

# Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

## Finalism in judgment, finalism of judging

*edited by*

Fabrizio Desideri

Mariagrazia Portera

(in collaboration with Fausto Fraisopi)

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



14 • 2/2021

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

# Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

## *Finalism in judgment, finalism of judging*

*Edited by*

Fabrizio Desideri, Mariagrazia Portera  
(in collaboration with Fausto Fraisopi)

Vol 14, No 2 (2021)

Firenze University Press



## Foreword Finalism and Judgement

What does it mean to “judge” something? What are the preconditions and the necessary prerequisites for the formulation of a judgement (be it a cognitive judgement, a moral judgement, or an aesthetic judgement)? Is there a special relationship between finalism and judgement and, if yes, in what sense? The relationship between finalism and judgment has been typically understood along two main lines of interpretation: on the one hand, as the finalism attributed by judging to certain objects or phenomena; on the other hand, from the point of view of the finality of judging itself, i.e., the teleological orientation of judging in the global dimension of life.

This issue of *Aisthesis* includes a selection of highly relevant contributions to the topic “Judgement and finalism”, with the aim of bringing to the fore the circular movement that seems to characterize every judgement in itself – from nature, and from the nature of our mind, to the objects, structures, natural kinds etc. that populate the world, and reversely from the world to the mind. Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement* plays, in this respect, a very fundamental role, as the papers by Stefano Velotti, Luigi Filieri, Lorenzo Sala, and Antonio Branca show brilliantly. Andrea Lanza and Barbara Santini discuss the interconnections between teleology and judgement in the frame, respectively, of Husserl’s phenomenology and Friedrich Hölderlin’s poetic philosophy. The idea that finalism and the dynamics of judgement have much to do with each other opens new links to disciplines other than philosophy and to an interdisciplinary approach to the activity of judging in

research fields such as psychology, cognitive sciences, biology. This is the perspective adopted by Francesco Vitale, in his paper on Ernst Mayr’s teleonomy, and by Onerva Kiianlinna, in her paper on epigenesis and modularity in Evolutionary Aesthetics.

This present issue is further enriched by a substantial focus on images and the aesthetic experience in the digital age (Fabrizio Desideri, Francesca Perotto, Caterina Zaira) and by a multifaceted and intriguing “Varia” section, with contributions by Ricardo Ibarlucia, Mariya Veleva, David Alvaro González, Carmelo Colangelo.

*Fabrizio Desideri, Mariagrazia Portera*





**Citation:** S. Velotti (2021) A New Image of Humanity? A Transcendental in the Making. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 5-15. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13204

**Copyright:** © 2021 S. Velotti. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## A New Image of Humanity? A Transcendental in the Making

STEFANO VELOTTI

Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy)  
stefano.velotti@uniroma1.it

**Abstract.** If it is true that at the core of the Enlightenment project was an attempt to discover a new definition of human nature itself, there is no doubt that for a long time, and today more than ever, there is a similar urgency to find a different vision of humanity, since the prevailing one – heir of the Enlightenment – is perceived from many sides as in need of a profound revision, if not catastrophic. If we are living in the ruins of modernity, we should neither attempt to embalm them, nor to raze them to the ground. This article maintains that Kant’s work on the reflecting judgment (along with a productive reinterpretation of notions such as «finality», «exemplarity», «heautonomy») can offer precious resources to reshape that image of humanity that we feel is now inadequate in the face of the complexity of our forms of life, without the need to abandon ourselves to old and new longings for the absolute.

**Keywords:** Reflecting Judgment, Finality, Exemplarity, Heautonomy, Ontological Turn.

---

### 1. A NEW IMAGE OF HUMANITY?

The forces and aspirations that find expression in our affluent societies today are manifold, not to mention those that elsewhere find no space to make themselves heard, because they are far removed from the interests that occupy the global political-economic establishment. Some of these forces – emotions, frustrations, longings, desires, worldviews – find access even in academic research, received and articulated in philosophical, anthropological, sociological discourses. In the background of the many crises we are experiencing – ecological, economic, moral, political – I believe there is a greater struggle, whose stake is the very image of humanity. If it is true that «at the core of the “Enlightenment project” was an attempt to discover a new definition of nothing less than human nature itself», (Pagden [2013]: 21-22), there is no doubt that for a long time, and today more than ever, there is a similar urgency to find a different vision of humanity, since the prevailing one – heir

of the Enlightenment – is perceived from many sides as inadequate, partial, unsuccessful, in need of a profound revision: all the “post-something” (not only the now worn out postmodern, but the postsecular, the posthuman, the postcolonial, the postcritical) that abound in academic discourse or public conversation are signs of this travail. These “post conditions” are all aimed at modifying, revising, or even rejecting the Enlightenment legacy that is integral to our concept of modernity. Leaving aside the more reactionary and conservative critiques of the Enlightenment, which have accompanied it since its beginnings (cf. Pagden [2013]: 373-417), and so also its current triumphalist apologies (e.g. Pinker [2018]), it nevertheless seems that “the age of critique” has lost its appeal for many, (Latour [2004]), and thus the very recourse to judgment is viewed with impatience, in favor of other practices (cf. Deleuze [1983]), sometimes even within a practice that is defined by the very exercise of judgment such as art criticism (Elkins [2003]).

Apart from the fact that modernity, and the Enlightenment itself, are not at all as monolithic and uniform as some would like to present them, it might also be true that «we have never been modern» (Latour [1991]), – if we mean on the one hand that the so-called modernity is imbued with archaic elements, and, on the other, that its most triumphalist proclamations do not find correspondence in its actual practices –, but then we should also affirm the inverse, namely that «we have never been non-modern», in the sense that every culture, even the cultures that we like to see as more «enchanted» and «tribal», are not at all compact and sealed in «the other of reason», and host within them critical reflections, skepticism, questions, pluralisms, non-uniform forms of life. The European Enlightenment itself is unthinkable without taking into account the encounter/clash with different cultures<sup>1</sup>. Often, even in those most

inclined to see modernity unilaterally as a single block of totalizing, scientific, Eurocentric, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal thought, blind and violent towards the richness of the pluralism of possible forms of life and alternatives to «ours» – at times the thought emerges that this same critique of modernity inherited from the Enlightenment is inevitably its heir. These efforts to overcome the «totalizing» perspective of modernity are addressed to the recognition of an epistemological and ontological pluralism<sup>2</sup>, in an attempt to depower, limit or at least reformulate the «autonomy» of the modern subject-individual and his world.

On the more strictly philosophical side, even more daring attempts are multiplying, aiming at unhinging the very «correlation» of human subjects with reality, in order to ensure its autonomy, trying to bypass any human footprint. As if the just (and belated) concern for the traces left on the world by the richest part of humanity – including those at the origin of the climate and ecological crisis we are witnessing – should be translated into metaphysical terms, exalting the autonomy of the non-human reality, its literal absoluteness. One could hypothesize that this fascination for objects, for absolute contingency, for what does not depend in any way on us – as if it had never been recognized by anyone in the past – is motivated by a sort of compensation, *sub spe-*

---

undesirable consequences: «The problem with cultural relativism is that it puts people in boxes not of their own making. [...]. Ontology2 [an ontology resulting from taking empirical, cultural concepts as constitutive as Kantian categories] only replaces a deeper box. Some people like deep boxes. There seems to be every reason to believe that those with whom Viveiros de Castro works, those with whom he fights for the rights to “ontological self-determination”, are among them. But by the same token, one must respect the desires of those who wish their boxes to be shallower, or who do not wish to be put in any kind of box» (Graeber [2015]: 34). For a view of the Enlightenment as indebted to Europeans’ encounters with «other» cultures see now Graeber, Wengrow (2021).

<sup>2</sup> See Consigliere (2020). On the limits and ambiguities of the so-called «ontological turn» in anthropology from a philosophical point of view see Leghissa (2021).

---

<sup>1</sup> The ontological pluralism assumed by the proponents of the «ontological turn» has been harshly criticized by Graeber in several respects, not least of which is that it is itself a form of generalized aprioristic categorization with

*cie aeternitatis*, for our cumbersome presence. A sort of homeopathic cure: curing the anguish of disappearing from the earth's crust by erasing our traces in the skies of speculation. The threat (for our species) of a world without us, is anticipated – in a way not devoid of contradictions – in exercises of thought that would like to free the real, of which they speak and with which they relate, from any correlation with human subjects, including themselves.

Of course, these are only impressionistic generalizations, and every single proposal should be evaluated with due attention. But if it is difficult to orient oneself in this maze of theories, it is also difficult not to think of a solidarity between the most superficial reconsideration of animism and panpsychism, of metamorphosis and «becoming other» – often associated with the exaltation of immersivity and interactivity promised in every press release of exhibitions and artistic performances –, and the anxiety for a new absolute, that of the real and of objects, animate and inanimate, finally freed from our (conceptual) grasps. Remaining on this impressionistic level of generality, we must reiterate that the needs from which these theories and reflections emerge are understandable and legitimate, but it remains to be decided whether the answers have so far found convincing formulations.

These very general references to our cultural landscape may seem disproportionate to the task we have set ourselves in this article: to re-examine some of the junctures of critical reflection, of Kantian origin, on the nature of the faculty of judgment in relation to finality, or conformity to purposes (*Zweckmässigkeit*). But the very fact that the philosophical-cultural currents just mentioned often have Kantian thought as their main polemical target made it opportune to recall them.

Outside the large circle of his scholars, in fact, Kant is now from time to time casually named as the greatest representative of an Enlightenment blinded by the myth of reason<sup>3</sup>, of a Eurocen-

tric universalism (and therefore in reality tribal and colonial)<sup>4</sup>, of a monolithic and self-confident modernity, or instead as the founder of a post-modern mentality, constructivist to the extreme of idealism, disrespectful of the hardness and independence of reality. In the field of aesthetic reflection, then, as if by a conditioned reflex worthy of a Flaubertian dictionary of received ideas, he is immediately associated with the stigma of «disinterested contemplation», as if this were something that would not even be worth trying to understand, simply accepting it as the opposite of whatever an aesthetic experience up to our times should profess. More surprising and disappointing is the frequent ignorance of the important transformations of Kantian thought elaborated in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* even by scholars who dialogue with his thought, starting perhaps from the prejudice that aesthetics is a negligible sectoral field, if not for some art lovers, but completely unusable when dealing with serious questions, as when discussing, for example, the quality or legitimacy of our forms of life<sup>5</sup>.

---

Desideri rightly states after a careful analysis of the «aesthetic movement from below» that characterizes Kant's reflection in the third *Critique* (Desideri [2011]: 187).

<sup>4</sup> In his extensive defense of the Enlightenment, Pagden (2013: 373-417) reviews, in the final chapter, some of the most prevalent positions of its «enemies».

<sup>5</sup> Just one example among many that could be given, taken from an author who has written books of great interest, Rahel Jaeggi, regarded as an exponent of the last generation of the Frankfurt School: «Can forms of life be criticized? Can we say whether particular forms of life are good, successful, or even rational? Since Kant it has been broadly accepted that happiness or the good life, in contrast to the morally right, cannot be determined philosophically. [...] The question of how we lead our lives has been consigned to the domain of *unquestioned preferences or irreducible and unchallengeable identities*. As with taste, there is no quarreling with forms of life.» (Jaeggi [2005]: 67, italics mine). This is a surprising statement in many ways, starting with the fact that it is precisely taste that, in Kant's reflection, legitimizes the boundless field of what is susceptible to «quarreling», or discussion, as distinct, on the one hand, from what can be demonstrated – under certain conditions – empirically and logically and, on the other, from mere individual, idiosyncratic prefer-

---

<sup>3</sup> «The thesis that Kantian philosophy has removed “the other of reason” turns out to be a weak legend», Fabrizio



As I hope to show, the critical philosophy inaugurated by Kant has valuable tools to offer to help understand our present, starting with the concept of «exemplarity» elaborated in the third *Critique*, in close relation to other notions, such as precisely that of «reflecting judgment» and «finality», but also of «heautonomy» and «common sense». It would be absurd, of course, to want to defend all the personal convictions that Kant shared with his time, many certainly indefensible. But personal convictions are one thing, thinking and understanding problems are another. The specialized studies on the notions just mentioned are endless, and there is no lack of very interesting studies from a philosophical-political point of view (see at least Arendt [1970], Ferrara [2008]). It is worthwhile, then, to try to clear the field of some misunderstandings surrounding some of these key notions, aiming to highlight the aspects that are most susceptible to further developments and applications. Here I will mostly follow the interpretative lines drawn by Emilio Garroni (especially [1986], [1992]), trying to compare them with some of those themes just mentioned, not yet on the agenda or in the foreground in the years when Garroni was writing.

## 2. EXEMPLARITY

«The expression “example” [...] had all the requisites to be destined to profoundly change the general orientation of critical philosophy» (Garroni [1992]: 142). One of the places where the notion of example emerges most explicitly «in a strong Kantian sense» (ibid.: 25), is the fourth moment of the «Analytic of the Beautiful», there where Kant questions the modality of judgment of taste and of that peculiar feeling it expresses. The analysis of the modality proceeds in parallel with that of the quantity of the judgment of taste, dealt with in the second moment of the «Analytic»: the

kind of validity that demands a judgment of taste is, as is well known, an aesthetic, (inter)subjective universality, that demands to extend itself over the entire sphere of those who judge (and does not concern the logical extension of the concept). On the other hand, since the logical quantity of the judgment of taste is singular – insofar as ascribing the beauty to some object or all objects belonging to a class is a dead end because it would presuppose a conceptual principle for their subsumption –, it must only be exemplary. It is no coincidence that section 9 of the second moment (the peculiar universality of the judgment of taste) follows an argument similar to that made in section 21 of the fourth moment (devoted to its peculiar necessity), given the double implication between the exemplary universality and the exemplary necessity of the judgment. The necessity assigned by Kant to the judgment of taste is therefore also a «special kind» of necessity: not an apodictic necessity – neither theoretical nor practical – but precisely «only exemplary»:

*Now this necessity is of a special kind: not a theoretical objective necessity, where it can be cognized a priori that everyone will feel this satisfaction in the object called beautiful by me, nor a practical necessity, whereby means of concepts of a pure will, serving as rules for freely acting beings, this satisfaction is a necessary consequence of an objective law and signifies nothing other than that one absolutely (without a further aim) ought to act in a certain way. Rather, as a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called exemplary, i.e., a necessity of the assent of all to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce (Kant [1790], §18, 5:237).*

This notion of exemplarity – the exemplification of a rule that cannot be made explicit, because it is indeterminate and can only be felt – has struck many commentators. But it also happens to distinguished scholars (cf. Derrida [1978]) to appreciate the Kantian novelty, only to return to confuse some purely illustrative examples, with which Kant would like to facilitate, perhaps unhappily, the understanding of his arguments,

---

ences. One need only read the pages of the «Dialectic of the Faculty of Judgment» to revisit such a trite view, or the important section 40 on «common sense» (*Gemeinsinn*), and the now extensive literature about it.

with the exemplarity «in the strong sense» that – exemplifying a «rule that one cannot produce» – cannot determine anything, let alone a class of objects with certain characteristics, ornamental or not (cf. Velotti [2010]). Garroni's reading remains firmly anchored to this «strong» sense of exemplarity, not referable to the exemplification of determined concepts (this cat as a member of the class of cats) and referable, it would seem, to the example of an extraordinary person: the *imitatio Christi* certainly does not refer to an invitation to become a member of the class of Christs, but to Christ as «exemplum for human beings [...], that is, in the sense in which something concrete and determined is the bearer of a quality or condition that cannot be expressed otherwise than through its bearer» (Garroni [1992]: 90, note 76). This last clarification, given as a first approximation, could be misleading, however, like the one offered by Hannah Arendt in her reading of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In fact, Arendt seems to assimilate exemplarity to particularly typical or emblematic empirical schemes:

*The example is the particular that contains in itself, or is supposed to contain, a concept or a general rule. How, for instance, is one able to judge, to evaluate, an act as courageous? When judging, one says spontaneously, without any derivations from general rules, «This man has courage». If one were a Greek, one would have in «the depths of one's mind» the example of Achilles. Imagination is again necessary: one must have Achilles present even though he certainly is absent. If we say of somebody that he is good, we have in the back of our minds the example of Saint Francis or Jesus of Nazareth. The judgment has exemplary validity to the extent that the example is rightly chosen. Or, to take another instance: in the context of French history I can talk about Napoleon Bonaparte as a particular man; but the moment I speak about Bonapartism I have made an example of him. (Arendt [1970]: 84)*

This interpretation of exemplarity leaves much to be desired and has been rightly criticized (Ferrara [2008]: 49-61; but see also Tavani [2010]

183 sg.)<sup>6</sup>. Since Garroni's reference to the *imitatio Christi* could lead to a similar misunderstanding, it is good to clarify at least some points of the issue. Ferrara raises several objections to this reading, all of which are relevant, among which I mention: (a) the danger of assimilating examples to empirical schemata, and thus bringing exemplarity back into the realm of determining, rather than reflecting, power of judgment; (b) the risk of flattening the exemplary case to an image in its concreteness, however holistic, without grasping a «unity of purpose»; c) the difficulty in accounting for the possibility not only of selecting or «applying» an example – which obviously requires, like any judgment, the exercise of a reflecting, as well as determining power of judgment – but of creating a new one. Ferrara then proceeds to reconstruct a more adequate notion of exemplarity, reaching the following conclusion:

*Examples orient us in our appraisal of the meaning of action not as schemata, but as well-formed works of art do: namely, as outstanding instances of congruency capable of educating our discernment by way of exposing us to selective instances of the feeling of the furtherance of our life. And the force of examples transcends local boundaries more easily than the force of laws or principles because they tap intuitions that run deeper, in the constitution of our subjectivity, than the level that requires translations. (Ferrara [2008]: 61)*

But despite this reconstruction, perhaps it is necessary to insist on the fundamental issue: to Arendt's assertion that «The example is the particular that contains in itself, or is supposed to contain, a concept or a general rule», it should be immediately added that it is not just any rule, but that «rule that one cannot produce» (§ 18). The power of reflecting judgment, as Kant explains in section IV of the «Introduction» – as the power of applying aptly a rule to a given case, or as the power of finding a rule for one or more particu-

<sup>6</sup> The examples brought by Arendt seem, if anything, more assimilable to Vico's «poetic characters», perhaps not identical to the «fantastic universals» (Velotti [1995]).

lars in order to classify them or to bring them together under the same universal law not yet given – certainly has a crucial epistemological value. And in all empirical judgments, cognitive or otherwise, the power of determining judgment (in which a universal or a rule is already given) and of reflecting judgment (in which a universal or a rule must be assigned “judiciously” or constructed because it is not available) must work together. However, the determining principle (*Bestimmungsgrund*) of the faculty of judgment *in general* is exemplarily exhibited in *aesthetic* judgments, if and when they are produced on the occasion of a (logically) singular judgment. And aesthetic judgments highlight, exemplarily, that our faculty of judgment in general cannot depend on a conceptual rule, nor does it necessarily have to rely on another rule or law that can be made explicit. Leaving all other considerations aside, this would lead to an infinite regress (the rule to apply the rule...). But it is precisely in aesthetic judgments that the universal to which the individual «thing», event or action is traced is what Kant calls a common sense or common feeling, a *Gemeinsinn*. And such a feeling escapes the problem of infinite regress in that it is «self-applicable» (Floyd [1998]: 195) or «self-congruent» (Ferrara [2008]). Yet, if such *Gemeinsinn* can only be felt (it is a *Sinn*, a sense as in “making sense”, and it is a feeling, a *Gefühl*), it is at the same time a product of our cognitive faculties united in a «free schematism», where it is not a determined concept that is schematically exhibited but the same indeterminate legality or normativity of the whole intellect.

