the cognitive potentials of the characters are systematically suppressed. Also, uninhibited aggression of characters will be discussed in view of the mechanisms of sublimation, and *the addendum* (*Das Hinzutretende*), by which the complexities of the response characters give to the situation of coercion is elucidated. In *The War Plays*, socio-political institutions promote violence to produce socially conditioned victims. These aggressive victims, we conclude, would cooperate with power for the preservation of the *status quo*, yet challenge the system momentarily through expressing their sufferings.

Keywords: Edward Bond, *The War Plays*, Identity Thinking, the Addendum, Sublimation.

INTRODUCTION

Edward Bond's preoccupation with social and political issues in mid-twentieth century, including war, nuclear disasters, and military conflicts, alongside renunciation of human rights by restrictive social orders, class-war, and violence, most manifests itself in his oeuvre published through the years after the Second World War. Through the medium of drama and highlighting themes such as human brutality and their never-ending struggle for survival in capitalist societies, Bond gives life to characters who do not seem to have an understanding of their potentials and who live their lives as if their whole life is imposed on them. Bond makes these characters suffer and tolerate beyond their capacity. Subsequently, they end up responding to violence with different forms of violence. As Jenny Spencer and Jane Spencer remark, Bond is «known for his seriousness […] and his vio-

lence» ([1992]: 143). Violence in the works of Bond has earned him controversial fame among dramatists who directly point at social mechanisms as the real source of human suffering, hostility, and aggression in modern society.

More often than not, Bond's drama foregrounds his conviction that in an unjust society drama should deal «with the relationship between the individual and society» (Bond[1996]: 169), and reflect on the question «what it means to be human» (Bond[1996]: 169). This is, Bond believes, because «reality tends to be subordinated to ideology" and "Drama is the means … to circumvent this» (Bond [2000]: 181). Likewise, what Bond portrays in his *The War Plays* is an excessive level of social domination over the lives of highly ideologized and manipulated characters. Starting from birth, the characters of the plays are taken on a journey to the hell of self-alienation in which they have no adequate response to the question «what it means to be human». Utterly powerless in relation to the rigid social order presented in the plays, the characters ultimately yield to the demands of a selfish and ruthless society that treats them not as human beings, but as social atoms expected to act as demanded.

Written in a harsh and powerful style, *Red Black and Ignorant* epitomizes the inculcation of the ruling ideologies in human beings and the subsequent diminution of subjectivity. Families are forced to sell their neonates to the system so that they have no chance of developing the power of independent critical thought. Born and raised in the context of war and massive nuclear explosions, the children are taught how to materialize the standards of their war-torn community. The characters, namely Monster, Wife, Son, Buyer, the neighbor, and the neighbor's wife, are all in a situation of scarcity that leads to a struggle for food and the resulting acts of aggression. The play effectively illustrates the grown-up Son's adaptation to a world that is full of injustice, hatred, and indignation. The play ends with the death of Monster at the hands of his soldier son who, due to the widespread famine, is given the order to kill an old man in his neighborhood.

The second play, *The Tin Can People*, traces the actions of the nameless survivors of a nuclear disaster in the absence of social institutions. Despite the abundance of food and political freedom in the second play, similar patterns of action develop in both *The Tin Can People* and *Red, Black and Ignorant*. The characters' inability to change is interpreted as them being controlled by the same strict social and psychological forces that operated before the breakout.

Lastly, *Great Peace* can be regarded as a combination of the first two plays. In the initial setting of the play, soldiers, including Son, are given an impossible order: they must return to their birthplace and eliminate a child. After hours of deliberation, Son responds to the order by killing his own sibling. The second part of the play illustrates Woman who is shocked and traumatized by the death of her baby at the hands of her son. Carrying a bundle which she thinks is the dead baby, Woman sets off into the wilderness. There she meets a pregnant woman who has never seen a baby and is on the verge of giving birth to one. The mother dies in childbirth and the Woman leaves the baby, reasoning she cannot nurse two babies. The play ends with Woman finally coming to terms with her traumatic experience, assisting a real human being in an act of real compassion and refusing to join a newly formed community which leads to her probable lonely death in the wilderness.

Literature exploring Bond's *The War Plays* is limited and most of it views the plays as explorations of violence on the stage as a mechanism of raising consciousness among the audience about the threats of nuclear annihilation and the corrupt realm of politics that authorizes such threats. From this perspective, the plays «confront squarely and explicitly the issue of the day» (Witham [1998]: 297) and do the admirable job of foregrounding the present concerns about nuclear advancements.

The War plays, however, does more than exploring violence: through presenting a wide range of dehumanized characters within their socio-political context, these plays investigate the

«function of technology and the deification of the object over the people who produce it» (Castillo[1986]: 82) as the reason for widespread violence in human communities. The root of this reversed mastery is explored in the characters' social relations which convince them that they are nothing more than a tool or a machine. Likewise, these plays are viewed as a demonstration of the inevitability of «corruption, perversion, or destruction of any instinctive moral goodness by social conditioning» (Inns [1993]: 86). Most of the characters in the plays are perceived to be socially conditioned victims whose actions are directly mediated by the social system.

However, none of these studies provide a theory or an analysis as to how exactly the characters of *The War Plays* are rendered inhuman by their society, and more importantly, why the characters do not resist the dehumanizing social forces they encounter. This study, therefore, sets itself the task of illuminating the issue under consideration. In doing so, the article delves into the way socio-political institutions in *The War Plays* act as antagonism when they aim to mediate and control the characters' actions. Since these institutions are represented by «the state» and «the army», this article will focus on selective scenes involving these organizations and their confrontation, weather directly or indirectly, with the characters. In view of the fact that there are no social institutions represented in *The Tin Can People*, the scenes are selected from *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace*.

For this purpose and under three thematic headings, identity thinking, sublimation and the addendum, the article will first explain how the aforementioned social institutions in Bond's *The War Plays* take control of the cognitive realm of the characters' lives by eradicating and repressing their heterogeneous or non-identical properties from the conceptual system of their thought. This phenomenon Adorno refers to as «reality's compulsion to identity»; "a cultural impasse whose solution may only rely on aesthetic identity" (Adorno [1997]: 4). Whereas, Adorno contends, inclusion should be about the diversity of thought,

exploring and valuing differences and embracing distinctive and dissimilar characteristics to create, nurture, and embed an inclusive culture, the totalitarian character of identity thinking in these plays creates identical and substitutable characters. Leaning on Adorno's understanding of identity thinking and its subsumptive rationality, it will be then argued that politically organized institutions in *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace*, rely on the reduction of cognition and elimination of authenticity to create submissive characters.

Thereupon, it will be argued that the characters' realm of cognition is not the only permeable sphere of individual life presented in the plays. Consulting Freud's concept of sublimation and his analysis of group psychology along with Adorno's observation of fascist propaganda, it will be discussed that in the community of these plays, domination over the instinctual life of the characters is the second source of domination illustrated in the plays. Suppression of the expression of uninhibited libido in the form of sublimated human behavior and liberation of inhibited instinctual energy in the form of excessive aggression is considered to be the reason why the characters assigned to the army cooperate with the coercive system presented in these plays. This form of domination entails the liberation of the unconscious desires of aggressive instincts; thus, Freud declares, this process takes place with the instinctual approval of the individual; while at the same time domination is being intensified.

Furthermore, Adorno's concept of "the addendum" is employed to illustrate the internal conflicts and the suffering of the characters who are, in the process of socialization, extremely externalized, both instinctively and cognitively. Adorno's addendum is primarily a critique of the Kantian position that reason can be practical on its own; it is also a response to «the idealist equation of reason and freedom» (Adorno [2006]: 183). In response to Immanuel Kant who endorsed the idea that rationality and reason are the sole driving forces of an action, Adorno

contends that without a physical impulse no free and moral action can take place. Accordingly, after shedding more light on the concept of the addendum and its psychic/somatic nature, it will be demonstrated that, when put in extremely difficult situations, two of the most externalized characters of *The War Plays* - the two soldiers - cannot comply with the rationalized order that dictates each should kill a civilian, and end up resolving the situation with killing members of their own family. Despite their mode of rationalization which is in total conformity with the ruling system and its particular form of instrumental reasoning, the characters fail to perpetrate the action and illustrate a divergence of insight/reason and action. Eventually, they respond to the situation with an action that is neither rational nor purely impulsive. Adorno's addendum which has been frequently interpreted as an image of the reconciliation of mind and body, generates the discussions provided in the last section of this article.

1. IDENTITY THINKING IN RED BLACK AND IGNORANT AND GREAT PEACE

Identity thinking treats the "unlike" as "like" and then subsumes them under general conceptual categories. While identity thinking implies that the concept is rationally identical with the object it refers to (Rose [1978]: 44), for Adorno, this mode of subsumption is necessarily coercive and does violence to the particular or non-identical characteristics of concepts. Adorno condemns this reductive character of identity thinking and asserts that in the course of history concepts are used by social institutions to control cognition and make thinking succumb to the prevailing interests. As the medium of human cognition, the diminution of concepts anticipates the limitation of intellect and genuine apprehension (Adorno [2004]: 161). This paves the way for social domination over the cognitive content of the thinking subject. In the absence of inherent properties and particular characteristics, Adorno asserts, the rul-

ing cognitive ideal becomes the whole of thinking and, consequently, the subject loses its critical potential (Adorno [2004]: 85).

Viewed in this way, for Adorno, identity thinking is not concerned about the genuine existence of the subject or the object. Rather, it is more about what something «represents» or to what category the subject belongs (Adorno [2004]: 149). This aspect of identity thinking is overtly observed in Bond's trilogy of *The War Plays*. What, at first glance, unites the three plays of *The War Plays* is that most of the characters are nameless. The characters are referred to as Woman1, Woman 2, Soldier 1, Soldier 2, Soldier 3, Captain, Monster, etc. In his commentary on *The War Plays*, Bond explains that «the characters are not named because although they are not symbols their lives are social forces - and the forces are clarified by the crises. But there is another reason. They have lost their names because they have lost themselves» (Bond [1998]: 361).

In view of Adorno's assertion that the identifying mode of thought sacrifices particularity, foregrounds similarity, and ultimately reduces the subject to a substitutable representative of a category, the namelessness of the characters of these plays is attributed to their social configuration. Since, for Adorno, the identity that is gained through identity thinking is necessarily dependent on external and social factors (Jarvis [1998]: 166) for its existence, the namelessness of the characters, as Bond explains, illustrates the point that they, rather than being individuals with private interests, are treated as social forces. Most of these nameless characters are the economically underprivileged members of the community whose survival in their community depends on their subsumption into the community. For this to happen, they are forced to abandon their uniqueness and lose that necessary element that Horkheimer and Adorno believe is required to have a name: a life of their own (Horkheimer, Adorno [2002]: 123).

Act five, titled «Selling», in *Red Black and Ignorant* gives a clue as why these characters, rather than being individuals with private inter-

ests and a life distinct from their social existence, can be considered as, to borrow from Horkheimer and Adorno, «the mere stuff of classification» (Horkheimer, Adorno [2002]: 6). The Buyer has come to announce that it is time Monster and Wife sell their child:

> BUYER. I am the Buyer
> *The Register of Births records the birth of your son*
> *He is now at the age to learn to speak*
> *I have come to buy him.* (Bond [1998]: 16)

Wife's statement, «he's too small to sell» (Bond [1998]: 16), indicates that this transaction is legal and normal. She applies reason to her feeble attempt at resistance when she declares that she did not expect the buyer to come so soon. The Buyer bases his rationale for this haste on the claim that the children's training must begin at an early age to have full effect. Wife's conversation with the Buyer makes it clear that the parents in this community do not play the conventional role of parents in the families. As is indicated by the quality of interaction between the buyer and the parents, it is the instrumental rationality of identity thinking that governs their existence.

The price, however, sparks off considerable debate between Buyer and the parents. The buyer warns the parents that their procrastination will result in their children being «scattered like dry beans on the supermarket floor» (Bond [1998]: 17) waiting «to be weighted and priced« (Bond [1998]: 17). That said, the parents still haggle over the price. This conversation between Buyer and the parents is expressive of two basic features of identity thinking: 1) identity thinking identifies what can be calculated and made use of in practical terms; 2) it subjugates cognition and the conceptual realm of thought as a precondition for social domination over individual lives. The buyer's mode of rationalization conforms with Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of identity thinking, since, as the buyer contends, these children will be trained in thinking as is expected of them. The result is, their cognition will be limited to the given and their genuine existence sacrificed for social totality.

The Buyer specifically stresses the importance of the child's transferal before his thoughts are formed. Only this way «he will learn to think and behave in such a way that the community will welcome him» (Bond [1998]: 16). Otherwise, the Buyer declares, the child is as good as trash on the street and «there are many types of incinerator devices for disposing of unsellable goods which if left lying about» (Bond [1998]: 18). He also directly points out that these children are to be used for the benefits of the state when he says:

> BUYER: …*The good citizen is satisfied more by serving than being*
> *served*
> MONSTER. *That's what you'll train him to think*
> BUYER. *Certainly*
> *And then he won't object will he?*
> *His opinions will be formed even before he knows the subjects on which he holds them*
> *Could life be more trouble-free?* (Bond [1998]: 18-19)

In this scene, the parents make clear that they are not concerned with anything but the material aspect of both themselves and their child's existence. The buyer's interest in the transaction, on the other hand, is suggestive of reasons beyond materiality. He indicates that the children are welcomed to this community as long as their thinking faculty is governable; and when cognition is manipulated, «the moment of thought that resists totalisation» (Gritzner [2015]: 9) is eliminated. Thus, with buying children before their cognition is developed, this community is protecting itself from the new generation's critical observations.

As Adorno observes, identity thinking takes an affirmative stance towards the status quo; the thinking subject no longer possesses the revolutionary power of a critical mind that could rise up against the normalized state of affairs (Adorno [2004]: 85) when his/her cognitive power is constrained. And In this play, everyone, including the parents and Buyer himself, are directly taught how to think; the conversation reveals that Monster and Wife were once sold to the state as well.

Individuals, according to Adorno's views, in order to maintain their uniqueness need «to have

a cognitive content other than that which is provided for» (Bernstein [2004]: 37) by their social systems, if they want to stay immune from the destructive character of identity thinking. The reductive character of identity thinking makes itself fairly perceivable in this scene since the buyer and the parents' dialogues indicate that these children are valuable as long as they do not develop dissonant characteristics or a cognitive content of their own.

Moreover, each individual, in order to survive in this community, needs to acquire the necessary characteristics required for their subsumption into specific categories; in this trilogy, almost all of the individuals who belong to the category of "women" or "soldiers" behave the same way. All of them ultimately surrender to the demands of the state and the pervasive mode of rationalization even when they fractionally display differential characteristics. This is because survival requires that each newborn be subsumed into the homogeneous whole and be alienated from its dissonant characteristics. What happens when the parents fail to sell their children on time is that the children «run wild» and thus they need to be disposed of. This is implicative of Adorno's claim that an identitarian society «tolerates nothing outside it» (Adorno [2004]: 172). Children whose cognitive development does not take place under the supervision of the state, Buyer indicates, cannot fit in this community because they will not know how to materialize the standards of the state.

In both *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace*, characters are enmeshed in circumstances of scarcity resulted from war and nuclear explosions. Hence, a widespread sense of struggle for survival is implied in both of these plays. What is clear is that the parents sell their child in exchange for «subsistence for twenty years» (Bond [1998]: 17). The parents negotiate with the buyer for a price not specified as food, clothes, or currency, but subsistence for specific number of years. In this context «subsistence» can be interpreted as the state's guarantee of the parents' mere «continued existence» (Wilson [2007]: 18). As Adorno and Horkheimer contend, the individuals'

struggle for self-preservation in identitarian societies ultimately lead to their self-destruction. This is due to the assumption that in such societies the self has to do violence to the non-identical or the heterogeneous aspect of itself so that the identical or the homogeneous part can continue to exist (Horkheimer and Adorno [2002]: 42).Assuming that survival is more than having access to food and other necessities of life, it can be concluded that the living characters in these plays do not really survive in their communities; with the elimination and repression of particularity and unique qualities, as Adorno and Horkheimer assert, the survival of these characters is considered as nothing more than continued existence.

In addition, identity thinking in *Great Peace* is represented in the form of the mimesis of death. Since identity thinking treats nature the way it treats concepts and subjects, those properties of nature that cannot be subsumed under general categories are rendered imperceptible by the rationality of identity thinking. As Wilson poetically depicts the situation, nature is reduced «to a blank verse» (Wilson [2007]: 16). Consequently, the exclusion of nature's unidentifiable properties from view, transforms nature into an inanimate object. Paradoxically, the more the objectified subject posits itself over and against the objectified nature, the more it becomes like the nature which it has treated as empty matter (Wilson [2007]: 18). The result is, the hierarchy between the subject and the object – nature – is blurred and the subject seeks to liken itself to the object it tries to control. This, in turn, brings about a fluidity of identity between the subject and the object (Huhn [2003]: 4). As a result, as Caillois declares, the subject develops the «desire to recover its original insensate condition» (qtd in Armstrong [2012]: 111) through submerging into the object it imitates. Since this desire acts as an intermediate stage toward the subject's ultimate end (Fortin [2011]: 185), Horkheimer and Adorno relate it to Freud's death drive and Caillois' concept of mimesis (Horkheimer, Adorno [2002]: 189).