This is why Garroni can write that Kant «goes in search [...] of a condition that in a certain sense precedes the conditions – forms of intuition, pure concepts of the intellect, concept of freedom – already established in the first two Critiques, in that it is the most original condition of their very functioning in the territory of experience» (Garroni [1992]: 143). It will be necessary to return to the implications of a principle that is at the same time a sentiment detectable only exemplarily, and on the single «case» that triggers it, but not before having fine-tuned some impor-

tant junctions on the concept of finality, since «the entire Critique of Judgment is [...] centered on formal finality» (ibid: 113).

### 3. FINALITY AND FAVOR

One of the objections raised by Ferrara, in the wake of Makkreel (1994), to Arendt’s reading of exemplarity is of particular interest here: the risk of flattening the exemplary case to an image in its concreteness, however holistic, without grasping a «unity of purpose». The strength of the objection, it seems to me, lies not so much in the fact that the concrete case is an image (every image, in principle, could be exemplary under certain conditions and in certain cultural contexts), but precisely in the exemplary representation, in the singular case, of an indeterminate rule that is, subjectively, animated by a «unity of purpose». Indeed, on the one hand, there are those who have attempted to reformulate the disinterestedness required by aesthetic experience – as a suspension of any determinate, sensible or conceptual purpose – in psychological or cognitive terms of attention. Bence Nanay, for example, distinguishing between objects and their properties, lists four possible types of attention: «i. Distributed with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties; ii. Distributed with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties; iii. Focused with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties iv. Focused with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties» (Nanay [2016]: 24)<sup>7</sup>. The first is the most obvious form of attention, useful for classifying a multiplicity of objects possessing certain properties; the second would amount to wandering with the gaze, without dwelling on anything in particular; the third is of intense concentration on a specific purpose; and the fourth would come closest, according to Nanay, to describing an aesthetic experience, focusing on a single instance and yet letting one perceptually and imaginatively peruse

<sup>7</sup> For a more complex and adequate exploration of attention in relation to aesthetics cf. Desideri (2011: ch. 2).

all its indefinite properties, without having already channeled them through conceptual purposes or immediate pragmatic needs. On the other hand, however, in the absence of a reflection on finality, the «unprompted eye» that Nanay associates with aesthetic experience will also have the virtue of defamiliarizing the world and its objects. Yet it is not clear why we should experience aesthetic pleasure, given that a defamiliarized world is also given in a psychotic or “alienated” experience. In order to give an aesthetic feeling of pleasure that depends above all on its determining principle (although accompanied, empirically, by feelings, desires and concepts of all kinds), defamiliarization is not sufficient. At the same time, it must be perceptible in its «unity of purpose», without being able to rely on a conceptually or pragmatically pre-established purpose. It is the famous «purposiveness without an end» or, precisely, «formal purposiveness», exposed by Kant in the third moment of the *Analytic* (§ 10 ff.), dedicated to relation.

Even in this case, maintaining this Kantian perspective is not easy: on the one hand, there are those who try to naturalize finality as a result of evolution. It may be more heuristically convenient, from an adaptive point of view, to assume that reality is organized finalistically, even if this leads to errors and difficulties in accepting the very theory of evolution that assumes the emergence of this very attitude (cf. Guthrie [1993]; Girotto, Pievani, Vallortigara [2008]). On the other hand, an avowed atheist like Thomas Nagel has been critical of what he considers the neo-Darwinian «materialistic reductionism», hypothesizing instead a teleology of nature, even in dialogue with the supporters of the «intelligent design», without admitting, however, the assumption of a transcendent author (Nagel [2012]).

We could say that, in the first case, the assumption of a teleological organization of nature is considered a cognitive, subjectivistic bias, and, in the other, a realistic hypothesis about objective ends and values. Both perspectives ignore, however, the Kantian proposal of the third *Critique* – that is, the most important and refined reflection

that modern philosophy has produced on finality and teleology. The result is to preclude, in both cases, a perspective that avoids attributing purposes and values to reality, but neither confines them in a psychological subjectivity that would «project» them onto an indifferent and inert reality. The aesthetic principle elaborated by Kant – transcendental and not psychological – obviously does not say anything on the absolute ontological constitution of reality (final or non-final, sensible or senseless). But it allows to free all the contingency of empirical reality – which at any time could prove refractory or hostile to any form of sensible experience<sup>8</sup> – making it understandable, at least in its general lines, the organization of experience, and of the concomitant sphere of normativity, starting from our being already always immersed in it<sup>9</sup>.

In *Against Nature*, Lorraine Daston (2019) summarizes all the reasonable objections raised in time by philosophers and anthropologists against the temptation to legitimize cultural norms and habits on the basis of a presumed correspondence with natural orders, but proposes a hypothesis on the origin of normativity *in general* (not of culturally specific and variable norms) from natural exemplars: «The human impulse to make nature meaningful is rooted in a double insight about order: normativity demands order; and nature

---

<sup>8</sup> «The reflecting power of judgment, therefore, can only give itself such a transcendental principle as a law, and cannot derive it from anywhere else (for then it would be the determining power of judgment), nor can it prescribe it to nature: for reflection on the laws of nature is directed by nature, and nature is not directed by the conditions under which we attempt to develop a concept of it which is in this sense entirely contingent» (Kant [1790] IV, 5:180). And, regarding genera and species: «For it may certainly be thought that [...] the specific diversity of the empirical laws of nature together with their effects might nevertheless be so great that it would be impossible for our understanding to discover in them an order which we can grasp, to divide its products into genera and species [...]» (ibid: V, 5:185).

<sup>9</sup> The need to reconstruct the genesis of judgment has been felt many times: two very different examples are Deleuze (1963) and Desideri (2011: 110 ff.).

supplies exemplars of all conceivable orders», immediately adding that «natural order alone cannot dictate which specific norms to follow, if only because there are so many orders in nature» (Daston [2019]: 160). A consideration that seems inspired precisely by a Kantian perspective, which considers our encountering an order in nature – we may add, human and non-human – as a kind of unexpected and contingent «favor» (*Gunst*, a word that recurs several times in crucial places in the third *Critique*). And if we add to the Kantian claim that the power of reflecting judgment is responsible for the ordering of entities in genera and species the important Kantian considerations on the use of analogy, then we would find a way to understand not only the emergence of different cultures from the different «orders» of nature, but their different ways of organizing the world symbolically. In fact, according to the Kantian distinction between inferring and thinking by analogy<sup>10</sup>, analogical inferences between entities are legitimized only for those properties that these entities can share to the extent that they belong to common genera and species (*paritas rationis*). Now, if the organization of entities into genera and spe-

---

<sup>10</sup> Analogy is often considered one of those terms that a “monological” modern culture would have removed from our legitimate ways of reasoning and operating, whilst it is a key term of Kant’s third *Critique*. Here is a passage that illustrates Kant’s distinction – in relation to analogy «in a qualitative sense» (an analogy of the predicates) – between inferring and conceiving by analogy: «The principle that authorizes such an inference lies in the fact that we have the same reason to count animals, with respect to the determination in question, as members of the same genus with human beings, as humans, insofar as we compare them externally to each other, on the basis of their actions. There is *par ratio*. Similarly, in comparing the propositional products of the causality of the supreme cause of the world in the world with the works of art of human beings, I can conceive of the former in analogy to an understanding, but I cannot infer to this property in the cause of the world by means of analogy; for here the principle of the possibility of such an inference is precisely what is lacking, namely *paritas rationis* to count the supreme being as part of the same species along with human beings (with respect to their respective causalities)» (Kant [1790], note to §90, 5: 464).

cies is different, then different analogical, contingent and defeasible inferences are also authorized, shaping more or less desirable forms of life, more or less adaptive or felicitous relations to nature. On this basis, there would be no need to advocate an «ontological pluralism» in order to *take seriously* cultures that are very different from the one to which we belong – with all the risks of sealing each culture within its own world, incommensurable with others – but to move the comparison on a symbolic level. Symbolism (Kant [1790]: § 59, 5: 351-352), as distinct from both the «objective schematism» (ibid.: § 9, 5:218) of knowledge and from merely “empty” thinking, is for Kant the level at which we «make sense» of our experience, at which the different forms of life, their exchanges, their transformations are then played out. And the distinction between nature and culture is also played out not on the basis of dogmatic ontologies, fixed one and for all within the boundaries of a certain culture, but from within the very organization of experience. We all agree that what we call nature and society, nature and culture, are intertwined, but is not precluding any distinction between the two – by assuming only an inextricable hybrid magma<sup>11</sup> – a way of precluding the possibility of exercising a critique of specifically human (social, cultural, political) responsibilities in the face of, for example, the occurrence of natural disasters?

#### 4. NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL?

But if, on the basis of the «heautonomy» (Kant [1790]: V, 5:186; Floyd [1998]) of this aesthetic principle, the Kantian perspective allows us to understand why it is possible and necessary to renegotiate, plastically but not in a mere arbitrary way, the sensitive, cognitive and ethical grammar of different cultures, is this principle to be considered in turn natural or artificial? Or is it

---

<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, hybridization is a key word for Bruno Latour and his followers (e.g., Latour [1991]), who evoke it against the theoretical «purification» of the hybrids “perpetrated” by “the moderns”.

instead at this level, if anything, that an authentic «hybrid» is located<sup>12</sup>? This question has been extensively re-examined by Catherine Malabou (2014) in an essay entirely aimed at clarifying in what sense Kant understands in the first *Critique* the transcendental as the epigenesis of reason («a system of the epigenesis of pure reason», B 167), beginning with the famous section 27 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and finding its unfolding and fulfillment precisely in the third *Critique*. Malabou confronts at length some of Kant's major interpreters, none of whom offers, however, in her opinion, convincing answers<sup>13</sup>. The book is aimed at showing how attempts to «relinquish the transcendental», either through neurobiological reductionisms or through the anti-correlationism proposed by Quentin Meillassoux (2006) and taken up in various ways by supporters of speculative realism, are unsuccessful. A comparison with Malabou's important book would require a separate study, but here it is important to note the strong similarities with Garroni's reading on a fundamental point: Malabou considers the debate over whether the transcendental is natural or fabricated («factitious»), pointless, because it would be the very development of the transcendental, from the first to the third *Critique* to be epigenetic. Without specifically calling into question epigenesis in this context, Garroni is very clear on this point, and arrives at the conclusion that the faculty of judging is not even in all senses a faculty, since it is «self-constructed», investing with its character all the other faculties, and therefore the very status of the transcendental outlined in the previous critical works. For Garroni (and for Malabou, who on this issue arrives at almost literally identical

conclusions)<sup>14</sup> it is not simply a matter of vaguely affirming, as Deleuze and Guattari do in the Introduction to *What is Philosophy?* (1991: 2), that «Kant's Critique of Judgment is an unrestrained work of old age, which his successors have still not caught up with», in which «all the mind's faculties overcome their limits, the very limits that Kant had so carefully laid down in the works of his prime», but to grasp the joints in which this revision of the transcendental is articulated. We could take as reference a section of the third *Critique*, which has always surprised the interpreters.

Kant, after having affirmed the exemplary necessity of the judgment of taste (§18) and after having provided almost a deduction of common sense (*Gemeinsinn*) as its principle, states in fact decisively that this principle «must be able to be assumed with good reason, and indeed without appeal to psychological observations, but rather as the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition, which is assumed in every logic and every principle of cognitions that is not skeptical» (Kant [1790]: §21, 5:239). Immediately afterwards, however, he seems almost to question the result just achieved, wondering «whether taste is an original and natural faculty, or only the idea of one that is yet to be acquired and is artificial» (Ibid.: §22, 5:240). The question of the «natural and original», or instead «artificial and factitious» status of the principle of determination of judgment is «pointless», as Malabou argues, only if one goes in search of an exclusive answer: the answer that emerges from Garroni's reading is instead intimately paradoxical: the «nature» of the principle is said to be «in the making», «self-constructed» (Garroni [1992]: 210, 227), precisely because it is aimed at recognizing in that principle the condition of possibility of every culture. A condition that cannot be, circularly, only cultural, but not even only natural, as a guarantee of meaning that, making everything indistinctly sensible and justifiable, would not allow us to take seriously not only «other cultures»,

<sup>12</sup> Ferrara oddly assumes, perhaps in the wake of Gadamer's disputable interpretation, that Kant elaborates a «minimalist, naturalized concept of *sensus communis*» (Ferrara [2008]: ch. 2).

<sup>13</sup> «The «system of the epigenesis of pure reason» implies an original co-implication of a priori and a posteriori, before and after, whose paradoxical complexity and meaning have not been clarified by any of the exegetical «keys» we have attempted so far» (Malabou [2014]: ch. 12).

<sup>14</sup> See the section on «The Backlash Effect of the Third Critique on the First» (Malabou [2014]: ch. 13).

but not even our own. (Ibid.: 245-270). Making sense emerges, after all, as an aesthetical-ethical risk that we ought to run, without yearning for a «supreme meaning» or a triumph of a supposedly universal sense.

In conclusion, if we are really living in the ruins of modernity, I believe that it is neither a question of embalming them, nor of razing them to the ground, and that one of its main protagonists can offer precious resources to reshape that image of humanity that we feel is now inadequate in the face of the complexity of our forms of life, without the need to abandon ourselves to old and new longings for the absolute.

#### REFERENCES

- Arendt, H., 1979: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by R. Beiner, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.
- Consigliere, S., 2020: *Favole del reincanto. Molteplicità, immaginario, rivoluzione*, DeriveApprodi, Roma.
- Daston, L., 2019: *Against nature*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Deleuze, G., 1963: *La Philosophie critique de Kant*, PUF, Paris.
- Deleuze, G., 1983 : *Pour en finir avec le jugement*, in Id., *Critique et Clinique*, PUF, Paris, pp. 158-169.
- Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., 1991 : *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.
- Derrida, J., 1978 : *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris.
- Desideri, F., 2011: *La percezione riflessa. Estetica e filosofia della mente*, Cortina, Milano.
- Elkins, J., 2003: *What happened to Art Criticism?*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Ferrara, A., 2008: *The Force of the Example. Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Floyd, J., 1998: *Heautonomy: Kant on Reflective Judgment and Systematicity*, in Parret, H. (ed.), *Kants Ästhetik*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York, pp. 192-218.
- Garroni, E., 1986: *Senso e paradosso. L'estetica, filosofia non speciale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Garroni, E., 1992: *Estetica. Uno sguardo-attraverso*, Garzanti, Milano.
- Giroto, V., Pievani, T., Vallortigara, G., 2008: *Nati per credere. Perché il nostro cervello sembra predisposto a fraintendere la teoria di Darwin*, Codice, Torino.
- Graeber, D., 2015: *Radical Alterity is just Another Way of Saying «Reality». A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro*, "Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory" 5 (2), pp. 1-41.
- Graeber, D., Wengrow, D., 2021: *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*, Allen Lane, London.
- Guthrie, S., 1993: *Faces in the Clouds*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Jaeggi, R., 2005: "No Individual Can Resist": *Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life*, "Constellations" 12 (1), pp. 65-82.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.
- Latour, B., 1991: *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris.
- Latour, B., 2004: *Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern*, "Critical Inquiry" 30 (2), pp. 225-248.
- Leghissa, G., 2021: *Quanti Grubb ci sono davvero? Il discorso antropologico tra epistemologia e ontologia*, "Aut Aut" 391, pp. 143-159.
- Makkreel, R., 1994: *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Malabou, C., 2014: *Avant demain. Épigenèse et rationalité*, PUF, Paris.
- Meillassoux, Q., 2006: *Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*, Seuil, Paris.
- Nagel, Th., 2012: *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Nanay, B., 2015: *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Pagden, A., 2013: *The Enlightenment. And Why it Still Matters*, Random House, New York.
- Pinker, S., 2018: *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, Penguin, New York.
- Tavani, E., 2016: *Hannah Arendt e lo spettacolo del mondo. Estetica e politica*, manifestolibri, Roma.
- Velotti, S., 1995: *Sapienti e bestioni. Saggio sull'ignoranza, il sapere e la poesia in Giambattista Vico*, Pratiche, Parma.
- Velotti, S., 2010: *Per un giudizio estetico «thick»*. *Steinberg, Johns e l'arte contemporanea*, "Paradigmi" 28 (2), pp. 67-85.







**Citation:** F. Vitale (2021) The Teleological Program. Ernst Mayr's Teleonomy from Philosophy to Cybernetics (or Kant's Revenge). *Aisthesis* 14(2): 17-28. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12754

**Copyright:** © 2021 F. Vitale. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## The Teleological Program. Ernst Mayr's Teleonomy from Philosophy to Cybernetics (or Kant's Revenge)

FRANCESCO VITALE

Università degli Studi di Salerno (Italy)  
fvitale@unisa.it

**Abstract.** Teleology is still a source of embarrassment for the natural sciences and in particular for biology that seems unable to describe and explain the genesis and structure of life without it. How is it possible for something not yet existing to determine the occurrence of what is temporally prior to it? How can the future cause the present and the past? In what follows we intend to examine the elaboration of the biological notion of «teleonomy» through the writings of Ernst Mayr, in order to verify its rigor and strength with respect to the criteria of scientificity adopted by Mayr himself, in particular with respect to the adoption of the cybernetic model. On the one hand, to show the consistency of the debt that the so-called scientific discourse owes to the philosophical tradition, where it elaborates notions that claim to be emancipated. On the other hand, to detect, within the scientific discourse itself, the limits that a certain position that claims to be scientifically founded can impose on research, becoming a dogmatic assumption.

**Keywords:** Teleology, Teleonomy, Cybernetics, Biology, Philosophy.

Teleology is still a source of embarrassment for the natural sciences and in particular for biology that seems unable to describe and explain the genesis and structure of life without it. In fact, teleology is one of the oldest devices developed by the philosophical tradition, at the origin of several conceptions of nature and life now considered purely metaphysical and without foundation from a scientific point of view, especially because the teleological explanation seems to imply a reversal of efficient causality, the only one considered valid in the mechanistic horizon of modern science. In fact, teleology seems to violate the order of temporal succession of events from the present to the future: how is it possible that something not yet existing determines the occurrence of what is temporally anterior to it? How can the future cause the present and the past?

In short, according to many authoritative philosophers of science, the use of teleology could compromise the scientific status

of biological sciences, unable to free themselves from metaphysical assumptions inherited from the philosophical tradition. For this reason, teleology is still today at the center of the scientific debate, as evidenced by the numerous publications dedicated to the problem. One of the most accredited solutions in nowadays' biology is represented by the notion of «teleonomy», introduced by Colin S. Pittendrigh (Pittendrigh [1958]) and later finely elaborated by Ernst Mayr, evolutionary biologist of Darwinist matrix, authoritative representative of the so-called “modern synthesis” or “evolutionary synthesis” (cf. Jepsen, Simpson, Mayr [1949]). Beginning with *Cause and Effect in Biology*, first published in 1961 and later collected in *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology* (Mayr [1988a]), to *The Idea of Teleology* (Mayr [1992]), Mayr devoted a series of writings to defining the concept of «teleonomy» in order to demonstrate the necessity and legitimacy of teleological explanations within the biological sciences. The most articulate is undoubtedly *The Multiple Meanings of teleology*, published in *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology* (Mayr [1988b]), a revised and augmented version of *Teleological and Teleonomic. A New Analysis* (Mayr [1974])<sup>1</sup>. According to Mayr, in order to free teleology from its compromising philosophical origin and transform it into a scientific concept, it is necessary to adopt the perspective of cybernetics and in particular the notion of «program». As is well known, in 1948 Norbert Wiener had pioneered the extension of the cybernetic model to life-sciences (and beyond) with the publication of *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Wiener [1965]). Mayr would be among the first to take this path, which would soon allow François Jacob, Jacques Monod and André Lwoff to explain the mechanism that regulates the genetic control of protein synthesis by DNA, a discovery which

would award them with the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1965 and constituting a decisive step for the very status of modern life sciences (cf. Debru, Morange, Worms [2012]). However, in his personal path of research, Mayr does not renounce the close confrontation with the philosophical tradition: on the one hand, to demonstrate that the notion of teleonomy is immune to the objections to which «philosophical» teleology is subject, on the other, paradoxically, to demonstrate that this notion is consistent with the oldest source of teleological thought, namely with the lesson of Aristotle, which may be recovered in the scientific context, once freed from the interpretations that, since the Middle Ages, made it the matrix of positions untenable from a scientific point of view, that is, both that of «vitalism» and that which Mayr appropriately calls «cosmic teleology», that is, of the idea of a general finality of nature with its theological and humanist variants (the finalistic order of nature as a demonstration of the existence of God, man as the apex of the evolution of life oriented towards perfection, etc.) (Mayr [1988b]: 40, 56).

In what follows, we intend to examine the elaboration of the notion of «teleonomy» through Mayr's writings, in order to verify its rigor with respect to the criteria of scientificity he himself adopted, in particular with respect to the adoption of the cybernetic model. On the one hand, to show the consistency of the debt that the so-called scientific discourse contracts, more or less consciously, towards the philosophical tradition from which it claims to be emancipated. On the other hand, and more deeply, to detect the limits that a certain scientific hypothesis can impose on research once it is considered a definitive acquisition, an incontrovertible truth. In this horizon, we will be guided by *The Idea of teleology* (Mayr [1992]), the essay in which Mayr retraces his own path in the elaboration of the notion of «teleonomy» in order to show its validity and effectiveness in the horizon of the (then) most recent biological research; this will allow us to reconstruct its evolution with reference to the previous texts to which Mayr himself refers.

<sup>1</sup> To complete the *corpus* of Mayr's writings devoted to teleology, one must also take into account the following *The Evolution of Living Systems* (Mayr [1964]) and *The Concept of Finality in Darwin and After Darwin* (Mayr [1988c]) first published in 1983.

## 1. STARTING WITH KANT, VERSUS KANT

The starting point of Mayr's research seems to take us back to Kant's position of the problem in the opening of the second part of the *Critique of Judgement*, the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* (Kant [1790]: § 65): the philosophy of science of the twentieth century would still be conditioned by the mechanism of Cartesian matrix, at the origin of its reductionist orientation and then by the rejection of teleology from the sciences (which actually goes back at least to Roger Bacon). Precisely for this reason, the philosophy of science would not yet be able to describe and explain the phenomena of living nature:

*Refutation of a finalistic interpretation of evolution or of nature as a whole, however, did not eliminate teleology as a problem of philosophy. For the Cartesians any invoking of teleological processes was utterly unthinkable. Coming from mathematics and physics, they had nothing in their conceptual repertory that would permit them to distinguish between seemingly end-directed processes in inorganic nature, and seemingly goal-directed processes in living nature. They feared, as shown particularly clearly by Nagel, that making such a distinction would open the door to metaphysical, nonempirical considerations. All their arguments, based on the study of inanimate objects, ignored the common view, derived from Aristotle and strongly confirmed by Kant, that truly goal-directed and seemingly purposive processes occur only in living nature. Yet the (physicalist) philosophers ignored the study of living nature and the findings of the biologists. Instead they used teleology in order to exercise their logical prowess. (Mayr [1992]: 120, my italics)*

In *The multiple Meanings of Teleology*, the reference to Kant is in this sense explicit and yet limited to the location of the problem<sup>2</sup>, in fact, Mayr believes that Kant's investigation of the phenomena of living nature is irreparably compromised by the still «primitive» state of the knowledge then

accessible and elaborated in the horizon of philosophical «vitalism»:

*Kant was a strict mechanist with respect to inanimate nature, but he saw teleological forces acting in all processes of the living world. [...] Yet his familiarity with the work of Buffon, Haller, Wolff, and Blumenbach could get him only as far as these authors had gone, with the exception of the solution of some problems of physiology and a rather primitive systematic and anatomy, it must be realized that biology at the time when Kant wrote his Critique of Judgement (1790) and his Opus Postumum was virtually a terra incognita. The birth of scientific biology falls in the period from 1828 to 1865, characterized by the names von Baer, Schwann, Schleiden, Liebig, Bernard, Virchow, Darwin and Mendel. (Mayr [1988b]: 57).*

The argument would seem legitimate and, in any case, sufficient to justify the untenability of Kantian teleology in the context of modern natural sciences, were it not that the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* does not simply resolve itself into a description of the phenomena of the living world, based on the proto-biological knowledge of its time. On the contrary, Kantian reflection is primarily concerned with defining the epistemological status of the teleological evaluation of the phenomena of life forms and of nature in general. A reflection that concludes with the affirmation of the impossibility to consider teleology as «constitutive» of the phenomena of nature. In virtue of the analogy with the human practical-technical behavior that constitutes its exclusive foundation, teleology can only be used as a heuristic – «regulative» – principle for the investigation of the phenomena of the living world.

*Thus, we are bringing forward a teleological ground where we endow a concept of an object – as if that concept were to be found in nature instead of in ourselves – with causality in respect of the object, or rather where we represent to ourselves the possibility of the object on the analogy of a causality of this kind – a causality such as we experience in ourselves – and so regard nature as gifted of a capacity of its own for acting technically; whereas if we did not ascribe such a mode of operation to nature, its causality would*

<sup>2</sup> «Even Kant (1790) believed that numerous phenomena of nature could not be explained purely mechanistically. He therefore postulated final causes» (Mayr [1988c]: 235).

*have to be regarded as blind mechanism. But this is a different thing from crediting nature with causes acting designedly, to which it may be regarded as subjected in following its laws. The latter would mean that teleology is based—not merely on a regulative principle, directed to the simple judging of phenomena, but rather on a constitutive principle available for deriving natural products from their causes: with the result that the concept of a natural end would no longer belong to reflective, but to determining-judgment. (Kant [1790]: § 61)*

Kant therefore excludes the possibility of attributing to finality an objective, ontological value, contesting, in fact, the position of Aristotle and the metaphysical tradition derived thereof. Our hypothesis is that this is precisely the reason why Mayr refuses the comparison with Kant, as seems to be confirmed by a passage of *Teleological and Teleonomic. A New Analysis*, apparently more generous towards Kant but amended in *The Multiple Meanings of teleology*:

*He [Kant] clearly saw two points, first that no explanation of nature is complete that cannot account for the seeming purposiveness of much of the development and behavior of living organisms, and secondly that the purely mechanical explanations available at his time were quite insufficient to explain teleological phenomena. Unfortunately, he subscribed to the prevailing dogma of his period that the only legitimate explanations were purely mechanical («Newtonian») ones, which left him without any explanation for all teleological phenomena. He therefore concluded that the true explanation was out of our reach and that the most practical approach to the study of organisms was to deal with them «as if they were designed». Even though he was unable to free himself from the design-designed analogy, he stressed the heuristic value of such an approach: It permits us to make products and processes of nature far more intelligible than trying to express them purely in terms of mechanical laws. (Mayr [1974]: 108, my italics)*

According to our hypothesis, the limit of Kantian teleology, for Mayr, would not consist so much or exclusively in the scientific unreliability of its «proto-biological» sources, but first of all in

the exclusively heuristic value – «regulative», certainly not «practical» – attributed to teleological evaluation and above all in the recourse to analogy with intentional (practical-technical) human behavior as its irreducible condition of possibility. In fact, as much as Mayr also seems to attribute a heuristic value to the teleological evaluation of the phenomena of the living world (Mayr [1988b]: 53-55), in *The idea of Teleology* he refers to a «genuine goal-directed processes» (Mayr [1992]: 125) as phenomena specifically teleonomic, on the basis of the distinction we have already encountered between «truly goal-directed and seemingly purposive processes» that refers in extreme synthesis to the section of «The Multiple Meanings of Teleology» entitled «Seemingly or genuinely goal-directed processes» (Mayr [1988b]: 44-50). In this section, Mayr delimits the boundaries of the scope of natural phenomena that can be described and explained through the notion of «teleonomy», affirming its «constitutive» validity, that is, the possibility of attributing to it an objective, ontological value, thus allowing us to understand the most stringent reason for the lack of comparison with Kant. In fact, Kantian teleology not only prevents the «constitutive» determination of finality as a genetic-structural condition of the phenomena of the living world, but also exposes teleology to one of the objections that have been raised against it within the scientific debate, and perhaps the most stringent: the so-called «anthropomorphism» that accuses precisely the analogical derivation of teleology. It is Mayr himself who defines it in these terms, dedicating to it ample space and a central position in the list of objections raised to the scientific use of teleology and of which Mayr gives an account to demonstrate the inefficacy with respect to the notion of «teleonomy» that he is preparing to define:

*Teleological language introduces anthropomorphism into biology. Many philosophers, indeed, have made human intentions and purposive acts the starting point of their analysis of goal-directed activities in other organisms. This introduces concepts such as purpose, intention, and consciousness into the discus-*

*sion and ties the whole problem to human psychology; but it seems to me that this is a poor foundation for an analysis of goal-directed activities in the non-human living world. In my own treatment I have therefore refrained from using anthropomorphic language, particularly the terms «purpose» and «intention», when explaining teleonomic phenomena in animals and plants. The term goal-directed is strictly descriptive, while terms like purpose or intention introduce psychological problems that are irrelevant to our immediate objective. (Mayr [1992]: 122)*

At this point, we should verify the true consistency of the distinction, which Mayr assumes to be rigorous, between «truly goal-directed and seemingly purposive processes», and in particular we should verify whether, through the decisive introduction of the cybernetic armamentarium, Mayr succeeds in his intent to subtract the teleonomy to the analogy with the human intentional behavior, which is expressed, according to the Kantian model, in the technical production of artifacts and consequently, if Mayr succeeds in affirming the objective determination of the teleonomic processes.

#### THE SPECTRE OF KANT

In *The Idea of Teleology* the section *Teleonomic Processes* opens with an important clarification, concerning the use of the notion of teleonomy following its introduction by Pittendrigh:

*The term teleonomic has been used with various meanings. When Pittendrigh introduced the term, he failed to provide it with a rigorous definition. As a result, various authors used it either for programmed functions or for adaptedness as did for instance B. Davis, G. G. Simpson, Monod, and Curio. I restricted the term teleonomic to programmed activities and now provide the following definition: a teleonomic process or behavior is one that owes its goal-directedness to the operation of a program. (Mayr [1992]: 126)<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Mayr develops his critique of Monod's use of the notion of teleonomy in Mayr (1988b): 48. Based on the Darwinian principle of natural selection, evolutionary adaptation

This definition, which Mayr claims to be «narrow», is, however, sufficiently broad to apply to «processes» and «behaviors» of a very different order, namely, as he points out immediately afterwards, both the physical-chemical processes that determine the ontogeny of living beings at the molecular level and the behavior of animals in their habitat, the object of study of ethology:

*The term teleonomic thus implies goal-direction of a process or activity. It deals strictly with proximate causations. They occur in cellular-developmental processes and are most conspicuous in the behavior of organism. «Goal-directed behavior ... is extremely widespread in the organic world; for instance, most activities connected with migration, food-getting, courtship, ontogeny and all phases of reproduction are characterized by such goal orientation. The occurrence of goal-directed processes is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the world of living organism». (Mayr [1992]: 126)*

The passage quoted in quotation marks, as well as the unquoted definition preceding it, comes from *Teleological and Teleonomic* (Mayr [1974]: 98)<sup>4</sup>, with a small but significant difference signaled by the hanging points, In the most recent version Mayr has in fact removed a parenthesis: «goal-directed behavior (in the widest sense of this word)» (Mayr [1974]: 98). This is actually a parenthesis that could prove compromising in that it allows one to recognize the source of this expanded conception of goal-directed behavior: it is the article of Rosenblueth, Wiener and Bigelow, *Behavior, Purpose and Teleology*, published in 1943, with which Mayr, in 1974, admitted to having incurred a fundamental debt:

---

cannot be explained in terms of a teleonomic process, i.e., as the result of a process pre-determined by the genetic «program» of an individual or species. Indeed, this would result in the illegitimate attribution of a general purpose to the evolution of living beings. In Vitale (2017) I noted this limitation in Monod in the context of a deconstruction of the biological application of the cybernetic model, the more general results of which I believe, however, can also apply to Mayr.