Scenes nine, ten, eleven, and twelve all entitled «Wilderness» in *Great Peace*, present the woman

carrying a bundle wandering in the wilderness seventeen years later, after her son had killed her baby. There she meets the same soldiers who were given orders to eliminate babies. The traumatized woman seems saner than the apparently sane soldiers; they think they are dead. They also try to convince the Woman that she is dead, too. The soldiers describe scenes of dying:

> PEMBERTTON. *If you'd saw what we saw you'd 'ave an excuse for not noticing you're dead*
> *We was corpsin civvies in a quarry - ran out of ammo -*
> *(Points.) just that one box left*
> *We was going back t' the quarry: then it 'appened: the end of the world they talked about*
> *No explosion, just the wind*
> *We was down in a gully, a sort of defile*
> *All the bodies - livin an dead, army an civvie - shot up in the sky*
> *It was full of bodies whirlin around in circles like a painted*
> *ceiling*
> *The wind blew em up there*
> *Whirlin round over our 'eads – looked like a dance.*
> (Bond [1998]: 168)

One reason why the soldiers think they are dead could be attributed to the traumatic experience of being exposed to massive scenes of dying. Another reason could be discussed in terms of the way Adorno and Horkheimer explicate identity thinking: In this scene the soldiers who are told what to do and how to think are on their own. Now that the army is gone they seem to be incapable of standing out as individuals against their environment.

As Woman points out:

> But you could settle down - build permanent shelters –
> if yer looked after the soil things might grow
> Yer could still do your foragin
> Yer'd be comfortable in winter – take care of each other when you're ill
> Yer wont want t' march when you're old
> Per'aps other people'll find yer - there might be children my child could grow up with. (Bond [1998]: 180-181)

As the play indicates none of this happens. After seventeen years the soldiers are still wandering through the wilderness, thinking they are dead. It could be inferred that these soldiers are imitating their landscape; it seems that the soldiers' inner and outer landscape is the same. As explained, mimesis, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is the attempt to immerse into nature, to become one with nature. The nature, as described, appears to be barren and dead:

> WOMAN. *No food since days*
> *(Gestures around.) 'S'dead - no rain.* (Bond [1998]: 165)

At the end of this scene the soldiers lapse into a collective phase of dementia, asking to be «corpsed»: «If we're dead why dont we put ourselves in the ground» (Bond [1998]: 180). They voluntarily keep asking to be shot to prove they are dead. It is interpreted that, since with the soldiers' identitarian mode of thought, the boundary between the object and the subject is abolished and the soldiers no longer view themselves as valuable to a system, they are imitating the object, the dead nature, and trying to submerge into what they have been imitating for a long time.

2. SUBLIMATION IN THE WAR PLAYS

The sphere of cognition, as Adorno contends, is not the only source of domination in modern capitalist society. Adorno refers to Freud's theory of sublimation and group psychology to develop his own account of fascist propaganda whereby sublimation of instincts is hindered in the ideological interests of the dominant powers.

Sublimation, as Freud describes it, «is the normal maturation of individual» (Freud [1962]: 44). This process transforms the individual's initial impulses into socially acceptable behavior. Sublimation necessarily involves the repression of excessive libido and aggressive instincts. Through sublimation instinctual energy finds its expression in tendency for sexual union and different forms of love (Freud [1949]: 38). It is also what prepares

the individuals for higher artistic, scientific, and different aspects of cultural development (Freud [1962]: 44) when it successfully puts limits on the liberty of destructive instincts. This account of sublimation is ascribed to the individual's normal maturation in normal circumstances, as when the individual is given the chance to channel his uninhibited instinctual energy into proper and civilized expressions.

A profound alteration in the individual's mental development, however, Freud observes, is possible when the individual is assigned to an organized group. Adorno adopts this account of Freud's sublimation and group psychology to assert that fascism exploits and utilizes the «irrational, unconscious, [and] regressive» (Adorno [1991]: 134) instincts to liberate inhibited instinctual energy in the form of aggression and violence. Since the liberation of destructive instincts entails the subject's instinctual satisfaction and approval (Marcuse [2002]: 82), he/she willingly yields to the demands made by the group's leader (Adorno [1991]: 134).

In *Red Black and Ignorant* selling the children to the state provides a huge blockage in the normal sublimation of instincts. Freud considers sublimation as an important aspect of cultural and individual development (Freud [1962]: 44) because it puts a limit on destructive instinctual energy for the sake of both the subjects and their community. Selling the children to the state indicates that if limitations are to be imposed on the instinctual energy of the characters, it will not be for the interests of the characters because «the good citizen is satisfied more by serving than being served» (Bond [1998]: 18). Therefore, it can be inferred that the children's instinctual energy will be directed towards the fulfillment of the state's aims.

Given that in the scene discussed in the previous section, the role of the families in the upbringing of their children is debilitated and none of the subsequent actions provide information as how the children are being trained and educated immediately after the state receives them, it is not clear how sublimation of instincts

takes place in this community. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the child, now referred to as Son, joins the army in his adulthood. The Son displays characteristics that indicate his aggressive instinctual energy is liberated rather than sublimated. Scene seven, entitled «The Army», in *Red Black and Ignorant* starts with the parents, Monster and Wife, helping «the Son to put on a bullet-proof army jacket and combat helmet and give him a rifle» (Bond [1998]: 27). Son starts singing The Army Song:

I am the army
My legs are made of tanks
My arms are made of guns
My head is made of bombs
I am the army
[…]
When a soldier heaves a grenade what does he see: a body explode like a bottle on a wall
When a soldier slits a belly what does he see: guts spill like clothes from a suitcase
When a soldier fires a bullet what does he see: blood spurt like water from a hosepipe
That is the soldier's reward for his skills: the pleasure of seeing the way he kills
[…]
Bow down and worship me. (Bond [1998]: 28)

This army song is not like the typical military songs. It does not speak about the great amount of pride a soldier takes in serving his country and protecting the civilians; nor does it embody the ideals of a military organization or anything that can be attributed to a devoted patriot. This song, it can be argued, is full of what we may call the aggressive and «narcissistic» attitude of a soldier who seems to be inflicted with great delusions of power and grandeur. All the traces of humanity leave this army song with the line that says «that is the soldier's reward for his skills: the pleasure of seeing the way he kills» (Bond [1998]: 28). This military song illustrates how far a soldier is allowed to go in expressing his narcissistic attitudes and his aggressive desires. Moreover, a lack of the proper sublimation of instincts in the form of acceptable human behavior is present in

this army song. The song contains lines such as «and wipe my arse on the lists of the dead» (Bond [1998]: 28) and «my breath is toxic gas» (Bond [1998]: 27). These lines indicate that Son is proud of characteristics that are not only aggressive, but also defamatory and repulsive.

In Freud's psychology, the normal sublimation of the instincts of aggressiveness and libido takes place when the child's infantile development is supervised by the parents or people with whom the child can have the chance to develop emotional attachments; but in different situations, as when the individual forms part of a highly organized group such as an army, he/she no longer materializes the values of the «high culture» or the sublimated expressions of his/her instincts. Within the group, the individual is a powerful self who can act on the impulses of his/her unconscious and thus carries out actions and approves of things he/she would otherwise refrain from (Le Bon [2001]: 4). As Monster remarks, «he [the Son] does things he cant tell his parents» (Bond [1998]: 29). The reason why in the army individuals are capable of destructive actions, Freud asserts, is due to the evolving libidinal ties between the members and the leader or the leading idea whereby the individuals identify themselves with the power that stems from the collectivity and the leader (Freud [1949]: 120); thus, developing a narcissistic cathexis. This can explain why Son's army song contains statements such as «bow down and worship me» ([1998]: 28).

Scene eight, «No one Can Willingly Give up the Name of Human», in *Red Black and Ignorant*, demonstrates that Son enjoys being part of the army. In her attempt to justify her son's actions, Wife declares that «the army wont let him out and if he didn't obey orders he'd be shot» (Bond [1998]: 30). Son responses to his mother with the statement, «I like the army» (Bond [1998]: 30). And the reason why he likes the army is because:

When you're a soldier all your problems are solved by training
Kill or be killed
No apologies or explanations

You always gab about right and wrong
Do what's right? - its as much use as an overcoat to a corpse. (Bond [1998]: 30)

As attested by Freud's group psychology and Adorno's observation of fascist propaganda, domination over the individuals who are bound to the group with the ties of identifications, takes place with the instinctive approval of the individual (Freud [1949]: 75); it also prevents the normal sublimation of individuals by repressing the uninhibited instincts and liberating the inhibited and destructive libidinal energy in the form of aggression (Freud [1949]: 118- 119), as is the case with Son or the children who are to be soldiers. This explains why Son finds it pointless to brood over the question of right and wrong. As Adorno explains, when the subject is assigned to a highly organized group such as an army, he develops a weak ego and a manipulated id (Held [1980]: 135) devoid of moral standards. It could be asserted that as a member of the army, Son no longer possesses moral standards by which he could operate.

In spite of the fact that *Red Black and Ignorant* provides access to the dialogues of one soldier only, the beginning of scene eight indicates that all the soldiers in this community are considered to be infamous by the civilians. Edward Bond's description of soldiers in his *The War Play* poems confirms the assumption that soldiers of this community are a fearsome group; and «in a few years people started to flee from the soldiers» (Bond [1998]: x).