<sup>4</sup> The same lines can be found in Mayr (1988b): 45.

*We owe a great debt of gratitude to Rosenblueth et al. (1943) for their endeavor to find a new solution for the explanation of teleological phenomena in organisms. They correctly identified two aspects of such phenomena, (1) that they are seemingly purposeful being directed toward a goal, and (2) that they consist of active behavior. (Mayr [1974]: 100)<sup>5</sup>*

This is one of the milestones of cybernetics in which the authors use the notion of «negative feed-back» to describe in information-science terms the goal-directed behavior of animals by analogy with machines equipped with servo-mechanisms. However, there is no trace of the notion of «program» or even the extension of the cybernetic model to onto-genetic processes; especially the extended definition of «goal-directed behavior» implies the explicitly analogical reference to human voluntary action:

*Active behavior may be subdivided into two classes: purposeless (or random) and purposeful. The term purposeful is meant to denote that the act or behavior may be interpreted as directed to the attainment of a goal ... Purposeless behavior then is that which is not interpreted as directed to a goal. The vagueness of the words «may be interpreted» as used above might be considered so great that the distinction would be useless. Yet the recognition that behavior may sometimes be purposeful is unavoidable and useful, as follows. The basis of the concept of purpose is the awareness of «voluntary activity». Now, the purpose of voluntary acts is not a matter of arbitrary interpretation but a physiological fact. When we perform a voluntary action what we select voluntarily is a specific purpose, not a specific movement. (Bigelow, Rosenblueth, Wiener [1943]: 18)*

Thus, the extension of the notion of goal-directed behavior to onto-genetic processes is made by Mayr, and as such appears problematic, at least with respect to the analogical assumption that justifies its application: the recognition of voluntary intentional activity. Interpreting onto-genetic processes as a form of «behavior»,

even if in this extended sense, one takes the risk of attributing some kind of intentionality to them, exposing teleology once again to the accusation of anthropomorphism (which does not seem to worry cybernetics in the least, interested in the elaboration of a model for the comparative study of goal-directed behavior in machines and organisms, without any ontological claim). In *The Idea of Teleology*, Mayr seems to solve the problem precisely through the notion of «program»: both the onto-genetic development of an organism as well as the behaviors of organisms, the result of this development, would manifest a «genuine» teleonomic orientation, as they would be predetermined by a program that prescribes the goal to be achieved and dictates the instructions necessary to achieve it.

In *The Idea of Teleology* Mayr again refers to *Teleological and Teleonomic* to impose a further restriction on teleonomic phenomena, retracting what he had previously argued precisely on the basis of the article by Rosenblueth, Bigelow and Wiener, even though he had just confirmed the extended notion of «goal-directed behavior» he had drawn from it and still necessary to the definition of «teleonomy»:

*In my original proposal I suggested that one might expand the application of the term teleonomic to include also the functioning of human artifacts (e.g., loaded dice) that are fixed in such a way as to assure a wanted goal. This extended use of the term has been criticized, and I now consider that human artifacts are only analogs. Truly teleonomic activities depend on the possession of a program. (Mayr [1992]: 127)*

At this point the argumentation appears really convoluted if not paradoxical: Mayr intends to exclude human artifacts from the field of application of teleonomics, the definition of which, however, necessarily implies the analogy with at least one human artifact, namely the «program» of electronic computers. In *Teleological and Teleonomic*, Mayr had defined the notion of «program» precisely in this analogical perspective and with reference to the work of Rosenblueth, Bigelow and Wiener:

<sup>5</sup> This line also appears in *The Multiple Meanings of Teleology* (see Mayr [1988b]: 46).

*The key word in my definition of «teleonomic» is the term «program». [...] The term is taken from the language of information theory. A computer may act purposefully when given appropriate programmed instructions. Tentatively program might be defined as coded or prearranged information that controls a process (or behavior) leading it toward a given end. ... My definition of program is deliberately chosen in such a way as to avoid drawing a line between seemingly «purposive» behavior in organisms and man-made machines. The simplest program is perhaps the weight inserted into loaded dice or attached to a «fixed» number wheel so that they are likely to come to rest on a given number. A clock is constructed and programmed in such a way as to strike at the full hour. Any machine which is programmed to carry out goal-directed activities is capable of doing it «mechanically». (Mayr [1974]: 102)<sup>6</sup>*

In *The Idea of Teleonomy* the rejection of the analogy with human-produced artifacts produces a contradictory if not downright paradoxical effect: Mayr, on the one hand, claims, as we have seen, that human artifacts are teleonomic only by analogy with ontogenetic processes and animal behavior, because only the latter would be endowed with a «program». On the other hand, he must necessarily resort to the analogy with man-made computers to describe the essential characteristics of the «program» with which living organisms would be endowed, of which it would constitute the onto-genetic cause:

*The existence of programs, of course, is in no way in conflict with natural laws. All the physico-chemical processes that take place during the translation and execution of a program strictly obey natural laws. But to neglect the role of information and instruction inevitably results in a most misleading description of a program. Could one explain a computer strictly in terms of natural laws, carefully avoiding any reference to information and instruction? (Mayr [1992]: 126).<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> The same passage is found in *The Multiple Meanings of Teleology* (see Mayr [1988b]: 49).

<sup>7</sup> This text is absent in both Mayr (1974) and Mayr (1988b).

The paradoxical reversal of the analogy with human practical-technical behavior, which for Kant (as for Rosenblueth, Bigelow and Wiener) constituted the necessary condition for the exclusively «regulative» use of teleology for the evaluation of organic phenomena, seems to reproduce the Freudian logic of the «kettie», leading us to draw the relative consequences: If for Freud the affirmation of contradictory theses in the same argument («the cauldron was already pierced when you lent it to me», «the cauldron was not pierced when I gave it back to you») is the symptom of an unsuccessful removal, then at this point it is more than legitimate to suppose that this unfortunate paradox is due to the need to avoid the return of Kant's specter, which must be removed in order to sustain a «constitutive» use of teleonomy. Therefore, it seems equally clear that in order to give teleonomy an ontological status, constitutive with respect to onto-genetic processes and animal behavior, Mayr must demonstrate that the latter are in themselves endowed with a true cybernetic program, that such a program does in fact exist, and that it does in fact function as a cybernetic program.

#### THE ONTOLOGICAL PROGRAM AND KANT'S REVENGE

As we have seen, in order to define the «rigorous» sense of teleonomy, such as to legitimize the «scientific» use of this notion, Mayr would have to demonstrate the existence of a goal-directed «program» within organisms capable of determining first of all their onto-genesis. In particular, one must demonstrate the existence of the goal of the «program» and the instructions necessary for its realization within the «program» itself, «the goal is already coded in the program which directs these activities» (Mayr [1992]: 134). This last point is essential because it would allow us to define the «program» as the initial and exclusive cause of onto-genesis, thus solving the problem of the inversion of the causal process that had made teleology unusable in a «rigorous» scientific con-



text; in fact, understood in this way, the program would play the role of «efficient cause» and «final cause» at the same time, being the cause that starts the teleonomic process, which can therefore be explained in terms of a linear physical-chemical process:

*All teleonomic behavior is characterized by two components. It is guided by «a program» and it depends on the existence of some end point, goal, or terminus which is foreseen in the program which regulates the behavior. This end point might be a structure (in development), a physiological function, the attainment of a geographical position (in migration), or a «consummatory act» in behavior. Each program is the result of natural selection, constantly adjusted by the selective value of the achieved end point. The key word in the definition of teleonomic is program. The importance of the recognition of the existence of programs lies in the fact that a program is (1) something material and (2) something existing prior to the initiation of the teleonomic process. This shows that there is no conflict between teleonomy and causality. (Mayr [1992]: 127)*

This passage is the result of the conjunction (indicated by the asterisk) of two passages present in *Teleological and Teleonomic* but in different places and with a significant modification<sup>8</sup>. The second part of the quotation involves the elision of a passage that allows us to note that at the time of *Teleological and Teleonomic* and then *The Multiple Meaning of Teleology*, Mayr was much more cautious in asserting the existence of a goal-directed program responsible for the ontogeny of organisms, preferring a still analogical and, above all, hypothetical, use of this notion because of the still scarce biological knowledge regarding the nature and functioning of such a program:

*The key word in my definition of «teleonomic» is the term «program». Someone might claim that the difficulties of an acceptable definition for teleological language in biology had simply been transferred to the term «program». This is not a legitimate objection,*

*because it neglects to recognize that, regardless of its definition, a program is (1) something material, and (2) exists prior to the initiation of the teleonomic process. Hence, it is consistent with a causal explanation. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the concept «program» is so new that the diversity of meanings of this term has not yet been fully explored. The term is taken from the language of information theory. A computer may act purposefully when given appropriate programmed instructions. Tentatively program might be defined as coded or prearranged information that controls a process (or behavior) leading it toward a given end. (Mayr [1974]: 102)<sup>9</sup>*

The latter definition is taken up in *The Idea of Teleology*, but blurring, as far as possible, both the explicit analogical reference to computer programs and the hypothetical value of the analogy: «A program might be defined as coded or prearranged information that controls a process (or behavior) leading it toward a goal» (Mayr [1992]: 127). In fact, in *The Idea of Teleology*, the demonstration of the existence of programs that preside over the ontogeny and behavior of organisms is taken for granted and attributed to genetic biology, which in turn uses models developed by cybernetics:

*The program contains not only the blueprint of the goal but also the instructions of how to use the information of the blueprint. A program is not a description of a given situation but a set of instructions. Accepting the concept of program seems to cause no difficulties to a biologist familiar with genetics or any scientist familiar with the working of computer. (Mayr [1992]: 128)*

Therefore, the demonstration is entrusted to genetic biology and to the discoveries concerning the role that DNA plays in regulating the protein syntheses that preside over the construction of the organism. Mayr in fact refers to *La Logique du vivant* (1970) by François Jacob and to a short article by Max Delbrück, *Aristotle-tot-tote* (1971) for the «rigorous» scientific definition of the concept of «genetic program» and for

<sup>8</sup> See Mayr (1974): 99, 102. The same passages are present in Mayr (1988b): 45, 48.

<sup>9</sup> The same passage is present in Mayr (1988b): 48.

the demonstration of its existence at the molecular level. Not only that: according to Mayr, the biological definition of the «genetic program» would have been anticipated on an intuitive, not yet scientific, level by the proto-biological thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and even by the oldest source of teleological thought, namely Aristotle (of course, there is no trace of Kant):

*The existence of the program is inferred from its manifestations in the behavior or the activities of the bearer of the program. Concepts, corresponding to program, go back all the way to antiquity. After all, Aristotle's eidos had many of the properties we now ascribe to the genetic program, as was pointed out by Jacob and Delbrück. So did Buffon's moule intérieure as well as the many speculations about inborn memories from Leibniz and Maupertuis to Darwin, Hering, and Semon. As sound as the intuition of these thinkers had been, it required an understanding of the DNA nature of the genotype, before the genetic program could be considered a valid scientific concept. (Mayr [1992]: 128)*

In fact, in Delbrück's article there is no scientific demonstration of the existence of a «genetic program» in organisms, nor even a precise definition of this notion; Delbrück, addressing an audience of biologists, evidently believes both already established. The only purpose of the article is to show that Aristotle would have anticipated the idea of «genetic program» in *De generatione animalium*. Without going into the merits of a controversial and widely debated issue among Aristotelian scholars<sup>10</sup>, nor of the scarce scientific (i.e. philological and hermeneutical) «rigor» of Delbrück's alleged demonstration, which Mayr nonetheless claims [holding solid?], we limit ourselves to noting the result, insofar as it allows us to understand the salient characteristics that the biologist attributes to the «genetic program», believing that he has found them in Aristotelian teleology:

<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive critical overview of interpretations of Aristotelian teleology, see Quarantotto (2005): 13-28. In particular, Quarantotto accurately identifies the limit of interpreting the Aristotelian telos in terms of a «program»: the «reduction of the final cause to a motor cause» (Quarantotto [2005]: 23).

*It is my contention that Aristotle's principle of the «unmoved mover» originated with his biological studies, and that it was grafted, from here, first onto physics, then onto astronomy, and finally onto his cosmological theology. [...] And yet, «unmoved mover» perfectly describes DNA: it acts, creates form and development, and is not changed in the process. (Delbrück [1971]: 55)*

This conception of DNA as exclusively responsible for the ontogeny of the living being, immune to any direct external interference, was in fact sustained first of all by Jacob in *La logique du vivant*, a text that played an important role in determining the modern paradigm of genetic biology, and that seems to constitute the direct source on which Mayr draws, at least for the obvious terminological and conceptual correspondences:

*Heredity is described today in terms of information, messages and code. The reproduction of an organism has become that of its constituent molecules. This is not because each chemical species has the ability to produce copies of itself, but because the structure of macromolecules is determined down to the last detail by sequences of four chemical radicals contained in the genetic heritage. What are transmitted from generation to generation are the «instructions» specifying the molecular structures: the architectural plans of the future organism. They are also the means of executing these plans and of coordinating the activities of the system. In the chromosomes received from its parents, each egg therefore contains its entire future: the stages of its development, the shape and the properties of the living being which will emerge. The organism thus becomes the realization of a program prescribed by its heredity. (Jacob [1973]: 1)*

However, Jacob makes no claim to demonstrate the identity of DNA with a cybernetic program. The recourse to cybernetics is exclusively analogical, the reference to computer programs has a heuristic, «regulative» function, Kant would have said<sup>11</sup>. Jacob is very clear on this point; in particular, since it is an analogy, he points out

<sup>11</sup> On the use of the cybernetic model by Jacob I allow myself to refer to Vitale (2018): 103-126.

the need to take into account the differences that make it possible to construct an equivalence (an equality of relationships) but not an identity between genetic heritage and computer programs:

*The aim of modern biology is to interpret the properties of the organism by the structure of its constituent molecules. In this sense, modern biology belongs to the new age of mechanism. The program is a model borrowed from electronic computers. It equates the genetic material of an egg with the magnetic tape of a computer. It evokes a series of operations to be carried out, the rigidity of their sequence and their underlying purpose. In fact, these two kinds of program differ in many ways. First in their properties: one can change at will, the other cannot. In a computer program, information is added or deleted according to the results obtained; the nucleic acid structure, on the contrary, is inaccessible to acquired experience and remains unchanged throughout generations. (Jacob [1973]: 9, my italics)*

Paradoxically, Mayr turns the argument of analogical equivalence between DNA and computer programs, evidently taken up by Jacob, against the objection of «anthropomorphism» that should necessarily follow from the analogy between living organisms and machines built by man and endowed by him with a purpose:

*The existence and role of somatic programs has been understood by embryologists at least since Kleinenberg (1886). To borrow the term program from informatics is not a case of anthropomorphism. There is a strict equivalence of the «program» of the information theorists, and the genetic and somatic programs of the biologist. (Mayr [1992]: 129)*

Mayr's firm refusal to recognize the biological use of the cybernetic model as having an exclusively analogical value and thus a merely «regulative» function, induces him into a further conceptual twist, in open contradiction with what Jacob claimed regarding the «first» and most important difference between cybernetic program and DNA: the program of a computer is necessarily open to intentional external interventions that modify its structure and therefore its functions, while DNA

modifications, according to Jacob, depend exclusively on transcription errors in the course of hereditary transmission and on natural selection that intervenes on already formed organisms and populations that eventually inherited such a mutation. In order to hold this principle firm, while at the same time rejecting the analogical difference between DNA and computer programs, Mayr resorts to a notion that in fact has no counterpart in cybernetics:

*The study of teleonomic programs has shown that several kinds can be distinguished. A program in which complete instructions are laid down in the DNA of the genotype is called a closed program. Most programs which control the instinctive behavior of insects and lower invertebrates seem to be closed programs. There is, however, another type of program, open programs, which are constituted in such a way that additional information can be incorporated during lifetime, acquired through learning, conditioning, or other experiences. Most behavior in higher animals is controlled by such open programs. Their existence has long been known to ethologists without their introducing a special terminology. (Mayr [1992]: 129)*

For this distinction between «open programs» and «closed programs» Mayr in the note refers to himself, to one of his essays, *The Evolution of Living Systems* (Mayr [1964]), where, however, the distinction is taken from systems theory, which in fact provides a distinction between «open systems» and «closed systems», not from the information sciences, where in fact it does not make sense, or could at most have an empirical and contingent meaning.

Moreover, Mayr himself, starting in 1974, will consider misleading the reference to the notion of «system» for his definition of «teleonomy» precisely because the theory of systems does not deal with the ontogeny of systems but only with the structural dynamics of their functioning<sup>12</sup>.