MONSTER. Anyone see you enter the house?
SON. Why?
MONSTER. It would be marked as the home of a soldier. (Bond [1998]: 29)

The reason why the Son is back home, he explains:

Every squaddie's been sent back to his own street to shoot one civvie-corpse
[…]
When you've got gunsights for eyes and triggers for fingers you can call yourself a soldier

MONSTER. You'd do that?
SON. Following the reason yeh. (Bond [1998]: 30)

The reason why each soldier is given the order to eliminate one civilian is due to the widespread famine and food riots. Son justifies the action declaring the army is doing this for public good. Wife supports Son claiming if he does not kill the only neighbor they have, then Son's superior officer would kill both of his parents to punish him for being a coward. Determined that the order is reasonable and the action should be performed, Son leaves the house to carry out the deed; but he cannot bring himself to shoot the old sick neighbor who Wife assumes is going to die soon anyway. Son does not kill the sick neighbor and, shockingly, kills his father instead; as Bond puts it, «instead of killing the senile neighbor (who is as helpless as a child and will soon die), [he] kills the wrong man - his father» (Bond [1998]: 344).

Since *Great Peace* follows the same pattern and also provides information in greater detail, in what follows, Son's incapability to kill the sick neighbor will be discussed along with analyzing the repeated situation in *Great Peace*. In both plays, the two sons initially do not exhibit signs of resistance to the order; they strongly rationalize the required action and they believe it must be carried out. They also convince their mothers and in return get encouraged by them to get the job done. However, they cannot bring themselves to act on reason and resolve the situation by killing the wrong characters.

The opening scene of *Great Peace*, «Military Post», displays a group of soldiers who are ready for new orders. The Captain explains that food supplies are limited and the situation is debilitating. He continues:

Under government emergency regulations food will be restricted to civilian elements needed to assist in the recovery programme
[…]
The harsh truth is that most of them [the children] would die of
malnutrition in the fullness of time
[…]

To prevent this waste every soldier will return to his place of civilian domicile and eliminate one child. (Bond [1998]: 101)

Including Son, there are five soldiers present in this scene and none of them makes a remark that could remotely be interpreted as a sign of resistance or disagreement. Furthermore, a sense of responsibility is entirely vanished from this scene. As explained, this is because, more than regarding themselves as particular individuals, the soldiers view themselves as part of a powerful structure led by a powerful idea or a strong leader (Rensmann [2017]: 350). This is why, Adorno asserts, in military groups soldiers are capable of the most horrible and collective acts of crime without displaying a sense of resistance or responsibility.

In act three, «The Woman's House», Son is at his mother's house. There are two babies in the house, his little sibling and the neighbor's, who leaves her baby with Woman - Son's mother - while she is at work. Son needs to get his mother out of the house before he can perform the action. He sends the woman out to get him cigarettes; but he cannot act. In the absence of Woman another soldier shows up to tell him he does not have much time; he still does not act. When Woman returns Son tells her why he is home. Woman tries to protect both of the babies, she suggests they should take the babies and run away. Son insists that «the worse an order is the more they make sure it's obeyed» (Bond [1998]: 117). Son delivers a convincing speech as to why this order is right and must be carried out. He then takes the neighbor's baby and leaves the house. He spends hours with the baby but cannot kill it. Eventually, in act four, he returns the baby to its mother. In the next act, Son kills his own sibling.

Bond does not provide us with any details about the inner workings of his characters. So it is not clear why Son does not kill the baby when he has the chance. He rationalizes the order and he is also aware that if he fails to perform the action someone else will. Yet he cannot do what he thinks is right. Adorno's concept of the addendum or «the additional factor» (Adorno [2006]: 229),

can provide an explanation as why the two sons of *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace*, while rationalizing the action, fail to perform it and end up resolving the situation with a relatively more dreadful action.

3. THE ARCHAIC STAGE OF THE ADDENDUM

Adorno's concept of the addendum first appeared in the nineteenth lecture of his series *History and Freedom*. He initially describes Addendum as «"the additional factor", a term somewhat arbitrary chosen» (Adorno [2006]: 229). Later on Adorno uses the term as a noun in a four-page section in *Negative Dialectics* and also in "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis". He also describes the moment of the addendum in his *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, albeit without dubbing the term. Also, as Walschots maintains, the term *hinzutrende*, an adjective, occasionally appears in Adorno's oeuvre particularly in his *Aesthetic Theory* and *Zur Zetakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, but only to refer «to an "addition" rather than to the concept of the addendum» (Walschots [2011]: 1).

Adorno's rejection of Kant's claim that reason is practical on its own (Kant [1997]: 101), sparks off Adorno's discussion of the addendum. For Adorno a psychic element is necessary for action to make a material and meaningful effect in the world; however, it is never sufficient. As Adorno argues, «the will that has been reduced to pure practical reason is an abstraction» and «[t]he addendum is the name for that which was eliminated in this abstraction; without it, there would be no real will at all» (Adorno [2004]: 229). Thus, what Adorno captures with the idea of the addendum is something physical added to a mental component. More precisely, Adorno refers to the addendum as an impulse that is «intramental and somatic in one» (Adorno [2004]: 228-229). This means that Adorno rejects Descartes substance dualism[1] and Kant's distinction of mind/body and

claims that the two are intimately interconnected. Likewise, Joel Whitebook compares Adorno's the addendum to Freud's conception of instinct[2] as «a frontier entity on the border between the mental and the physical» (Whitebook [1995]: 260). Quoting from Adorno, he explains:

> This means that, as 'it denies the Cartesian dualism of res extensa and res cogitans, «the addendum has an aspect which under rationalistic rules is irrational». The impulse represents «a phase in which the dualism of extra-mental and intra-mental was not yet thoroughly consolidated ... nor [is] ontologically ultimate» and thus contains the conditions of «the will's transition to practice» and of the extension of freedom to «the realm of experience». (Whitebook [1995]: 260)

As indicated, it is the impulsive nature of the addendum that renders it «irrational under rationalistic rules». Nonetheless, it is because of this impulse and the interconnection of mind/body that human action is possible in the first place. Without the physical side of this impulse, Adorno argues, there would be no moral action, no human will, and no sense of freedom.

In his book *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno mentions aesthetic identity as an «aid to the non-identical» and with this description creates an implied parallel between aesthetic identity and the addendum. As art establishes its autonomy from empirical reality, human subject retains its freedom from cultural «monstrosity» (Adorno [1997]: 4) through having recourse to the impulsive acts of the addendum. By «negating the closed confines of the ever-same» art retains its authenticity which entails «scaring», «damaging» or «disrupting» itself (Adorno [1997]: 23). In these acts of scaring, or the return of impulsive and the irrational, the subject reveals what is most natural: nature in the subject. This archaic and irrational impulse appears when the subject is under tremendous amount of pressure and thus reveals his/her unfreedom and at the same time gives expres-

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[1] Descartes substance dualism refers to the distinction between «the inner "thinking" substance and the outer

reality to which action belongs» ([Adorno[2006]: 232).
[2] See Freud 1989, 562-567.

sion to his desire for autonomy and freedom (Adorno [2004]: 222); hence, the addendum is the spontaneous manifestation of the subject's desire for freedom from external forces, the same way aesthetics is the promise of authenticity for art; a freedom and an authenticity that are gained at a high price.

In *Red, Black and Ignorant,* scene eight, Son is sent home «to shoot one civvie-corpse», but being left to decide which on his own makes it hard for him to accomplish the mission. The imprecise order as to who must be killed is a chance for Son to make decisions and thus to evaluate right and wrong. This situation of decision-making exerts immeasurable pressure on the soldier who «kill[s] or [is] killed» and looks for «[n]o apologies or explanations» (Bond [1998]: 30). According to Adorno in his lecture on *Consciousness and Impulse*, a sense of freedom exists in subjects when they can «confront [their] actions with the consciousness with which [they] act» (Adorno [2004]: 230). A soldier, therefore, is unfree since the element of consciousness does not exist in his world; he kills mechanically and obeys orders without questioning. So, when a chance for decision making appears, consciousness becomes feasible. As Adorno explicates the relation between impulse and consciousness, when consciousness participates in reflexive actions, «the additional factor […] as a constitutive element of the will came into being» (Adorno [2004]: 236). As a result, when in the corner house to kill a neighbor, Son suffers from indecision, evident in the soliloquies that intersperse his dialogue with the neighbor lady:

> *The room seemed bigger when I was a child*
> *I could touch the ceiling*
> *My mother (why dont you kill him?) is cooking*
> *Its late*
> *(He'd lie on the floor like a raincoat in a jumble sale*
> *For anyone to buy*
> *You put it on and look in the mirror*
> *The stranger's still wearing it)*
> *My mother said hurry*
> *Bolt the door after me so that even I couldnt get in.*
> (Bond [1998]: 36-37).

This pressure leads to a build-up of instinctual aggression, culminating in Son shooting his father. This act of patricide, or scaring oneself by damaging a sibling, can be interpreted as the result of the «withdrawal of libidinal energy from external reality» (Adorno [2006]: 231), which opens up a chasm between the inner and the outer, ultimately leading to a more excessive form of instinctual aggression liberated through the addendum.