For Mayr, as for Jacob and Delbrück, the essential point, as we have seen, is the causal func-

<sup>12</sup> «The combination of “teleonomic” with the term system is, thus, rather incongruent» (Mayr [1974]: 127).

tion of the genetic program as the principle of the ontogeny of organisms and the closure of the program with respect to direct external interference, that is, with respect to the possibility that the program may undergo modification due to interaction with the environment. Both principles, as we have seen, cannot be demonstrated and not even inferred from the results of ontogeny of living beings, given the great phenotypic variety with respect to genotypic stability. Rather, they depend on the Darwinian principle of natural selection, posed as an acquired and incontrovertible truth to which the definition and function of the «genetic program» can be traced and commensurate, by analogy with computer programs. In fact, these are the principles of what today is defined by the same biologists, the «central dogma of molecular biology»<sup>13</sup>. Recent research on the ontogeny of organisms and hereditary transmission has in fact shown that these principles, although they have contributed to the achievement of important discoveries, cannot be considered absolutely valid, and above all that their hypostatization as principles has constituted an obstacle for research with respect to significant problems such as the role of environmental interaction in the genetic transmission of several pathologies among which many cancers. In particular, research on methylation has shown that the activation and development of the ontogenesis process of an organism does not depend exclusively on the «genetic program» but on essentially differential chemical signals that can come both from the cytoplasm of the cell, i.e. from outside the nucleus where the DNA is located, and from other cells of the embryo at its earliest stage, activating or silencing the expression of a gene in the chromosome sequence. It has also been shown that the differential value of signals (active/silenced) can be influenced by contingent factors that occur during ontogenetic development and that can also be traced to environmental factors. This new and different approach has led genetic biology to open a new horizon of research,

called epigenetics, which deals with genetic mutations due to contingent environmental factors, to the pathologies that depend on them and their hereditary transmission, to the intersection between nature and culture (presence of particular chemical substances in the environment, scarcity of food sources or parental care and therefore pollution, famine, war, pandemics or other catastrophes)<sup>14</sup>. This research are rightly defined as «revolutionary» with respect to the Darwinian paradigm of natural selection as the only one responsible for genetic variation and therefore with respect to the entire conceptual framework of the theory of evolution. This research, on an epistemological level, show how misleading it can be, in the horizon of scientific research that wants to be rigorous, the dogmatic hypostatization of a widely shared research hypothesis (as philosophers of science such as Godfrey-Smith are now willing to admit). The latter, reconstructing the scientific debate concerning the import of computer language into biology, first notes that «the “program” concept seems to be applied in biology in an especially broad and unconstrained way, often guided only by very vague analogies with computers and their workings» (Godfrey-Smith [2007]: 111), and then concludes by admitting only a cautious «regulative» use, useful in certain research contexts:

*The use of the informational framework is guided by some real features of genetic mechanisms, but also by application of schematic causal model that guides many or most uses of a semantic language. It reflects and reinforces a general disciplinary focus on sequence properties as opposed to others. This would steer us away from the idea that there is some definite but hidden set of properties being posited by such language, which might or might not be real. (Godfrey-Smith [2007]: 118)*

We have thus seen in which conceptual and hermeneutical twists and paradoxes the demon-

<sup>13</sup> Jablonka, Lamm (2005): 31, 152-153. See also Kay (2000) and Keller (2000).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Francis (2011), as well as Jablonka, Lemm (2005). For an interpretation of the deconstructive effects of such research I refer to Vitale (2018): 53-101.

stration of the scientific objectivity of «teleonomy» as a principle of the ontogeny of organisms remains entangled. Paradoxes and twists that Mayr could perhaps have avoided if he had limited himself to supporting a merely «regulative» use of this notion.

#### REFERENCES

- Bigelow, J., Rosenblueth, A., Wiener, N., 1943: *Behavior, Purpose, Teleology*, "Philosophy of Science" 10 (1), pp. 18-24.
- Debru, C., Morange, M., Worms, F., 2012: *Une nouvelle connaissance du vivant: François Jacob, André Lwoff, Jacques Monod*, Rue D'Ulm, Paris.
- Delbrück, M., 1971: *Aristotle-Totle-Totle*, in Monod, J., Borek, E. (eds.), *Microbes and Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 50-55.
- Francis, R. C., 2011: *Epigenetics. The Ultimate Mystery of Inheritance*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Godfrey-Smith, P., 2007: *Information in Biology*, in Hull, D.L., Ruse, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Philosophy of Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 103-119.
- Jablonka, E., Lemm, M.J., 2005: *Evolution in Four Dimensions. Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioral and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA/London.
- Jacob, F., 1973: *La logique du vivant. Une histoire de l'hérédité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970; transl. by B.E. Spillman, *The Logic of Life. An History of Heredity*, Pantheon Books, New York.
- Jepsen, G.L., Simpson, G., Mayr, E. (eds.), 1949: *Genetics, Paleontology, and Evolution*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*; transl. by J. C. Meredith, rev. and ed. by N. Walker, *Critical of Judgement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.
- Kay, L.E., 2000: *Who Wrote the Book of Life. A History of the Genetic Code*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Keller, E.F., 2000: *The Century of Gene*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/London.
- Mayr, E., 1964: *The Evolution of Living Systems*, "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America" 51 (5), pp. 934-941.
- Mayr, E., 1974: *Teleological and Teleonomic: A New Analysis*, "Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science" 14, pp. 91-117.
- Mayr, E., 1988a: *Cause and Effect in Biology* (1961), in Id., *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/London, pp. 24-37.
- Mayr, E., 1988b: *The Multiple Meanings of Teleological*, in Id., *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/London pp. 38-65.
- Mayr, E., 1988c: *The Concept of Finality in Darwin and After Darwin* (1983), in Id., *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/London pp. 233-257.
- Mayr, E., 1992: *The idea of Teleology*, "Journal of the History of Ideas" 53 (1), pp. 117-135.
- Pittendrigh, C. S., 1958: *Adaptation, natural Selection, and Behavior*, in Roe, G., Simpson, G. (eds.), *Behavior and Evolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 390-416.
- Quarantotto, D., 2005: *Causa finale, sostanza, essenza in Aristotele. Saggio sulla struttura dei processi teleologici naturali e sulla funzione del telos*, Bibliopolis, Napoli.
- Vitale, F., 2017: *With or Without You...Deconstructing Teleology between Philosophy and Biology*, "The Oxford Literary Review" 39 (1), pp. 82-100.
- Vitale, F., 2018: *Biodeconstruction. Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY.
- Wiener, N., 1965: *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.



**Citation:** L. Filieri (2021) Kant on the Purposiveness of the Reflecting Power of Judgment. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 29-40. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12786

**Copyright:** © 2021 L. Filieri. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Kant on the Purposiveness of the Reflecting Power of Judgment

LUIGI FILIERI

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (Germany)  
lfilieri@uni-mainz.de

**Abstract.** In this paper I argue that 1) Kant's power of judgment is constitutively always reflecting, as its lawful employments involve a preliminary self-reference of the faculties the power of judgment itself is required to connect and let them match with each other. Accordingly, I claim that 2) the principle of purposiveness is the principle of the power of judgment as such, and not just of an allegedly self-standing reflecting branch of this faculty. I criticize the view that Kant draws a dichotomy between reflecting and determining judgments and argue that 3) Kant's point in the third Critique is to rule out the amphiboly between the reflecting and the determining employment of the principle of purposiveness. The power of judgment is, as such, always reflecting: while in the case of cognition it also works in a determining way, in the case of both aesthetics and teleology it is only reflecting, i.e., self-purposive – as it sets its function as its own end.

**Keywords:** Purposiveness, Reflecting Judgment, Self-Reference, Aesthetics, Teleology.

### 1. FINALISM AND REFLECTING JUDGMENTS

The idea of a *reflecting* power of judgment is one of the most distinctive marks of Kant's third *Critique*<sup>1</sup>. Reflecting judgments open a new path towards the systematic unity of nature, as they follow from the transcendental principle of the power of judgment. The principle of purposiveness at once strengthens the importance of the regulative function of the ideas of reason in the first *Critique* and further develops Kant's account of the systematic unity of all cognitions. Moreover, only as *reflecting* the power of judgment can lawfully aim to bridge the gap between the domains of nature and freedom (cf. Anceschi [1972]: 184). Finally, recalling one of the main legacies of

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotations follow *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*, (KrV, A B); *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, (KU, AA 5; EE for the *First Introduction*, AA 20). The page-numbers from the English translations are always in ().

Kant's third *Critique* in German Romanticism (cf. Amoroso [2015]), the idea of a reflecting power of judgment grants the possibility of aesthetic judgments of taste.

While it is indisputable that these achievements follow from Kant's account of a reflecting power of judgment, it may be not immediately clear why do we need a specification for the power of judgment when the third *Critique* explicitly deals with the power of judgment in general. One may also doubt whether Kant's account of the power of judgment needs two at least autonomous functions – a determining and a reflecting one. Another relevant question concerns the principle of purposiveness itself. Why does Kant state that the latter is the principle of the reflecting power of judgment? On the one hand, one may answer that the power of judgment ought to have its own principle if it has to count among the faculties of reason. Without a principle, the power of judgment could not aim to attain its main goal, namely bridging the gap between nature and freedom. This first answer makes it clearer that the power of judgment needs its own principle, yet it does not explain why it has to be the principle of purposiveness. On the other hand, dealing with this lack of explanation more specifically, one may ask further why the principle of purposiveness alone is entitled to play the role of the principle of the *reflecting* power of judgment.

Kant argues that the idea of a purposive system of natural laws is the key to our understanding of nature itself, for the systematic unity of nature mirrors reason's need for its own systematic unity. However, raising one last question, one may still ask why the principle of purposiveness did not seemingly serve the determining power of judgment as well – since 1) this principle is the principle of the power of judgment in general; 2) determination is the sole judgmental function with which we have been explicitly dealing in the first *Critique*. After all, already in the first *Critique* [KrV, A 643-644 B 671-672 (590-591)] the understanding – our determining function *par excellence* – had to refer to the regulative and in some sense already purposive function of reason's ideas

in order to attain the systematic unity of cognitions (cf. Ferrarin [2015]: 42-57).

According to a first reading, we may sum up Kant's claims in the following way. The dichotomy between the determining and the reflecting power of judgment – which seemingly reiterates one of Kant's most typical methodological habits – follows from the need to grant the possibility of aesthetic evaluation and the teleological arrangement of the empirical laws of nature. Both possibilities indeed require a non-determining employment of the power of judgment (cf. Zuckert [2007]: 66-67). Neither the notion of beauty can be determined – as beauty would then illegitimately count as an empirical concept – nor the finalism we assume in order to overcome the mechanism of nature may translate an objective principle – as it would then be constitutive of nature itself, and not only of our understanding of it. According to this picture, it would make sense to see a full-fledged parallelism. Each branch of the power of judgment – the determining and the reflecting – would then have its own principle: respectively, the principle of the synthetic unity of the apperception and the principle of purposiveness.

Kant himself seems to foster this reading. In section XI of the *First Introduction*, we read that the notion of a natural end «is used by the power of judgment merely in reflecting, not in determining judgment» [EE, AA 20: 244 (44)]. In section XII, we also read that «it is not the determining but only the reflecting power of judgment that has its own principles [*Prinzipien*] a priori» [EE, AA 20: 248 (47)]. This idea reaches basically unaltered the published *Introduction* of the third *Critique*. In section V, Kant stresses that the finalism we refer to as we apply the «law of the specification of nature» – which follows directly from the principles of purposiveness – «is not a principle of the determining but rather merely of the reflecting power of judgment» [KU, AA 5: 186 (72-73)]. According to this picture, Kant established a full-fledged dichotomy between the determining and the reflecting power of judgment. The power of judgment would then entail two different functions: the objective determination of empirical

concepts; the reflection upon artworks (more precisely, upon their form) and natural formations in accordance with the subjective principle of purposiveness.

This picture also provides us with a specific account of the reflection involved in reflecting judgments. *To reflect* would then mean to perform a completely different activity than *to determine*, yet both activities would imply nothing but a reference to things outside there, though according to different aims and outcomes.

The aim of this paper is to show that this seemingly consistent account oversimplifies the relevance and status of the reflection we deal with in reflecting judgments, thereby making it difficult to understand why the power of judgment deserves a transcendental critique. Kant actually «wrote the *Critique of Judgment* because he aimed to complete what he called his “critical business” – the investigation of all knowledge claims involving principles that cannot be justified by experience alone» (Henrich [1992]: 30). Kant’s third *Critique* is not merely «a *Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment*, only» (Teufel [2012]: 3). More precisely, we may say that it exclusively deals with the reflecting power of judgment only if we also make it clear that this *reflecting* status is not just alternative to the determining one. The pillars of a different reading are the following:

- *Reflection* is the most distinctive and characterizing trait of the power of judgment in general.
- There is a reciprocity between the finalism of the principle of purposiveness and the reflection involved in reflecting judgments.

It is true that a) «determinant and reflective faculties of judgment do not stand to each other as simply parallel functions of a faculty of judgment in general» (Nuzzo [2005]: 166) as it is clear that b) «the *Urteilkraft* that occupies the third *Critique* can only be the *reflective* faculty of judgment» (*ibidem*). However, I take this second claim b) to mean that the reflecting power of judgment is the power of judgment in its most general and

constitutive sense, otherwise it cannot coherently fit with the first claim a).

In her *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, Longuenesse ([1998]: 163-167; 195-210) argues that the reflecting power of judgment plays an essential role in the first *Critique* already, but in her account the reflecting status of reflecting judgments follows from an alleged failure: reflecting judgments are *merely* reflecting for they produce no concept. This negative account of reflecting judgments (also criticized by Makkreel [2006]) does not take into account the reciprocity between the finalism of the principle of purposiveness and the reflection involved in reflecting judgments. In the following, I aim to show that there is no failure on the side of reflecting judgments, for instead the non-determinacy of the principle of purposiveness is a necessary condition for the power of judgment to achieve two goals that reach further than the mere determination of an empirical concept. Reflecting judgments are no defective version of determining judgments: they mirror the general form of the very activity of the power of judgment in general. To put it short: the power of judgment is reflecting in that it targets its own activity.

The reflecting power of judgment 1) is no alternative variant of the determining one (if anything, quite the opposite is true) and 2) does not simply appeal to the principle of purposiveness since it could not count on the fundamental principle of determining judgments – that is the synthetic unity of the apperception. The point is rather that reflecting judgments are reflecting insofar as they are self-purposive. There is no dichotomy between reflection and determination, but rather a hierarchy – for the determining employment of the power of judgment is just one of possible activities of the power of judgment in general – which is intrinsically reflecting (cf. Barale [1992]: 84; Desideri [2003]: 72) and purposively-oriented. Most importantly, the one thing is because of the other.

It is at least misleading to think that the ends of reflecting Judgment’s (*Urteilkraft*) purposiveness are just those we have to assume in order to deal with aesthetic representations or the systematic arrangement of the empirical laws of nature



– since both require us to appeal to a non-determinable universality. For sure, this is *also* the case, but the reflecting status of the reflecting power of judgment follows from the fact that the actual end and object of the power of judgment is its own employment (cf. Anceschi [1972]: 196; 199-201). Equally misleading is to think that this self-reference of the power of judgment would not take place in the case of determining judgments or, even worse, to claim that «the determining power of judgement [...] *cannot* be the subject of a *Critique*» (Teufel [2012]: 2).

The fundamental difference between determining and reflecting judgments is not that the former may do without a self-purposive reflecting moment – which would then exclusively pertain to the latter. Rather, the determining employment of the power of judgment counts on the objectifying function of the normative framework of the understanding – its pure concepts as rules and the synthetic unity of the apperception – as the means through which we achieve universally valid outcomes. To this regard, it is worth noticing that Garroni ([1998]: 50-53) goes as far as to claim that in the case of determining judgments the power of judgment is but the understanding itself. As Kant himself puts it, in the case of determining judgments the universal is given [KU, AA 5: 179 (66-67)]. Whenever the universal is not given – as in the case of the universality of the aesthetic feeling of pleasure or the systematic unity of all empirical laws of nature (which cannot be determined by means of objective concepts) – the power of judgment can still target its own activity in order to draw out of itself a principle for its use. It is this self-reference of the power of judgment that which makes sense of its reflecting status, namely its being-its-own-end. In turn, this reflection brings about a purposive order according to which we assume – but not determine – the purposiveness of aesthetic representations and natural formations.

We may define the reflecting employment of the power of judgment in terms of an almost self-referential activity or, by borrowing Kant's own terminology, as the general *heautonomy* of the power of judgment (cf. Pollok [2017]: 283-285).

More precisely, the latter notion means that the power of judgment draws a principle out of its own use. If we take this at face value, we may be tempted to think that, in the end, what lies outside this self-reference of the power of judgment is somehow inessential. However, this is not the case. The reflecting employment of the power of judgment is *almost*, not utterly, self-referential – for both in the aesthetic and the teleological case, it finally reaches objects: respectively the form of aesthetic representations and natural formations as such. The point is that, before reaching out of itself, namely towards objects, the power of judgment – as intrinsically reflecting – makes of its own use its end. To reflect is a verb we are thus required to mean quite literally. The power of judgment's needs and aims actually reflect upon the objects of our aesthetic or teleological judgments. In turn, our judging the beautiful forms of nature and art and the teleological structure and development of natural formations mirrors the demands of the power of judgment – as it reflects upon its own use.

The power of judgment – as a reflecting power of judgment – gets always back to itself by assuming as its guide those principles according to which its own employment 1) is lawful, 2) attains the goals of a priori synthesis. From possible experience (by means of the determining use of the categories and the synthetic unity of the apperception), to moral agency (through the categorical imperative) and, finally, the very overarching need for the systematic unity between the two domains of reason. As constitutively reflecting, the power of judgment ought to be its own principle.

## 2. THE PRIMACY OF REFLECTION

By relying on these premises, we gain a different interpretive standpoint on those Kant's statements that one would otherwise misleadingly mean to establish a dichotomy between the reflecting and the determining power of judgment – whereby only the former would work purposively. In section V of the *First Introduction* we

read that *to reflect* means «to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one's faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible» [EE, AA 20: 211 (15)]. On the one hand, this may confirm the dichotomy reading, for *reflecting* would be simply alternative to *determining*. However, on the other hand, one may also ask whether it would be possible *to compare and to hold together* different representations without – as a condition – a preliminary reference of any representation to the faculty of cognition. If we further ask whether we may proceed directly from the faculties of cognition to their objects independently of a preliminary self-purposive reference of the very same faculties upon the principles of their own lawful use, the answer can be but negative. The first *Critique* already taught us that the concept of nature implies a legislation following from the normative drive of our cognitive faculties [KrV, A 126-129 (241-243); B 163-165 (262-264)]. Kant's point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not to acknowledge how things are, but to state how they ought to be according to a priori principles – in order to be the objects of our possible experience. Said differently, Kant's point is to establish

*the autonomy and purposive use of our cognitive faculties in a way that at the same time proves them to involve essentially a reference to the concept (or idea) of a realm of experience that is purposive for the use of our cognitive faculties, i. e. that contains the necessary unity required for their use (Fugate [2014]: 211).*

Any reference of a representation to another as well as to the faculties of cognitions implies a preliminary self-reference of the very same faculties, for these make a representation possible in the very first place according to the principles of their lawful use. Kant himself give us a hint when he states that even in the case of a (determining) judgment (*Urteil*) of experience the power of judgment in its reflection is «also determining» [EE, AA 20: 212 (16), my emphasis].

The power of judgment's need to reiterate its own activity is key. According to an eminently

transcendental point of view, it is no matter of how we actually judge, but of how we ought to judge. The principle of purposiveness is the most distinctive mark of the reflection the reflecting power of judgment brings about, for both its purposiveness and reflecting status make it clear that the power of judgment's aims and normative drives are but two sides of the same coin. The power of judgment's ends are the principles of its own use. It makes thus sense to appeal to the principle of purposiveness as to a *maxim* «as the basis for research into nature» which disregards «what happens» and «how things are judged». It rather works to establish «how they ought to be judged» [KU, AA 5: 182 (69)]. The power of judgment

*must thus assume it as an a priori principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable, in the combination of its manifold into one experience possible in itself. [KU, AA 5: 183-184 (70)]*

In the guise of a self-reference, the power of judgment is only *reflecting*, not also *determining*. It aims to «think of nature [...] in accordance with a principle of purposiveness for our faculty of cognition». The reflecting power of judgment «represents the unique way in which we *must proceed* in reflection on the objects of nature with the aim of a thoroughly interconnected experience» [KU, AA 5: 184 (71), my emphasis]. Notice that this *ought-to-be* of the power of judgment requires us to turn the final cause into an efficient one (cf. Allison [2012]: 186). The systematic unity of the empirical laws of nature – an epiphenomenon of reason's own overarching systematic needs – is an end that brings about the conditions and method for its own achievement. Here the drive – the ground – is at once the end.

We see that the seeming dichotomy between reflecting and determining Judgment does not hypostatize two heterogeneous and self-standing functions – each allegedly endowed with a particular principle. It rather hides a hierarchy

between two possible – lawful – employments of the power of judgment.

When Kant stresses that the principle of purposiveness would exclusively belong to the reflecting power of judgment, he could have two different things in mind. On the one hand, if we take his statements at face value, it is hard to deny that we are in front of a dichotomy between two parallel and autonomous employments of the power of judgment. On the other hand, however, if we assume the broader perspective of a critique of the power of judgment, we see that the word *reflecting* describes the most distinctive mark of the power of judgment as such, that is in its *heautonomy*, as it sets its own function as its end. Quite a good definition of *reflection* after all.

The power of judgment may well just proceed only reflectively, but it cannot be merely determining. Any determining move of the power of judgment relies on a preliminary self-reference of the faculties of cognition, namely those faculties the power of judgment alone is entitled to connect and let them match with each other. Determining judgments display just one of the possible employments of the power of judgment in a priori synthesis, as it counts on a *given universal*. The judgmental connection between the pure concepts of the understanding and the empirical manifold given in intuition leads to the determination of the concepts for the objects of possible experience. Accordingly, possible experience is one of the achievements – one of the most fundamental and relevant – of a priori synthesis. Yet to say that a priori synthesis always takes place in the form of determining judgments is to misunderstand the aims and scope of Kant's critical project.

Analogously, to say that the principle of purposiveness pertains to the reflecting power of judgment is *not* to say that no purposive self-reference of the power of judgment takes place in the case of determining judgments. The systematic needs of reason worked as ends far before Kant came to identify the principle of purposiveness as such, i.e., as a principle. It has been for Kant unavoidable to understand that reason's purposive activity relies on a transcendental principle for

the sole of power that is actually able to let reason's faculties match with each other. The third *Critique* closes a circle that Kant began to trace almost twenty years earlier, for the power of judgment at once let reason establish its domains and allows their systematic unity. The principle of purposiveness can be but the principle of the power of judgment as such – i.e., as reflecting. Its seemingly exclusive belonging to an allegedly reflecting branch of the power of judgment does not mean that our cognitive determining judgments disregard this principle. Kant's main concern is not to argue for two self-standing functions of the power of judgment but, instead, – as I aim to show in section 3. – to rule out the determining employment of the principle of purposiveness.

In the first *Critique*, in the introduction to «The Analytic of principles», we find – in embryo, so to say – the very same issue Kant addresses in the third *Critique*. Where are we to find a principle for the power of judgment? The section «On the Transcendental Power of Judgment in General» [*KrV*, A 132-136 B 172-175 (268-270)] provides no full-fledged answer; yet there is one relevant point. When judging we face the problem of rule-giving, namely the need to find a rule according to which our judgmental rule-giving should take place. The easy way to solve this problem is to state – as Kant does – that the power of judgment is an original talent that has to find its own way. However, the fact that only transcendental logic can be of help in this case – by no means general logic – brings the issue of the power of judgment's employment into play. General logic cannot provide any canon for the lawful employment of the power of judgment for it utterly disregards «all content of cognition». Transcendental logic instead – as it deals with the form of cognition and experience – provides the power of judgment not just with the rule to be applied, but also with the case to which this rule ought to be applied. Does this twofold rule-giving come from outside the power of judgement itself, or should we rather acknowledge that whenever we deal with the lawful employment of the power of judgment we cannot avoid – as a condition – setting

the functional requirements of the power of judgment as the rule it ought to follow in order to carry out its task?

Kant himself seems to take this path when he makes it clear that, since «the understanding can make no other use of these concepts [the categories] than that of judging by means of them», then «the understanding in general can be represented as a faculty for judging» [*KrV*, A 68 B 93 (205)]. If in the case of determining judgments the understanding is the power of judgment itself, then the pure concepts of the understanding are but the means the power of judgment employs in order to grant the possibility of experience and cognition. Most importantly, we see that even in the case of determination the functional requirements of the power of judgment constitute its own method. As Longuenesse ([1998]: 196) remarks, in the case of determining judgments the power of judgment «*schematizes its reflection*».

It is true that the first *Critique* does not address the point of the power of judgment's reflecting status in the very same way the third *Critique* does, but this does not prevent us from recognizing the point. Moreover, recognizing this point is one of the most fruitful ways to employ the interpretive framework of the third *Critique* retrospectively.

Kant's point is not that determining judgments are non-reflecting or non-purposive. Rather, his point is that no determining employment of the principle of purposiveness is lawfully possible. This difference – to which we have to turn now – is key. The normative framework of the understanding alone leads to objective determination, as the categories realizes the unity of the principle of the apperception by making empirical concepts out of the given manifold. This is not the scenario of the reflecting employment of the power of judgment – precisely because there is no universal to be determined. Neither the form of aesthetic representations nor the assumption of an inner finality in natural formations rely on the conditions of determining judgments. The *purpose* at stake in the principle of purposiveness is just the very employment of the power of judgment itself: not

this or that cognitive taking but, rather, the general form of cognition and its system.

The hierarchy between the reflecting and the determining employment of the power of judgment – where the former is the most general form of judging and the latter one of its possible and lawful specifications – accounts for three relevant points. First, the *heautonomy* of the power of judgment; second, the reciprocity between reflection and purposiveness; third, the illegitimacy of the amphiboly between the reflecting and the determining employment of the principle of purposiveness. As we are going to see, in the case of the amphiboly we would be unable to grant the possibility of the two main achievements of the third *Critique*: aesthetic and teleological judgments.

### 3. AESTHETICS AND TELEOLOGY

Kant's account of aesthetic judgments of taste further strengthens the reciprocity between reflection and (self-)purposiveness. The very title of § 35 sounds quite telling: «The principle of taste is the subjective principle of the power of judgment in general» [*KU*, AA 5: 286 (167)]. The claim that the principle of taste is subjective utterly fits with the non-determining employment of the principle of purposiveness. Kant leaves indeed no room open for the determination of the concept of beauty (cf. Tomasi [2017]), for the latter cannot be objective. However, the claim that the principle of taste – a principle of the reflecting power of judgment – is the principle of the power of judgment *in general* makes sense only insofar as we give up construing a dichotomy between reflection and determination. Kant's words are quite unambiguous. Since «the judgment of taste is not determinable by means of concepts, it is grounded only on the subjective formal condition of a judgment in general. *The subjective condition of all judgments is the faculty for judging itself, or the power of judgment*» [*KU*, AA 5: 287 (167), my emphasis].

The non-determinability of the judgment of taste runs parallel to Kant's refusal of the amphi-

boly between the determining and the reflecting employment of the principle of purposiveness. The former may well be impossible without this to mean that the latter is likewise ruled out. Even more relevant is that Kant stresses that the form of the judgment of taste – a merely reflecting judgment – is in fact the form of a judgment as such. It is, said differently, the form of judging itself. As reflecting, the power of judgment draws a principle out of its own activity. Its end literally mirrors its needs; the final cause is at once an efficient one. We thus see that the aims of the judgments of taste rely on the overarching aims of the power of judgment in general: the lawful synthetic connection of the faculties. While in the case of determining judgments we deal with the synthetic objective unity of the given manifold according to the rules of the understanding (under the aegis of the principle of the apperception), in the case of taste Kant famously appeals to the free play between the imagination and the understanding [KU, AA 5: 287 (167-168)]. The harmonious interplay between these two faculties is the wellspring of the disinterested feeling of pleasure (by no chance this feeling relies on a *reflektierte Wahrnehmung*, cf. Desideri [2003]: 81-83). In the two different cases at stake, the overarching perspective is still the same, for the power of judgment aims to provide itself with the fundamental conditions for its own lawful employment.

In § 58, which is titled «On the idealism of the purposiveness of nature as well as art, as the sole principle of the power of aesthetic judgment» [KU, AA 5: 346 (221)], Kant stresses that the free play of the faculties coherently matches with the reflecting status of aesthetic judgments. In the case of taste, we aesthetically aim «to the correspondence of its representation [of the judgment] in the imagination *with the essential principles of the power of judgment in general*» [KU, AA 5: 347 (221), my emphasis].

In the same paragraph, Kant also cares to distinguish between the idealism and the realism of purposiveness. Kant's ground for this distinction is the same for the distinction between the reflecting and the determining employment of the power

of judgment: the illegitimacy of a determining use of the (reflecting) principle of purposiveness. The binary reciprocity between reflection and purposiveness thus gets a third element, namely the *idealism* of purposiveness itself. Purposiveness works as the principle of the reflecting power of judgment not *despite* but *because* of its non-determinability, namely its ideal status. A real purposiveness – an objectively determined purposiveness – would mean an objective principle, i. e., a dogmatic assumption. In this case, we would unlawfully equate the principle of purposiveness and the principles (*Grundsätze*) of the understanding. By contrast, the purpose of what we may now call reflecting purposiveness – the very idealism of this purposiveness – is instead a mere «intrinsically yet contingently manifested purposive correspondence with the need of the power of judgment in regard to nature and the forms generated in it in accordance with particular laws» [KU, AA 5: 347 (221-222)]. Aesthetic judgments of taste do nothing but mirror the general *heautonomy* of the power of judgment – whereby the latter so to say escapes the meshes of objective determination. When judging about beauty we indeed «seek the standard for it in ourselves a priori» [KU, AA 5: 350 (224)].

The same assumptions lay the ground of Kant's teleological judgments<sup>2</sup>. In § 75, whose title is «The concept of an objective purposiveness of nature is a critical principle of reason for the reflecting power of judgment» [KU, AA 5: 397 (268)], Kant states that to say

*that the generation of certain things in nature or even of nature as a whole is possible only through a cause that is determined to act in accordance with intentions is quite different from saying that because of the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties I cannot judge about the possibility of those things and their*

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that aesthetic judgments are teleological judgments, for the latter do not rely on the free harmonious interplay between the imagination and the understanding, nor their universality relies on a feeling. On the distinction between aesthetic and teleological judgments see Pollok (2017): 273-307.

*generation except by thinking of a cause for these that acts in accordance with intentions, and thus by thinking of a being that is productive in accordance with the analogy with the causality of an understanding. In the first case I would determine something about the object, and I am obliged to demonstrate the objective reality of a concept that has been assumed; in the second case, reason merely determines the use of my cognitive faculties in accordance with their special character and with the essential conditions as well as the limits of their domain. The first principle is thus an objective fundamental principle for the determining, the second a subjective fundamental principle merely for the reflecting power of judgment, hence a maxim that reason prescribes to it. [KU, AA 5: 397-398 (268-269)]*

The distinction between the pair objectivity/determination and the pair purposiveness/reflection – where the former is subordinated to the second – directly follows from these premises. The ground of the distinction at stake lies in the two different employments of the power of judgment. The power of judgment is as such constitutively reflecting. It is *merely* reflecting as no universal is given. However, when it objectively employs the rules of the understanding with respect to the manifold given in intuition, it is *also* determining (in its reflection). To claim that the objectivity the determining power of judgment brings about utterly disregards the principle of purposiveness means to claim that Kant provides us with another dichotomy. Even worse, it means to claim that our objectively determining moves are non-purposive – something which would misunderstand the regulative function of the ideas in the first *Critique* already. Kant proceeds through dichotomies in a number of circumstances but, as shown, it is methodologically wrong to subsume the distinction between determining and reflecting judgments under the genre of the dichotomy. In the case of determination, the power of judgment is, recalling the *First Introduction*, «*also* determining» in its reflection [EE, AA 20: 212 (16), my emphasis].

We are thus prevented from conceiving of the determining employment of the power of judgment as disregarding the principle of purposive-

ness, for it is precisely because of the constitutive limits of our determining activity that we are required to further assume a purposive order of nature. At the same time, we also see that no determining employment of the principle of purposiveness is lawfully possible. It is worth stressing again that the non-determinacy of the principle of purposiveness (its idealism) is no lack but, rather, its most distinctive mark, namely what actually makes this purposiveness a transcendental principle for the power of judgment. To sum up: 1) determining judgments entail a reflecting moment because of the reflecting status of the power of judgment in general and the principle of purposiveness (the transcendental principle of the power of judgment in general); 2) determining judgments do not make any determining use of the principle of purposiveness (as the determination at stake relies on the categories and the synthetic unity of the apperception).

To assume an objective purposiveness does not mean to turn the subjective (reflecting) principle of purposiveness into an objective one (cf. Steigerwald [2010]: 293). If that were the case, the power of judgment would raise an unlawful dogmatic claim. The principle of purposiveness is either subjective or no *principle* at all. What distinguishes aesthetic judgments from teleological judgments is no allegedly objective (determining) employment of the principle of purposiveness, but their different scopes. On the one hand, in the aesthetic case, the *object* of the power of judgment is the form of aesthetic representations themselves. On the other hand, in the case of teleological judgment, the power of judgment takes on natural formations purposively, and consider them *as if* they were made according to a purposive intention (cf. De Bianchi [2011]: 18-20). These natural formations are the *objects* of the power of judgment in the case of teleological judgments.

The purposiveness is here *objective* in that it deals with actual objects (while aesthetic judgments deal with the subjective form of representations), by no means because it would rely on an objective – i. e., objectively determining – employment of the principle of purposiveness. We are

necessarily required to assume this purposiveness when dealing with the internal constitution of natural formations, but only as a guide for our judging, insofar as we are thereby able to systematize all empirical laws of nature. This is why teleological judgments are non-determining, for their guiding principle is not objectively determined in actual experience (while this is exactly the case of the categories). In turn, we see that determining judgments are *per se* unable to accomplish the task of teleological judgments – and this is why the former need the latter. The non-determinacy of the principle of purposiveness is a necessary condition for the reflecting power of judgment to achieve the systematic unity determining judgments are constitutively unable to achieve. By no chance Makkreel ([2006]: 229) refers to this principle as the «reflective principle of systematicity», whereby the purposiveness of nature is «relative to the subject and its rational need for order» (*ibidem*; see also Tonelli [1958]: 159).