Adorno relates the appearance of the addendum to the internalized social norms at a specific socio-cultural context and the inner conflicts they create when the subject is under the obligation to carry out a deed he/she believes is right and reasonable, but cannot properly justify it. Under such circumstances, this archaic impulse appears to rescue the subject from his/her rationalized obligations and the following conflicts (Adorno [2006]: 234). For Son, the order is to the benefit of the civilians who will suffer from famine in a year so gravely that, as Son explains, «[n]ext year you'll be so hungry you'll be like corpses who eat the nails out of their coffin and then look round for something else» (Bond [1998]: 30-31). In this way the order is reasonable to the soldier, and yet he cannot justify killing the old man in the neighborhood. Out of this conflict between the reasonable and the unjustifiable, the addendum is borne. Hence, the addendum is a critical response to the historical context in which the subject is trapped (Hammer [2006]: 121). The irrational mode of rationalization internalized in the subject in a particular socio-historical context brings about inner conflicts which ultimately result in preventing the subject from properly fulfilling the obligation in question.[3] Consequently, the subject «must

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[3] To further illustrate this point, Adorno brings up «the problem of Hamlet». For Adorno, Hamlet is incapable of performing an action he deems rational and reasonable. And «Hamlet's withdrawal of libidinal energy from external reality» (Adorno [2006]: 231) is the reason behind the chasm that is opened up between his consciousness and actions, inner and outer. Hamlet's entire relation to his external reality becomes problematic when, as a conscious and rational human being, «withdraws his actions

perforce regress; he must return to an earlier archaic stage» (Adorno [2006]: 234) to resolve the situation.[4]

The addendum, therefore, has a regressive side as well as a progressive side. Although it can be emancipatory, it is only so through bringing destruction. The irrationality, impulsiveness and freedom of the addendum resembles the freedom of art in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in which an "unfree society", very much like the society in which the soldier lives, "afflicts" art with autonomy, abusing its detachment from «religious, political, and other social roles» to «perform an ideological function» (Zuidervaart [1991]: 32). The same way, the impulsive actions of the soldiers give expression to their desire for freedom from their restrictive social context, but at the same time abuses them by exerting even more pain on them.

The experiences of suffering and inner conflicts, Adorno declares, are the necessary conditions for the emergence of the addendum. Adorno believes that rationalized thought accompanied by feelings of suffering and inner conflicts indicate that the subject is not free; and the response to this situation is an irrational violent outburst

through which the subject expresses his/her wish for autonomy and freedom (Hammer [2006]: 119). It also requires a somatic element to push the subject into the violent action. In *Red, Black and Ignorant* the fear of the Officer's punishments is the somatic element, and in *Great Peace*, the somatic element necessary for the addendum to move Son into the violent action is the pressure of time; the job has to be carried out by morning and it is almost morning. The two Sons, nonetheless, go against their rationalizations and postpone the action. This could be interpreted as a sign of self-reflection which is a necessary element of the addendum (Adorno [2006]: 233).

In the following scene, «Military Post by a Quarry», Bond highlights the insensibility of the soldiers who after committing a horrible deed are having a casual conversation. The soldiers appear calm and normal as before, except Son. He is distanced and disconnected from the other soldiers; and when the Corporal orders him to pick up a cigarette packet, he refuses to obey. The Captain comes in and repeatedly orders Son to pick up the packet. Son, however, remains silent and motionless until he is finally shot. Son's refusal to do a simple task after killing his sibling on an order indicates that what he did was not entirely an act of duty/reason, but had a compulsive/irrational component to it. As noted, the addendum indicates a mournful critique of the existing society and when it appears it tends to disconnect the subject form the community (Hammer [2006]: 119). It is not clear how the other soldiers carried out the order. If, for a moment, they did reflect on the action, given that in this scene they all appear normal and casual, based on Freud and Adorno's analysis of group behavior, it could be deduced that they all retreated to their id and gave a free reign to their destructive aggressive instincts, but Son did not do his murderous duty the normal/reasonable way. By killing his own sibling while he had the chance to kill a stranger, Son breached the army code of rationality. No more being regarded as a keg in the wheel of the military force, the Captain shoots him and gets «rid of a weak element» (Bond [1998]: 150).

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from the realm of irrational, corrupt, bad reality confronting him» (Adorno [2006]: 233). Thus, he remains locked inside his chain of thoughts, «incapable of translating the father-ghost's demand for revenge into the decisive deed» (Hammer [2006]: 118). This is because, as an outstanding example of a self-reflective character, Hamlet's own rationality does not entirely conform to the heroic culture of vengeance. The reason why Hamlet cannot bring himself to act is because he is «unsure about how he will ever succeed in emerging from his own rationality so as to transform into reality what he has perceived to be rational» (Adorno [2006]: 233). What Hamlet needs, in order to carry out what he thinks is right but cannot justify it, is a shock experience, or what Adorno refers to as «a sudden impulse» that throws the subject into irrational action.

[4] At the end of the play, Hamlet, whose interior monologue prevents him from carrying out the deed, suddenly and irrationally, in a manner that leads to his own death, goes on a killing spree and stabs everyone who crosses his path (Adorno [2006]: 233).

As claimed by Freud and Le Bon, being a member of an identitarian group requires that each subject acts with the ferocity of a barbaric; without a trace of deliberation or self-reflection (Le Bon [2001]: 8). In moments of being trapped between the inner and the outer, self-reflection can lead to a reawakened irrationality and a relatively more aggressive action (Adorno [2006]: 233). This aggression in *The War Plays* committed by the two soldiers cannot be contained by the military code of proper violence and is therefore a threat to it. Being a threat to its context, this aggression can be interpreted as an attempt to liberate the perpetrator from the constraints of that context. This impulsive aggression that Adorno calls the addendum «is the strongest and most immediate proof that there is such a thing as freedom» (Adorno [2006]: 235) and explains why the two soldiers have recourse to a more aggressive act.

Bond's *The War Plays* ends on an equivocal note: emergence of a new human community and the refusal of Woman to join it. The addendum, therefore, though an undeniable clue for the existence and reality of the impulse to freedom, is always unmanageable and at times very destructive, the same way, it can be argued, as Bond's art is inconclusive and ambivalent. As James Hellings explains, Adorno's aesthetic discourse, art itself is the addendum, surpassing its author and its spectators (Hellings [2014]). Thus by revealing the mechanisms of domination, Bond and Adorno ruminate over the possibility of counter-actions and freedom, and yet refuse to hail the additional factor or the impulsive behavior as necessarily redemptive. The addendum or the additional factor, thus, highlights the unpredictability of human actions even in strictest social contexts in both its promising aspect and its detrimental quality.

CONCLUSIONS

Edward Bond's *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace* depict characters who are embroiled in circumstances of scarcity resulted from nuclear explosions. These characters' survival in the aftermath of war entails their dehumanization which is resulted from encroachment of social force upon their life. This encroachment occurs through manipulating and controlling the two most important private realms of the characters' lives: their cognition and their instinctual life. As a result the characters surrender to the prevailing antagonistic social forces and even cooperate with the dehumanizing strategies presented in the play and in this way maintain the status quo.

At the beginning of this article, Adorno's understanding of identity thinking was employed to demonstrate how the state takes control of the characters' system of thought in *Red Black and Ignorant*. As discussed, identity thinking aims to subsume particular phenomena under general categories. Identitarian societies, for Adorno, are necessarily totalitarian; these societies do not tolerate what they cannot identify and that which is not identical with the rest of the society. Thus, individual lives are rendered meaningless outside of the community. Inclusion into the community in identitarian societies necessarily entails that the individuals abandon critical abilities and dissolve into the unthinking whole, pigeonholed and identifiable. This reductive process represses the individuals' potential for critical observations because their cognition is formed in accordance with external forces.

At the beginning of the first play Buyer shows up at the door of a family to purchase their son. It is revealed that Buyer's insistence on the immediacy of the transaction and on-time delivery is due to the necessity of the state's supervision over the cognitive development of the child; the state will teach the child how to think and behave. This transaction is necessary for both the state and the parents; the state will achieve mastery over the child's life and the parents will be provided with minimal resources that are necessary for their survival at a time of privation.

Then, it was argued that based on Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of identity thinking, survival in identitarian societies cannot be interpreted as more than continued existence. Since all the characters, including Buyer, were sold to the

state, they are all separated off from their intrinsic and heterogeneous characteristics. In order to be subsumed into the community, the characters are forced to do violence to their particularity and abandon their unique existence. Thereupon, it is demonstrated that in *Great Peace*, identity thinking treats nature the way it treats individuals: as identity thinking reduces individuals to empty bodies, it also reduces nature to mere objectivity, a blank canvas devoid of inherent properties. Regarding nature, Adorno and Horkheimer assert, identity thinking takes the form of the mimesis of death, in which mimesis implies affinity with the object. Meaning, the subject does not merely imitate the object, but it seeks to assimilate what it imitates. Accordingly, it was discussed that the soldiers of *Great Peace*, who seem to be imitating the dead landscape in four scenes of the play, exhibit the desire to be shot and dissolve into nature.

In the second section of this article, it was discussed that conceptual domination is not the only source of domination presented in these plays. Consulting Freud's group psychology and Adorno's analysis of fascist propaganda, it was explained that instinctual domination, especially when the subject is assigned to a group, assists the state for full mastery over the individuals' actions. For this form of domination, the normal sublimation of instincts must be repressed. The normal sublimation of instincts, Freud contends, is hindered when the role of the family in upbringing the subject is eliminated. The son of *Red Black and Ignorant*, which is sold to the state, scarcely displays signs of sublimated behavior. His dialogues are aggressive and his army song is indicative of his narcissistic attitudes. Freud's observation of group psychology suggests that when an individual is assigned to a highly mechanical group such as an army, aggressive expressions and narcissistic attitudes replace the sublimated expressions of instinctual energy. This is because such groups, based on Adorno, repress the uninhibited expression of sublimated behavior and in turn liberate the inhibited instinctual energy in the form of aggression.

Accordingly, the soldiers of the two plays do not exhibit signs of resistance to the order that commands each soldier should return to his street and eliminate one civilian. All soldiers, including the two sons of the plays, rationalize the order. However, unlike the other soldiers who successfully carry out the action, these two soldiers end up killing the wrong people.

These two soldiers' incapability to perform the action was analyzed in terms of Adorno's concept of the addendum, or the additional factor. The addendum or the irrational impulse, Adorno declares, appears when the dominated subject is inflicted with unresolvable inner conflicts. In situations when the subject is under tremendous amount of pressure - as when he is under the obligation to perform a specific action he believes is right and reasonable but cannot properly justify it - he/she ends up responding to the situation with an excessive form of aggression through the addendum. Further, it was elaborated that Adorno's addendum appears when the subject develops the desire to distance himself/herself form the specific socio-cultural period he/she is trapped in. The outlet of the aggression through the addendum, according to Adorno's views, is a mournful critique of the existing situation whereby the subject directs his aggression towards both himself and the wrong target. Accordingly, after hours of hesitation which is interpreted as a sign of self-reflection, the Son of *Red Black and Ignorant* kills his father, and the Son of *Great Peace* kills his sibling.

The two sons, who are considered to be two of the most aggressive and dehumanized characters in *Red Black and Ignorant* and *Great Peace*, display inability to kill two strangers; it is also clear that they cannot refuse the order. Both their cognition and their instincts are manipulated; thus their rationalizations are radically influenced by the state and the army. Conversely, the addendum, Adorno argues, is a purely archaic impulse that cannot be manipulated by external forces. That the sons, instead of killing strangers, should kill members of their own family is expressive of their suffering and the need to expand the suf-

fering into tangible experience in their external reality. Addendum is interpreted as a mournful critique of the existing and a sign of these two characters' suffering. This research considers these two sons as two extremely dehumanized characters who are not aware of their own suffering and who are forced to express their devastation with self-destruction - through the destruction of kin. The moment of the addendum renders this suffering perceivable, both to them and to the audiences of the plays.

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Aisthesis

Review

Mario De Caro, *Realtà*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2020, pp. 126.

Camminando per le strade di Roma, in questi mesi di *lockdown* più o meno severi a seconda della diffusione del virus, ci si può imbattere in un cartellone di promozione delle iniziative culturali e artistiche del Museo MAXXI. Il cartellone è piuttosto semplice, fondo scuro con la scritta bianca e nitida al centro, una sola parola: *realtà*. Non ci sono altre spiegazioni o dettagli. Grafica precisa e sottile, come fosse il tratto illuminato di un gessetto candido sulla lavagna scura. La realtà si staglia bianca e densa sul fondo nero. *Il mondo è a colori, ma la realtà è in bianco e nero* disse una volta Wim Wenders parlando di fotografia e il cartellone sembra seguire questa convinzione del regista tedesco. Ne *Il cielo sopra Berlino* a uno degli angeli protagonisti del film fece dire (rivolto agli esseri umani) «avete troppi colori per venirne a capo nel tempo, inciampate nei vostri colori» (Wenders, W., Handke, P. [1987]). Ma la realtà è davvero in bianco e nero? E, soprattutto, è così densa da poter essere solo affermata o negata? È reale quello che ci dicono i sensi o quello che ci dice la scienza? Il libro *Realtà* scritto da Mario De Caro per la collana *I sampietrini* di Bollati Boringhieri ci aiuta a rispondere, offrendoci strumenti efficaci per capire e risorse per formulare nuove domande.

1. Il ritorno del reale

A proposito di colori, ci viene in mente il titolo di un romanzo straordinario, *Il mio nome è rosso*, dello scrittore turco Orhan Pamuk che, per la verità, ha giocato spesso con i colori nei suoi titoli (*Il castello bianco*, *Il libro nero*). Perché proprio *Il mio nome è rosso*? Perché sembra la citazione più adatta a contraddire quella convinzione che la realtà sia in bianco e nero, da affermare o negare. Con una trama complessa che imita l'ordito delle *miniature* arabe del XVI secolo, Pamuk dà voce, spessore e, appunto, colore alle molteplici dimensioni di realtà che si intersecano nella storia, tra Oriente e Occidente, tra gli artisti della miniatura musulmani e la scienza

della prospettiva rinascimentale, tra le interpretazioni e la verità, la religione e l'umanesimo. La storia, raccontata in prima persona da voci diverse (con i capitoli che portano il titolo di chi parla, tra cui appunto "il colore rosso" che si presenta e prende la parola), è poliedrica, corale, complessa: storia di finzione, storia di realtà plurali, su piani diversi, a cui accedere solo con strumenti diversi (Pamuk, O. [1998]).

Realtà di Mario De Caro ci ha ricordato il libro segretissimo e pericoloso del personaggio dello Zio Effendi vicino al Sultano, che è al cuore dell'intrigo poliziesco della trama di Pamuk, ovvero il libro di chi aveva viaggiato in Occidente, era entrato in contatto con la scoperta della "prospettiva", ma che voleva trovare un modo per farla convivere con i miniaturisti della tradizione incapaci di accettare l'arte come sguardo dell'uomo, e per i quali la prospettiva era blasfema. La differenza è che, per fortuna, siamo nel XXI secolo, in tutt'altra storia, e il libro di De Caro non è segreto, né pericoloso, tanto che possiamo leggerlo e confrontarci con esso.

Che cosa è dunque la realtà? De Caro è impegnato da anni a non rispondere come gli uomini della quotidianità nelle *Confessioni* di Agostino davanti alla questione del tempo, «se nessuno me lo chiede, lo so bene: ma se volessi darne spiegazione a chi me ne chiede, non lo so» (Agostino, [1968]: XI, 759 e ss.). E soprattutto, fin da tanti suoi precedenti testi, come *Bentornata realtà* (De Caro, M., Ferraris, M. [2012]) e *Il libero arbitrio* (De Caro, M. [2004], è impegnato dalla parte del *new realism*: la convinta riabilitazione del concetto di realtà. Questo nuovo volume ha però qualcosa di diverso: è appunto un sampietrino, vuole cioè essere un blocchetto di pietra di strada su cui può poggiare il piede anche il lettore non del mestiere (filosofico) e allo stesso tempo un solido mattoncino per comprendere i termini della grande questione di ciò che è reale e ciò che non lo è. Ma non lo fa in bianco e nero, per assoluti, e neppure nelle sfumature del grigio (predilette dagli appassionati di ermeneutica): lo fa a colori. Tentiamo di seguire il contenuto senza rivelare il finale, operazione scorretta se si trattasse di una

serie televisiva, ancora più scorretta quando si tratta di un testo che snoda con chiarezza i termini del problema e accompagna i lettori a comprendere la soluzione proposta.

Innanzitutto l'autore ci spiega che il realismo è tornato con forza sulla scena filosofica negli ultimi decenni, quando cioè si è allentata la stretta degli antirealisti. Per chi scrive, uno dei pregi di queste pagine è quello di usare sempre la parola realtà e non quella di verità. Il gruppo degli antirealisti è stato preminente per buona parte del secolo scorso, sia in terre anglosassoni che continentali. Non che neghino l'esistenza di una realtà extra-mentale, come se al di fuori ci fosse proprio il nulla, ma è prevalsa la convinzione che senza le categorie della mente e del linguaggio la realtà sia "amorfa, destrutturata, inarticolata, insensata", e che quindi il mondo dipenda dai paradigmi attraverso cui lo si rappresenta (si pensi alle tesi del filosofo della scienza Thomas Kuhn). Accanto alle forme tradizionali di antirealismo, come il nominalismo, l'idealismo, il relativismo, l'empirismo radicale, lo scetticismo, il Novecento ne ha sviluppate altre, come il postmodernismo, il pensiero debole, il decostruzionismo, tutte concezioni che negano l'idea di una realtà oggettiva indipendente dalla precondizione linguistica della sua esistenza (sotto questo profilo, anche per l'ermeneutica di Hans Georg Gadamer la comprensione del reale presuppone atti interpretativi). Si affaccia il dubbio che l'antirealismo della ragione debole possa rischiare di generare un «nichilismo difficilmente giustificabile e armonizzabile con la vita effettiva della scienza, della società, della comunicazione» (Maddalena, G. [2020]: 693) e, aggiungiamo, dell'etica: una deriva che l'ermeneutica di Paul Ricoeur ha invece voluto combattere fino all'ultima riga (Ricoeur, P. [1990]).

Insomma, c'è bisogno di un ritorno alla realtà, che faccia però tesoro di quello che le tradizioni novecentesche ci hanno lasciato. In questo, De Caro è come Zio Effendi, ovvero sceglie di stare dalla sua parte, il realismo, ma dopo aver conosciuto la novità e le potenzialità della prospettiva, e prova a far convivere i mondi.