Kant's reference to the *peculiar constitution* of our cognitive faculties is relevant. Whenever we judge, the power of judgment brings about a synthetic connection of the faculties of cognition. In the case of teleological judgments, this connection is not meant to objectively determine an alleged empirical concept of a natural end or, even worse, the systematic whole of natural laws *in concreto*. Rather, Kant's point is to provide the power of judgment with a hermeneutical guiding light (cf. Makkreel [1990]: 111-112) while it is busy to investigate an unstable field – for the always increasing multiplicity of nature's laws may well bewilder the activity of the power of judgment itself. By no means «nature as a whole is [...] given to us as organized» [KU, AA 5: 398 (269)].

One last conclusive remark. The idealism of purposiveness counts not only on a negative description, namely as opposed to the realism of purposiveness. Kant also provides us with a positive characterization of the idealism of purposiveness as analogy. The idealism of purposiveness is indeed an analogical one. Already in the *First Introduction* (section V), Kant writes that «natural laws [...] which are so constituted and related

to each other *as if* they had been designed by the power of judgment for its own need, have a similarity with the possibility of things that presuppose a representation of themselves as their ground» [EE, AA 20: 216 (19), my emphasis]. In the published *Introduction* (section IV) he further adds that the very same laws have to be taken *as if* they followed from an overarching understanding who meant to establish those laws as in accordance with our cognitive means [KU, AA 5: 180-181 (67-68)]. Why must we understand these laws in such a purposive way? Because, Kant answers, this is what the power of judgment needs in order to accomplish its task: «to make possible a system of experience in accordance with particular laws of nature» [KU, AA 5: 180 (67-68)]. The expected achievement – the system of all empirical laws of nature (cf. Feloj [2013]) follows from the power of judgment's sole actual ground, that is its at once final and efficient cause: its own method and reflecting purposiveness. Its self-consistency, whose mirror image is the systematic unity of all empirical laws of nature.

When Kant mentions the *peculiar constitution* of our cognitive faculties, he does not refer to an anthropological or physiological human nature that somehow binds us to assume an undetermined subjective principle because of our allegedly given inability to satisfy needs that would actually exceed our means. In a far more radical and significant way, Kant means that the constitutively reflecting status of the power of judgment binds the power of judgment itself to draw a principle – as a maxim – out of its own use (cf. Siani [2015]: 103). More specifically, a principle driving the power of judgment towards a goal that can be achieved without being thereby objectively determined.

To conclude, the analogical idealism Kant appeals to does not represent a rhetorical means according to which we would discursively make sense of a complex thought. The analogy is indeed the sole logical form by virtue of which it is legitimately possible to conceive of a coherent correspondence between the empirical laws of nature and our judgmental cognitive procedures (cf. La

Rocca [2011]). As if the former were an *analogon* of the latter.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, H.E., 2012: *Reflective Judgment and the Application of Logic to Nature: Kant's Deduction of the Principle of Purposiveness as an Answer to Hume*, in Id., *Essays on Kant*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 177-188.
- Amoroso, L., 2015: *Der ästhetische Mensch von Baumgarten bis Schiller*, in Asmuth, C., Remmers, P. (eds.), *Ästhetisches Wissen*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, pp. 83-94.
- Anceschi, L., 1972: *Considerazioni sulla «Prima Introduzione» alla «Critica del Giudizio» di Kant [1968]*, in Id., *Da Bacone a Kant. Saggi di estetica*, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 175-221.
- Barale, M., 1992: *Critica del giudizio e metafisica del senso*, "Archivio di storia della cultura" 5, pp. 65-86.
- De Bianchi, S., 2011: *Kant's Concept of the Technique of Nature in the Critique of the Power of Judgment*, "Kant e-Prints" 6 (1), pp. 12-28.
- Desideri, F., 2003: *Il passaggio estetico. Saggi kantiani*, Il Melangolo, Genova.
- Feljo, S., 2013: *Towards an Alternative: Crisis of the System or Mediation between Nature and Freedom? The Concept of Einheit der Erfahrung in the Erste Einleitung*, in Bacin, S., Ferrarin, A., La Rocca, C., Ruffing, M. (eds.), *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, Bd. 1, pp. 535-542.
- Ferrarin, A., 2015: *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London.
- Fugate, C.D., 2014: *The Teleology of Reason. A Study of the Structure of Kant's Critical Philosophy*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston.
- Garroni, E., 1998<sup>2</sup>: *Estetica ed epistemologia. Riflessioni sulla "Critica del giudizio" di Kant*, Edizioni Unicopli, Milano.
- Henrich, D., 1992: *Kant's Explanation of Aesthetic Judgment*, in Id., *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World. Studies in Kant*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA), pp. 29-56.
- Kant, I., 1781<sup>1</sup>-1787<sup>2</sup>: *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. and ed. by P. Guyer, A. W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transl. by P. Guyer, E. Matthews, ed. by P. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- La Rocca, C., 2011: *Formen des Als-Ob bei Kant*, in Dörflinger, B., Kruck, G. (eds.), *Über den Nutzen von Illusionen. Die regulativen Ideen in Kants theoretischer Philosophie*, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York, pp. 29-45.
- Longuenesse, B., 1998: *Kant and the Capacity to Judge. Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*. Translation by C. T. Wolfe, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).
- Makkreel, R.A., 1990: *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant. The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London.
- Makkreel, R.A., 2006: *Reflection, Reflective Judgment, and Aesthetic Exemplarity*, in Kukla, R., (ed.), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 223-244.
- Nuzzo, A., 2005: *Kant and the Unity of Reason*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette (IN).
- Pollok, K., 2017: *Kant's Theory of Normativity. Exploring the Space of Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Siani, A.L., 2015: *Kants ästhetische Urteilskraft als nicht-ästhetisches Wissen und das Ende des modernen Subjekts*, in Asmuth, C., Remmers, P. (eds.), *Ästhetisches Wissen*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, pp. 95-109.
- Steigerwald, J., 2010: *Natural Purposes and the Reflecting Power of Judgment: The Problem of the Organism in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, "European Romantic Review" 21 (3), pp. 291-308.
- Teufel, T., 2012: *What Does Kant Mean by 'Power of Judgement' in his Critique of the Power of Judgement?*, "Kantian Review" 17 (2), pp. 1-30.



- Tomasi, G., 2017: *Loggettivismo debole di Kant in estetica*, "Estudos Kantianos" 5 (1), pp. 81-98.
- Tonelli, G., 1958: *Von den verschiedenen Bedeutungen des Wortes Zweckmäßigkeit in der Kritik der Urteilskraft*, "Kant-Studien" 49 (1-4), pp. 154-166.
- Zuckert, R., 2007: *Kant on Beauty and Biology. An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



**Citation:** L. Sala (2021) Systematicity, Purposiveness, Necessity: from the transcendental deduction of the ideas to the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 41-53. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12755

**Copyright:** © 2021 L. Sala. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Systematicity, Purposiveness, Necessity: from the transcendental deduction of the ideas to the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature<sup>1</sup>

LORENZO SALA  
Universität Trier  
sala@uni-trier.de

**Abstract.** In this paper I argue for a strong continuity between the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature and the transcendental deduction of the ideas from the first critique. On these grounds, I provide an interpretation of the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature in which I argue that: 1) the necessity of the principle of purposiveness of nature does not derive from its role in solving some specific philosophical problem (e.g. that of induction) but from its relation to a cognitive goal; 2) the representation of nature as conforming to the maxims of judgement is a direct, immediate consequence of a certain cognitive goal (in particular, of what is researched in the empirical investigation of nature; 3) that the *necessity* of the empirical laws mentioned by Kant in the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature is not so much their nomic necessity, but their necessity as consequences of higher laws.

**Keywords:** Transcendental deduction, Principle of purposiveness of nature, Appendix to the transcendental dialectic, Nomic necessity, Critique of the power of judgement.

---

In the literature on Kant's third *Critique*, there is a widespread tendency to interpret the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature as if it was aimed at solving the particular epistemological problem in light of which the principle in question is interpreted, be this the problem of induction (e.g. Allison [2001]), of the necessity of empirical laws (e.g. Teufel [2017]), or anything else. For this reason, the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature is interpreted in analogy to the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding from the

---

<sup>1</sup> This work was written with the support of the Core Fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University. I wish to express my gratitude to the whole staff for their precious support.

first *Critique*, where Kant begins from some representations' (i.e. the categories) disputed claim to objectivity and then vindicates this claim by showing that these representations are necessary for having an experience of objects. Likewise, in the third *Critique* Kant would provide an argument that shows that to represent nature as purposive, whatever means, is necessary for something else, be this «systematic scientific knowledge» (Guyer [1997]: 38), the formation of empirical concepts (e.g. Ginsborg [2015]) or something else.

In contrast to this interpretative tendency, in this article I argue that the principle of purposiveness of nature and its deduction are best understood as following the same logic that was at play in the genesis and the deduction of the transcendental ideas in the first *Critique*. There, instead of starting from some disputed claim to objectivity and vindicating it, Kant first begins by considering a certain research-activity of reason, taken as a fact, and then shows how to engage in this research activity *immediately* amounts to represent nature in a certain way (in the case of the first *Critique*, according to ideas). Although this does not imply that nature *actually is* so determined, this does not render illegitimate to proceed according to such a representation of nature in our research (i.e. *as if* nature were so determined), so that the question of the legitimacy of such a way of representing nature is nonetheless settled. To interpret the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature as embodying a similar logic, I contend, provides a vantage point not only for making sense of its text, but also in relation to the much-debated issue of what kind of necessity is at stake when, in it, Kant refers to the necessity of the particular empirical laws. In particular, contrarily to what is most commonly argued (e.g. Teufel [2017]; Guyer [2003]: 287-288), the necessity Kant is referring to is not so much the nomic necessity of these laws, but their necessity *as consequences* of more general laws.

To substantiate these claims, I am going to proceed as follows. In the first section, I am going to consider Kant's account of the origin of transcendental ideas in the activity of producing syl-

logisms. In particular, I will illustrate how to systematise our cognitions amounts in fact to represent things in a certain way: 1) as in relation to the unconditioned and 2) according to what Kant will later call the «maxims of the power of judgement» (Kant [1790]: 182; 69). On these grounds, in the second section, I will consider the transcendental deduction of the ideas that one finds in the *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic*. I will show how, in it, the fact that a certain way of representing things (i.e. according to ideas) is the result of a certain cognitive goal reflects on its *justification* (that is, how it legitimates their *regulative* use). Against this background, in the third section I am going to show how, like ideas with syllogism, also the representation of nature as purposive is the correlate of a certain research activity (in particular: of the search of universals for given particulars that Kant calls *reflective judgement*). In this way, I will explain also why, for Kant, to represent nature as purposive for our cognitive faculties means to represent it according to the *maxims of judgement*. Building on these results, in the fourth and last section I will provide an in-depth analysis of the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature. In this way, I will show how the kind of *necessity* of the empirical laws of nature on which Kant's argument hinges is their necessity as *logical consequences* of higher laws (and not so much their nomic necessity); secondly, I will explain how a certain cognitive goal can ground and justify a certain way of representing nature, albeit only for a regulative use.

#### 1. ON THE ROLE AND THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEAS IN THE FIRST CRITIQUE

In the *Critique of pure Reason*, Kant deals with what he will later call «maxims of the power of judgement» (Kant [1790]: 182; 69) in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, and specifically in its *Appendix*. Were in the *Critique of the power of Judgement* he takes these maxims to be the *expression* of the principle of purposiveness of nature (Kant [1790]: 184; 71), and links them to the *Urteilkraft*, in the

*Critique of pure Reason* he links the very same maxims to reason (*Vernunft*) and its ideas. In both cases, Kant affirms that these maxims are linked to a certain way of representing nature *itself*, and in particular as *systematic* in some sense: in the case of the *Critique of the power of Judgement* (*KU*), nature is represented as *purposive* for our cognitive faculties, in the *Critique of pure Reason* (*KrV*), as if its unity was grounded in the objects of the ideas (e.g. all the psychological phenomena as manifestations of a simple substance, the whole of nature as created by God, etc.). With respect to this feature, the *KrV* is easier to interpret than the *KU*: in the first, Kant writes more extensively about the reason why, in our empirical enquiry, we come to (and need to) represent nature itself as having a certain sort of systematic unity.

A good part of this explanation is not to be found in the *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic*, but instead in the *Introduction of the Transcendental Dialectic*: it is here that Kant explains how ideas (as representations of certain objects) originate in the role that reason plays in cognition. Specifically, like he did in the *Analytic* for the understanding and its concepts (the categories), Kant begins from the definition of reason that derives from its *logical* use, and proceeds from it to explain the origin of the ideas. Reason is first defined as the «faculty of drawing inferences mediately» (Kant [1781/1787]: A299/B355), i.e. syllogising, and then as «the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles» (Kant [1781/1787]: A302/B359).

The connection between these definitions can easily be understood by looking at one of Kant's definitions of principle – to be found in these very same pages – which is directly bound to the notion of syllogism:

*The term principle is ambiguous, and commonly signifies only a cognition that can be used as a principle even if in itself and as to its own origin it is not a principle. Every universal proposition, even if it is taken from experience (by induction) can serve as the major premise in a syllogism. [...] Thus, every syllogism is a form of derivation of a cognition from a*

*principle, for the major premise always gives a concept such that everything subsumed under its condition can be cognized from it according to a principle. Now since every universal cognition can serve as the major premise in a syllogism, [...] these propositions can, in respect of their possible use, be called principles. (Kant [1781/1787]: A300/B356-7)*

In line with the logical terminology of his times, *principle* is defined in functional terms, i.e. as the proposition functioning as a major premise in a syllogism<sup>2</sup>. For instance, in the syllogism «all humans are mortal, all Athenians are humans, ergo all Athenians are mortal», «all humans are mortal» is the principle, and «human» is what Kant calls the *condition*. Precisely for its *functional* nature, it is clear that this definition does not concern the specific features of judgements in isolation, so that any universal judgement can be a *principle* in this sense, inasmuch as it has a certain role in a syllogism.

With this in mind, one can easily understand the definition of *reason* as «the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles» (Kant [1781/1787]: A302/B359)<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, Kant takes reason to be not only responsible for drawing inferences when the principles are given, but also for the opposite activity, i.e. bringing various judgements back to another judgement – their principle – by finding the appropriate condition. For instance, by finding the *condition* that makes (e.g.) Athenians, Spartans and Thebans mortal into their human nature, the judgements «Athenians are mortal», «Spartans are mortal» and «Thebans are mortal» are *unified* under the *principle* «all humans are mortal». Both in this case

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Meier's definition of syllogism: «§356. That judgment which is derived from others in a rational inference is the conclusion (*conclusio, probandum, principiatum*). But those judgments from which the conclusion is derived are the premises (*praemissae, data, summiones, principia*)» (Meier [2016]: 120).

<sup>3</sup> Kant's references to the *rules* of the understanding is due to the fact that, in general, Kant takes concepts to be rules (see, for instance, Kant [1781/1787]: A132/B171). On Kant's understanding of concepts as rules, see Vanzo (2012): 187-189.

and when we draw an inference, we not only obtain a new cognition (either of the conclusion, when the principle is given, or of the unity of more cognitions, when it is the principle which is discovered): we also gain an insight into the (conditioned)<sup>4</sup> necessity of the judgements that figure as conclusion – for instance, Athenians necessarily are mortal inasmuch as they are human<sup>5</sup>.

Together with the activity of drawing inferences from given judgements, the unification of cognitions under higher principles is what Kant calls the *logical* use of reason, and it is in relation to it that one is to understand both 1) the production of *ideas* (called by Kant *real use of reason*) and 2) the necessity of representing *objects themselves* (nature) in a certain way. The link between these elements is to be found in a passage from the *Introduction* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, where one reads:

*Reason in its logical use seeks the universal condition of its judgment (its conclusion), and the syllogism is nothing but a judgment mediated by the subsumption of its condition under a universal rule (the major premise). Now since this rule is once again exposed to this same attempt of reason, and the condition of its condition thereby has to be sought (by means of a prosyllogism) as far as we may, we see very well that the proper principle a of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed. But this logical maxim cannot become a principle of pure reason unless we*

<sup>4</sup> The necessity of the conclusion is *conditioned* in that it depends on its premise – as Kant himself writes, it is necessary «under a condition» (Kant [1800]: 120; 615): it is not necessary in itself, but *as conclusion* of the inference of which it is part.

<sup>5</sup> This modal aspect is for Kant so central to the notion of syllogism to be part of its definition: «an inference of reason [a syllogism] is the cognition of the necessity of a proposition through the subsumption of its condition under a given universal rule» (Kant [1800]: 120; 614). The centrality of this link between syllogism, necessity and reason is confirmed also by the role it plays in Kant's distinction between the different degrees of cognition (see Rumore [2007]: 235-266), as well as to his understanding of science (see Capozzi [2002]: 541-541). See also Kant (1781/1787): A332/B389.

*assume that when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection). Such a principle' of pure reason, however, is obviously synthetic; for the conditioned is analytically related to some condition, but not to the unconditioned. (Kant [1781/1787]: A307-8/B364)*

This passage contains various elements that explain the relation between reason's search for unity, ideas, and the corresponding need of representing *things* in a certain way. First 1), the unification under principles is something that is *prescribed* by reason itself for any given judgement – for any given judgement, reason prescribes us to find a principle to which it can be brought back. As Kant himself explains, the fact that this prescription applies to *any* judgement makes this search for principles 2) a *reiterative process*: given this prescription, any new-found principle is again subjected to the same search for a higher principle under which to bring it.