2.Il conflitto dei realismi: la realtà a colori

De Caro sceglie una terza via per il suo realismo ontologico, pur non trovandosi all'interno di un "conflitto delle interpretazioni" di ricoeuriana memoria, ma all'interno di un "conflitto dei realismi". «A voler essere precisi – afferma – il problema del realismo non dovrebbe essere formulato in una forma tutto o niente. Detto altrimenti: nessun filosofo serio è stato mai del tutto realista o del tutto antirealista (…). In questa prospettiva, si comprende che tutti i tentativi di soluzione del problema del realismo sono questione di grado, occorre cioè determinare la giusta dose di realismo da adottare nei vari casi» (De Caro, M. [2020]: 15-16). Nel conflitto dei realismi troviamo da una parte il realismo ordinario, dall'altra il realismo scientifico. Il primo rappresenta la concezione di chi definisce reali solo le cose di cui si ha esperienza diretta attraverso i sensi, oppure indiretta attraverso gli strumenti che prolungano i sensi, come i microscopi, i telescopi, eccetera. È la percezione a farci accedere al mondo esterno, e le proprietà degli oggetti che essa coglie nel mondo devono, dunque, essere reali perché percepite. Il secondo tipo, il realismo scientifico, rappresenta la concezione di chi sostiene siano reali solo gli eventi e le entità che le scienze naturali possono descrivere e spiegare, come a dire che «la scienza è misura di tutte le cose, di ciò che è in quanto è, e di ciò che non è in quanto non è», prendendo in prestito una frase di Wilfrid Sellars citata nel libro.

Il conflitto è ovviamente molto più complesso. Sono tanti i riferimenti di De Caro, che per ovvie ragioni non possono trovare spazio in queste nostre righe: la disputa tra platonici e aristotelici, il primato della matematica e della fisica per i platonici rinascimentali e il primato della percezione nella conoscenza per gli aristotelici, la filosofia del Cinquecento di Galileo e le "esperienze sensate", fino a Descartes, Hume, l'empirismo. Prima di arrivare al realismo del senso comune di Hilary Putnam negli anni Novanta (con cui De Caro ha collaborato per un lungo periodo di ricerche e scrittura fino agli ultimi giorni della vita del filosofo statunitense) sfilano i nomi di Sellars, Qui-

ne, Searle, il pragmatismo di James, l'empirismo costruttivo di Van Fraassen. Nel capitolo sul realismo ordinario ritroviamo la lettura di Edmund Husserl, le cui indagini fenomenologiche provano che l'unico mondo reale è il "mondo della vita", il mondo dell'esperienza umana, che è «il dimenticato fondamento di senso della scienza naturale» (Husserl, E. [1961]: 48); il suo realismo ordinario diventa antirealismo rispetto alla scienza che va interpretata solo strumentalmente. Al contrario, nel capitolo sul realismo scientifico, le tesi di Willard Van Orman Quine ci portano al cuore del "naturalismo radicale", divenuto «il veicolo principale con cui il realismo scientifico si è diffuso nel mondo filosofico», scrive l'autore: la realtà è costituita solo da ciò che le scienze naturali ci spiegano; le scienze naturali sono le sole fonti genuine di conoscenza; la filosofia va sviluppata solo "in continuità con il resto della scienza", condividendone il metodo e gli scopi. Nel conflitto tra questi realismi egemonici e unilaterali, la soluzione proposta da De Caro è quella del "naturalismo liberalizzato", o realismo pluralistico, ricco e relazionale, appunto la soluzione che ci piace definire a colori: «noi disponiamo di una pluralità di chiavi di accesso alla realtà, e la realtà stessa è molto variegata».

Ciò che si deve concludere è che ognuno di noi, in quanto animale, è parte della natura, ma in quanto partecipe dello "spazio delle ragioni" è parte di una cultura insieme ad altri esseri umani e in questo modo acquisisce la sua seconda natura: e la seconda natura è, appunto, ancora natura (De Caro, M. [2020]: 72).

3. La sfida delle realtà potenziate

Il libro di De Caro ha il pregio di aiutarci a riformulare proprio quello "spazio delle ragioni" che pure costituisce la natura umana, ci è caro più di ogni altra cosa, e costruisce l'identità della filosofia non appiattita sulle scienze.

Davvero la realtà e la conoscenza non possono eccedere l'ambito della scienza? In un'ottica di realismo scientifico portato alle conseguenze più radi-

cali, non ci resta che la strada del *riduzionismo* per definire l'estetica e l'etica. La coscienza, il significato, la normatività, le proprietà morali, il libero arbitrio sarebbero fenomeni «ontologicamente genuini, soltanto perché identici, o almeno riducibili, a fenomeni scientificamente accettabili»: si pensi alle *neuroestetica* con il suo tentativo di ridurre le proprietà estetiche a proprietà neurologiche, ma si pensi anche alle teorie normative che poggiano l'oggettività dei giudizi su proprietà morali considerate solo come proprietà naturali che possono essere studiate con gli strumenti scientifici.

Quei tentativi di riduzione vanno però incontro a un enorme problema. Un aspetto essenziale delle proprietà morali è che esse hanno a che fare non solo con il mondo dell'essere, che riguarda il modo in cui le cose sono, ma anche con il mondo del dover essere, ossia con la normatività (…). Uno scienziato naturale, però, può solo indagare come le cose sono, non come dovrebbero essere. L'aspetto normativo della morale sfugge del tutto ai tentativi di riduzione (De Caro, M. [2020]: 60).

Non solo, quindi, sul piano morale il riduzionismo rischia di lasciare fuori quel che conta per noi in termini di libertà e creazione di significati, la nostra capacità di rispondere al senso dei valori e delle norme, di agire sul piano del "dover essere" (quindi della responsabilità e del coraggio), ma anche sul piano estetico rischia di ridefinire l'attenzione e la percezione tramite i soli dati dei processi neuronali scientificamente osservabili.

L'approccio di De Caro mira a ribadire che non esiste un solo modo di spiegare il mondo umano, ed è questo il tesoro più grande della filosofia. Del resto, anche la "meta-estetica" sfugge ai tentativi di riduzione, e si afferma proprio nella capacità di indagare come l'estetico si origini dalle dinamiche percettive e nei contesti culturali, senza però mai ridursi né alle une né agli altri; in questo senso, l'estetico nella sua origine va pensato come un *passaggio* tra le disposizioni naturali e la cultura, fatta di contesti, tradizioni, abiti (Desideri, F. [2013]).

Oggi è più che mai necessario ragionare su tutto questo.

I giorni della pandemia hanno riportato l'opinione pubblica a confrontarsi con le ricerche e le verifiche della scienza, e ci è sufficiente pensare al dibattito sull'efficacia del vaccino per capire come si ragioni in termini di oggettività del risultato, di *big data* in tutte le loro applicazioni. Ma la scienza non è l'automatismo del dubbio che produce il dato inconfutabile: è anche confronto, scontro di posizioni, agire comunicativo, risultati parziali, tempi dilatati, fallibilità.

Tanti altri esempi possono essere menzionati. L'antica domanda filosofica sulla realtà dello spazio, per esempio, e la risposta in termini realisti/antirealisti (è una determinazione del corpo oppure è una determinazione della mente?) deve necessariamente calarsi negli scenari artificiali e interattivi del *digital twin* urbano che sta consentendo l'evoluzione delle nostre città da *tecnopolis* a *smart cities*.

Ancora: se vogliamo costruire un discorso estetico ed etico sulla realtà potenziata della robotica umanoide, sperimentiamo che non è sufficiente fare i conti soltanto con la biologia e le neuroscienze, così come non basta soltanto l'esame della dimensione percettiva e sensoriale, ma abbiamo bisogno dell'analisi concettuale, del metodo fenomenologico ed ermeneutico.

E ciò vuol dire che ci sono casi – scrive De Caro - in cui la scienza può contribuire ad una discussione filosofica e altri in cui la filosofia può chiarire alcuni aspetti dell'indagine scientifica, e talora anche contribuire a dirimere alcune dispute tra scienziati (De Caro, M. [2020]: 76).

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[di Fabrizia Abbate]

Ricardo Ibarlucía, *Belleza sin aura: Surrealismo y teoría del arte en Walter Benjamin*, Miño y Dávila, Buenos Aires 2020, pp. 448.

In a counterpoint between conceptual exegesis and literary history, this recently published work by Ricardo Ibarlucía carefully interweaves a reconstruction of Walter Benjamin's materialistic theory of art with a revision of the historical evolution of Surrealism through its works and writings. *Belleza sin aura* is guided by the hypothesis that Benjamin's philosophical use of Surrealism is not only the drive of his essays devoted to the artistic movement itself but rather the keystone of his mature aesthetic theory. Although the impact of Benjamin's assimilation of Marxism in his late aesthetics has been examined quite copiously, this is not the case, as the author points out, with regard to the influence of aesthetic debates surrounding the Surrealist movement. Thus, this study aims to make a contribution in this direction.

Throughout its pages, the book achieves a coherent presentation of Benjamin's fragmentary materialistic theory or art by means of tracking down Benjamin's contact with the works of Surrealist writers as well as the material about them

and, as it were, reading along with the philosopher. While reconstructing Benjamin's mature aesthetics, it therefore creates a Surrealist archive from the genesis of the artistic movement to its end, that builds up to a *crescendo* from Surrealists' initial literary experiments with the unconscious to their involvement in political action. The first two chapters thus trace the origins of Surrealism. Chapter I starts by examining Guillaume Apollinaire's repertoire of aesthetic ideas, documenting his coining of the term "*surréalisme*" in connection to his thoughts on the "new spirit" and "new realism", while also taking stock of the literary journals that would start to sketch the outlines of Surrealism: *Les soireés de Paris*, *SIC* and *Nord-Sud*. Chapter II studies the birth and the initial stages of the Surrealist movement: first, it considers André Gide's character Lafcadio, illustrator Jacques Vaché and poet Isadore Ducasse as moral models for the young Surrealist artists; second, it focuses on the arrival of the first two issues of *Littérature*, the movement's first organ founded by André Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault; third, it studies the merge with Dada and the actions carried out in Paris by the unified group; lastly, it examines the "Surrealist controversy", in which the heirs of Apollinaire dispute the possession of the term "*surréalisme*" with the editors of *Littérature*, confronting their respective aesthetic positions.

Chapter III focuses on Aragon's *Une vague de rêves* and *Le paysan de Paris* as essential texts both for understanding Surrealist aesthetics and for Benjamin's writing of *Das Passagen-Werk*, and studies Aragon's notion of a "modern mythology", comparing his philosophical readings on German idealism with Breton's psychological sources for his "psychic automatism". In a similar spirit, it examines Surrealists' experiences towards an exploration of the subconscious and the resulting publishing of automatic texts and dream reports in *Littérature*'s second series and in the first issues of *La Révolution surréaliste*. After going over Benjamin's first contacts with Surrealism documented in some of his letters to Rilke and Scholem, chapter IV tackles the analysis of

Benjamin's "Traumkitsch", traced back to Benjamin's reading of *Une vague de rêves*, Breton's "Manifeste du surréalisme" and Éluard's *Répétitions*. Benjamin's interpretation of Surrealists portrayal of dreams leads to a brief enquire on the origin of the term "Kitsch" and then to comparing Benjamin's thoughts on the dialectic assimilation of Kitsch by films with Fritz Karpfen's, Adolf Behne's, Hermann Broch's, Clement Greenberg's, Theodor W. Adorno's, Norbert Elias' and Ernst Bloch's insights on Kitsch and mass art. Finally, it examines Aragon's aesthetics of the whimsical and his ideas on "modern beauty", linking these considerations to Benjamin's analysis of Surrealists' allegorical approach to consumer goods and of the figures of the chiffonier and the collector.

These final problems serve as a prelude to the subject of Chapter V: the analysis of the notions of "aura" and "trace", both crucial to Benjamin's theory of perception. Firstly, it deals with the link between Benjamin's observations on Kitsch and popular art, on the one hand, and his analysis of the mimetic faculty, children's games and the concepts of mask and ornament, on the other hand, reading through some of Benjamin's earlier writings. Secondly, it examines Léon Daudet's concept of *ambiance*, his thoughts on cinema and his analysis of the concepts of shock and distraction, considered as a conceptual framework for Benjamin's future remarks. Then, it goes through some of the works in which Benjamin defines the notion of aura, focusing on the connection between aura and glance, and offering a clarifying interweaving of the different appearances of the term. After reconstructing these definitions, the section analyses Benjamin's assertions on the decline of the aura and intertwines them with the conception of the beauty of cinema as a non-auratic beauty. Finally, it tackles the analysis of the notion of trace, considering the distinction between closeness and distance and Benjamin's remarks on nineteenth-century bourgeois interiors as discussed in "Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts", which leads to the connection with Art Nouveau and the analysis on Salvador Dali's essay on "edible beauty".

Following a brief excursus on the German reception of Surrealist authors, Chapter VI focuses on Benjamin's theory of distraction, his ideas on "tactile reception" and his approach to the concept of document in connection to use value for interpreting avant-garde artworks, reading through *Einbahnstraße*, the paralipomena of *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* and the "notes and materials" of *Das Passagen-Werk*. In turn, chapter VII examines the role of "G group" in Benjamin's first contacts with Man Ray's rayographs, Max Ernst's collages and Eugene Atget's photographs and the influence these works had on the writing of "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" and "Pariser Brief [II]. Malerei und Photographie". Chapter VIII initially documents the impression films like *Les vampires*, *The Great Mysteries of New York* and *Fantomâs* had on Surrealist artists in their youth and then examines Soupault's, Desnos' and Aragon's thoughts on the differences between cinema and theatre and the anti-Romantic influence the former could have on poetry. On this basis, it goes on to study Benjamin's ideas about film acting techniques, his thesis on the "optical unconscious", and cinema's proximity of vision with science and the connection of Walt Disney's works to *Märchen* (fairy tales). Finally, it explores the relationship between Benjamin's idea of the prophetic value in art and Breton's conception of the social function of artwork as traversed by "reflections of the future". Chapter IX is organized around the figure of Charles Chaplin and his films as central both for Surrealists and for Benjamin's late theory of art. After compiling some essays and poems Surrealist writers devoted to the English actor and then considering German reception towards Chaplin's work during the times of the Weimar Republic, it concludes by examining Benjamin's insights on the film actor and the dictator as well as about the revolutionary potential of laughter, in the light of his vision of Chaplin's The Tramp screen persona as a counterpart for Adolph Hitler.

Chapter X analyses some other capital categories for Benjamin's materialistic theory, this time

starting from a "genealogy" of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. It thus follows a line of inheritance suggested by Jean Brun that goes from Futurist aesthetization of the machine to Francis Picabia's "mechanic painting" and Duchamp's evolution towards his *Le grand verre*. Ibarlucía's proposal to interpret ready-mades as promoters of "tactile perception" and as a playground allows him to introduce the polarities between "cult value" and "exhibition value" and between "appearance" and "game" advanced by Benjamin in the different versions of *Das Kunstwerk*, as well as the distinction between a "first technique" and a "second technique". In turn, the supposition of a crisis of autonomous art that lies beneath these reasonings leads to confronting Benjamin's thesis with Heidegger's "Der ursprung des Kunstwerkes".

Chapter XI examines the concept of "profane illumination", present in "Der Sürrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz", and studies Surrealists' shift from dream to action in light of the analysis of the concept of "intoxication" as collective experience and his idea of a "dialectics of intoxication". Reviewing the political discussion within the artistic, it stresses the importance of Pierre Naville's notions of "surrealist illumination" and "state of frenzy" present in *La révolution et les intellectuels* as precedents for Benjamin's "profane illumination", as well as of Naville's call for an "organisation of pessimism" in "Mieux et moins bien". Finally, in the light of Benjamin's view of both Heidegger's existential ontology and the "profane illumination" of Surrealism as oppositional ways of secularization of the mystical tradition, the chapter examines the radical difference in the analyses of the concept of "Jetztzeit" offered in Benjamin's "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" and that of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.

The final chapter is devoted to the analysis of Benjamin's "anthropological materialism". It reconstructs Benjamin's critique of "metaphysic materialism" and his assumption of an anthropological point of view that emphasizes corporal and vital aspects of the collective dimension. In this spirit, it points out the way in which Benjamin stresses the importance of the secularized mystical element present in utopian and anarchocommunist political groups for political praxis, approximating it to the revolutionary nihilism he sees in Surrealism. In the light of these remarks, it studies Benjamin's proximity to the group Contre-Attaque and draws attention to the similarities between Breton's exhortation to study the new social superstructures and to use fascist weapons of exaltation and fanatism against fascism and the anti-fascist theoretical project behind *Das Kunstwerk* as well as Benjamin's idea of a dialectics of intoxication presented in his essay on Surrealism. After going through the philosopher's contacts with the College of Sociology and the group Acéphale, the chapter concludes by linking the idea of a state of restitution associated to Surrealist profane illumination with Benjamin's interest on "popular imagery".

In sum, *Belleza sin aura* does not only offer a solid account of Benjamin's mature aesthetics and a competent discussion with some of the philosopher's main exegetes, but also provides a valuable archive on Surrealism that includes literary critiques and new translations, all of which contribute to a historical reconstruction of the debates and categories that come into play in the aesthetics of the first half of the twentieth century, often absent in philosophical analysis and yet crucial for a full understanding of the conceptual problems at stake. For these reasons, this work promises to become an essential volume in the study of Benjamin's aesthetics. In the last pages of the book, Ibarlucía borrows the recurrent image of little people operating inside fairground automats to illustrate the way in which Benjamin, faithful to Breton's call for an occultation of Surrealism in his Second Manifesto, conceals the strings of Surrealism in his own theory. By means of a rigorous intertwining of Benjamin's thinking and Surrealist works and debates, the author amply proves the crucial role of the artistic movement in Benjamin's mature aesthetics.

[by Sol Bidon-Chanal]