This is for Kant directly bound with 3) the idea of the *unconditioned*. Indeed, in prescribing to always repeat the search for principles, we not only represent a certain set of judgements as grounded in a yet to find higher one, but we represent this yet to find higher principle as itself grounded in some other. Accordingly, to prescribe a reiterative search for principles directly *amounts to represent these higher judgements as a series*, the series of all these judgements *a parte priori*: this *whole* of judgements is what Kant refers to as the *unconditioned*. It is here not necessary to understand what *unconditioned* precisely means, nor to consider whether such a series is taken to be infinite or finite: what is important is that the link between the search for principles and the representation of the unconditioned – i.e. of the whole series – directly explains 3.1) why reason's maxim is bound to a certain representation of *things* as well as 3.2) how the *logical use* of reason generates transcendental ideas<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of this passage which deals extensively also with the notion of *unconditioned* see the impressive

Concerning the first point 3.1), the link between reason's maxim and a certain representation of *things* somewhat trivially depends on the fact that, for Kant, our concepts have a certain objectivity, i.e. they represent certain features of things. Accordingly, if a maxim prescribes to find a higher principle accounting for different elements (e.g. why various substances melt as the temperature increases), we are thereby representing *the objects themselves* (in this case, the melting substances) as governed by such a yet to find principle (e.g. a certain *law*), and accordingly as having the property described by it. Given the aforementioned recursive nature of the maxim of reason and its link with the idea of a totality of higher principles, it is clear that the prescription in question immediately amounts to the representation of things as governed by an analogously (i.e. hierarchically) ordered system of rules, which are expressed by the various judgements making up the whole series.

This makes it easy to understand the various parallelisms that Kant draws between *logical* and *transcendental* principles at the end of the *Dialectic*, where he deals specifically with those maxims that he will later ascribe to the power of judgement – for instance, when he claims that «the logical principle of genera therefore presupposes a transcendental one if it is to be applied to

nature» (Kant [1781/1787]: A654/B682). Indeed, if our principles are understood as rules representing general features of things, and are thought of as hierarchically ordered under one another, in searching for higher principles we are in fact representing things as governed by similarly hierarchically ordered rules. It is in this sense that the application of the *logical principle presupposes* a transcendental one: in our search for higher principles, we are representing nature in a certain way, without this being anyhow grounded in the outcomes of this research – this way of representing things is already in place *before* any kind of higher law governing them is actually discovered<sup>7</sup>.

Secondly, the genesis of ideas 3.2) is similarly linked to the maxims of reason: *ideas* are for Kant precisely the representation through which we represent the series of judgement as a whole and, therefore, as *unconditioned* – for instance, in empirical psychology, we try to bring back the various capacities of the mind to some fundamental power, in that we take all of them to be the enacted by an absolutely unitary soul. It is here unnecessary to get into further details about the genesis of ideas. What is here important is that, as they are the representations through which we represent

---

Willaschek (2018). The most relevant difference between Willaschek's interpretation and the one proposed here lies in the understanding of Kant's distinction between the *logical* and *real* use of reason. Whereas Willaschek (2018): 48-49 takes this difference to lie in the *relation* with an object – the *logical* use of reason is *formal* in that it abstracts from any relation with the represented object, while the *real* does not – I take Kant's distinction to still be the same he introduced in his dissertation (see Kant [1770]: 393; 385): the *logical* use of reason simply establishes new relations between otherwise given representations – in the case of reason, it produces syllogisms from given judgements – the *real* use of reason, instead, involves the production of new representations (specifically, the ideas). For a more detailed defence of this understanding of this interpretation of the distinction between *logical* and *real* use of reason in its relation with the genesis of ideas, see my Sala (2018a).

---

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the here proposed interpretation departs from the majority of the works on the topic: usually, a certain way of representing objects (e.g. as systematic, through ideas, etc.) is taken to be something which needs to be presupposed if some condition is to be met. For instance, McLaughlin takes certain assumptions to be necessary if our research is to be considered rational (McLaughlin [2014]; see also Guyer [1997]); Geiger (2003) for the amenability of the world to our research. Contrarily to this trend, I take this representation of nature to be immediately embedded in the research activity itself: to research general laws immediately amounts to represent nature in a certain way, and the necessity of this kind of representation does not depend on some further condition. Zuckert (2017): 98-106 seems to come closer to this picture, in that she takes transcendental ideas to be the direct correlate of our research activity. However, in contrast to the here proposed reading, she does not seem to think the same about those *transcendental principles* which will later become the maxims of the power of judgement.

the series of judgements as *unconditioned*, they *immediately* result from what is prescribed by the logical maxim of reason, for as we have seen, the latter's prescription involves the representation of the pro-syllogistic chain as unconditioned<sup>8</sup>.

Before turning to the *Dialectic's deduction*, it is necessary to briefly mention one last 4) element of the quoted passage, i.e. Kant's reference to the *givenness* of the unconditioned. Indeed, this is what discriminates between the *regulative*, legitimate use of ideas and their constitutive, dialectical one. As mentioned above, through ideas we represent the series of judgements as an unconditioned whole, and accordingly also the things in the world as having a certain order (e.g. as created by God). Although, as shown above, to represent things in this way is for Kant immediately bound with the search for higher principles, this does *not* imply that the objects represented by these ideas (*God*, *soul* and the *world*) are actually *given*: we just represent things *as if* they were in relation to them in our search for principles. Accordingly, although it is for Kant unavoidable to represent things according to ideas in our search for higher principles – which is what their *regulative* use amounts to – this does *not* mean that we can actually *know* the objects of ideas, nor that we can employ their representations *the other way round*: we cannot use them as *constitutive principles*, i.e. as principles for syllogisms in which they are the determining grounds for drawing conclusions about the objects that we represented as in relation to the object represented by the idea. For instance, although it is for Kant unavoidable to represent the whole of reality as grounded in a supreme being, this does not mean that we can actually know *God*, nor that we can draw conclusions about things in that we take them as grounded in God (e.g. we cannot conclude that our world is the best possible in that it was created by a supremely wise and good being)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the genesis of ideas see Sala (2018a) and Caimi (2013).

<sup>9</sup> On the givenness of the unconditioned, see the aforementioned Willaschek (2018). On the regulative use of ideas, see Ferrarin (2012): 49-55.

## 2. THE TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTION OF THE IDEAS IN THE FIRST CRITIQUE

Against this background, it is possible to briefly reconstruct Kant's deduction of the transcendental ideas in the *Dialectic*. As made popular by Henrich (1989), Kant uses the term *deduction* according to the *juridical* meaning of his times. In this context, *deduction* indicated the legal procedure inquiring into the legitimacy of some possession by taking into account the relevant facts: for instance, a deduction could be necessary for establishing whether someone's claim over a certain land was legitimate or not, and the dispute could be set (e.g.) by providing the deed of sale. In the *Critique of pure Reason*, this disputed possession is a priori knowledge and, in the case of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, that through ideas. However, in this latter, Kant's references to the notion of a transcendental deduction are not as common as they were in the *Analytic*, and only one of them is relevant here:

*Now, if one can show that although the three kinds of transcendental ideas (psychological, cosmological and theological) cannot be referred directly to any object corresponding to them and to its determination, and nevertheless that all rules of the empirical use of reason under the presupposition of such an object in the idea lead to systematic unity, always extending the cognition of experience but never going contrary to experience, then it is a necessary maxim of reason to proceed in accordance with such idea. And this is the transcendental deduction of all the ideas of speculative, not as constitutive principles for the extensions of our cognition to more objects than experience can give, but as regulative principles for the systematic unity of the manifold of the manifold of empirical cognition in general, through which this cognition, within its proper boundaries, is cultivated and corrected more than could happen without such ideas, through the mere use of the principles of understanding. (Kant [1781/1787]: A671/B699, amended translation)*

In this passage, Kant explicitly mentions a *transcendental deduction* of the ideas and says

that what he has just explained – *this (dieses)* – is what such a deduction amounts to. The long sentence coming before this remark contains two main claims. The first claim is that ideas «cannot be referred directly to any object corresponding to them and to its determination». This is the *Transcendental Dialectic's* negative result which was mentioned as a last point in previous section 4): the objects represented in the ideas cannot be given to us and, in this sense, they have no reference – they are not objects of a possible experience and it is therefore impossible for us to have any knowledge of them. More than a transcendental deduction, this claim seems to be the (negative) outcome of such a justification procedure: reason's claim to be in possession of a metaphysical knowledge of the world, God and the soul is refuted on the grounds of the lack of an adequate ground for justifying it.

The second claim is that the presupposition of the «object in the idea lead[s] to systematic unity» and, because of this «it is a necessary *maxim* of reason to proceed in accordance with such an idea». For what concerns the expression «object in the idea», this is something which Kant introduces some lines above the quoted passage. For something to be given «as an *object in the idea*» (Kant [1781/1787]: A670/B98) means that «no object is given [...] but which serves only to represent other objects to us, in accordance with their systematic unity, by means of the relation to this idea, hence to represent these objects indirectly» (*ibid.*). This, however, is nothing other but the mechanism which we have pointed out as the fourth and last point in the previous section: although we are not given the objects represented in the ideas (e.g. God), we nonetheless represent things *as if* these objects were given and, specifically, as if the things which we actually know were *in relation* to them as their ultimate ground. Similarly, what we have seen in the previous section also explains why to do so constitutes a *necessary maxim of reason*: to represent things as grounded in something unconditioned was in fact a direct consequence of reason's prescription of a complete unification of our knowledge under principles, because to search

for this unity immediately amounts to represent things in such a way.

This clearly cannot constitute a transcendental deduction like the successful one of the categories or the unsuccessful one of the first considered claim (i.e. those of transcendent metaphysics), for there is no claim to be in possession of a knowledge of some object. Nonetheless, it seems to fit the aforementioned legal meaning of *deduction*, in that it answers a question of right: a certain way of representing of things, that to ideas, is explained to have in fact a *legitimate* use – ideas have a legitimate use as regulative principles for the investigation of phenomena, for searching for principles under which to unify the cognitions that we already have. In this way, this deduction importantly differs from that of the pure concepts of the understanding, in that it does not involve showing how, without certain representation, a certain activity would not be possible: the logic at play is a much more linear, in that Kant simply shows that to search for the unity of our principle directly amounts to represent nature as unitary.

### 3. THE CONTENTS AND THE LOGIC OF THE PRINCIPLE OF PURPOSIVENESS OF NATURE

In this section I will show how the logic behind Kant's introduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature in the third *Critique* and its presentation as necessary closely resembles that of ideas (as reconstructed in the previous sections): also in this case, a certain way of representing nature is immediately bound with a certain search activity (respectively: the representation of nature as purposive for our cognitive faculties and reflecting judgement).

Both the principle of purposiveness of nature and the notion of a *reflecting* power of judgement (together with that of *determining* power of judgement) are novelties introduced in the third *Critique*<sup>10</sup>. In particular, the third *Critique's* distinction between reflecting and determining power of

<sup>10</sup> On the discovery of the principle of purposiveness, see Zammito (1992): 89-105 and 151-177.



judgement further specifies the first *Critique's* role of *Urteilkraft* (of mediating between the particular and the universal, see e.g. Kant [1781/1787]: A132/B171) by distinguishing between two ways in which these two can be related. When the universal (the concept) is already given and the power of judgement simply subsumes the particular under it, the power judgement is *determining* (see Kant [1790]: 179; 67), when the concept under which the particular falls is not yet available and we therefore need to find it, the power of judgement is *reflecting* – as Kant himself writes, its role is that «of ascending from the particular in nature to the universal» (Kant [1790]: 180; 67), and it aims to «the unity of all empirical principles under equally empirical but higher principles» (Kant [1790]: 180; 67).

In this respect, Kant's distinction between the *reflecting* and *determinant* power of judgement presents an important similarity with the two different uses of reason which, as we have seen in the previous section, Kant dealt with in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of the first *Critique*. In it, Kant factually attributed two different kinds of activity to reason: both drawing inferences when the principles are available and *finding principles* under which to group other judgements. The distinction between determining and reflecting power of judgement seems to replicate the same logic: in one case the concept (or the principle) is given, and the role of the faculty is, respectively, to subsume the particular under the universal or drawing the inference; in the other, opposite case, the concept (or principle) is not given, and reason or judgement aims to find them<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> In this respect, it is important to point out a fundamental difference between the activity ascribed to reason in the first *Critique* and the one attributed to reflecting judgement in the third. Whilst reason's activity was completely severed from intuition – what it systematised were judgements and concepts (see Kant [1781/1787]: A306/B364 and A302/B359) – the reflecting power of judgement deals *directly* also with intuition: its business includes also «finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception» (Kant [1790]: 186; 72). The historical reasons for this change of ascription are to be

The principle of purposiveness of nature is introduced by Kant as a principle through which we represent nature «as if an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the manifold of its empirical laws» (Kant [1790]: 181; 68). What this means is explained in two ways. First a), through this principle, we are said to represent nature as «suitable for human understanding in its necessary business of finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception and then further connection in the unity of the principle for all that is different (though universal for each species)» (Kant [1790]: 186; 72). Secondly, b) the principle of purposiveness of nature is said to be «expressed in the maxims of the power of judgement» (Kant [1790]: 184; 71), which are what in the first *Critique* were called *maxims of reason* (see Kant [1781/1787]: A666/B694) and comprehend all those laws like the *lex continui* (see Kant [1790]: 182; 69; Kant [1781/1787]: A661/B689) and Ockham's razor (see Kant [1790]: 182; 69; Kant [1781/1787]: A652/B680), which regulate our empirical investigation of nature.

Kant's explanation of the purposiveness of nature as a suitability for our cognitive business (a) presents an important similarity with the logic behind the first *Critique's* explanation of the genesis and the necessity of representing things through ideas. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous section, the fundamental element at the root of the genesis of this necessity was also *a task*, and specifically that task of searching for higher principles which is now taken to be one of the two cognitive tasks now ascribed to *reflecting judgement*. A certain way of representing things was in fact the immediate consequence of what was reason's prescription – to search for something (i.e. a certain unity) directly amounted to represent nature as having a yet to find unity of this kind. The dependency on a cognitive *goal* of

---

traced back to Kant's work on his theory of the beautiful, and in particular to the link between beauty and purposiveness and the contextual discovery of reflective judgement: on this, Zammito (1992): part one and Sala (2018b).

a certain representation of nature was also explicitly acknowledged by Kant in his definition of reason's maxims as «subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object but *from the interest of reason* in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object» (Kant [1781/1787]: A666/B694, my emphasis). In this respect, the fundamental difference is that, whereas in the first *Critique* purposiveness was left implicit – nature was taken to have a certain kind of unity *in conformity with a certain cognitive end*, but this unity was not directly explained in teleological terms – in the third *Critique* the representation of nature is spelled out *directly* in teleological terms, and further specified only later, by spelling out what this conformity entails.

This brings us to the second b) explanation of the principle of purposiveness of nature, i.e. that in terms of the *maxims of judgement*. Differently than in the first *Critique*, Kant does not deal with these maxims in much detail: he simply mentions three of them (but implies that there are others by terminating the list with an *etc.*), and then claims that they are «the basis for research into nature» (see Kant [1790]: 182; 69)<sup>12</sup>. Also in this case, Kant's considerations about these same maxims from the first *Dialectic* make it clear what the link between these maxims and the notion of *purposiveness* is: as seen above, a certain way of representing nature (i.e. according to these maxims) is a direct consequence of a certain cognitive task (an «interest»), so that to represent nature according to them factually is to represent it *as conforming to this task*, that is, as conforming to our cognitive goals<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Although he does not mention the first *Critique* in his explanation, Allison (2001): 30-34 offers a similar interpretation of these maxims.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that, in the first *Critique*, Kant considers also the ideas to be necessary for this research activity clearly raises the question of how he later conceived of the relation between reflective judgement and transcendental ideas. To answer this question, however, falls beyond the scope of my paper.

#### 4. THE TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF PURPOSIVENESS

In view of the foregoing sections, it is finally possible to give an account of the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature. As he did in the *Transcendental Dialectic* for the ideas, also in this case Kant does not dwell long on the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness, and deals with it just in one section of the *Introduction*, the fifth<sup>14</sup>. After stating that the principle of purposiveness of nature is expressed in the maxims of the power of judgement and that it needs a transcendental deduction, Kant lays out some remarks which, one page later, he retrospectively declares to be such a deduction (See Kant [1790]: 184; 71).

In particular, Kant begins by stating how the laws of nature in general (i.e. those expressed in the principles of pure understanding) are not the sole laws of nature: there are also the *empirical laws*, i.e. the laws of nature that we discover empirically. Kant makes then two observations on these latter laws: on the one hand, as we know them only *a posteriori*, there is a distinct sense in which they are contingent – experience does not give us any insight into the necessity of what is known through it, so that, in this sense, these laws are not known as necessary. On the other, precisely because we conceive them *as laws*, we take these empirically discovered laws to nonetheless be necessary<sup>15</sup>. Following these considerations, he writes:

<sup>14</sup> As it will become evident in the body of the text below, I believe that the portion of text which Kant himself indicates as the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature contains an argument which is on its own sufficient for answering the question of the legitimacy of such a principle. Therefore, it seems to me unnecessary to assume, as often done (see e.g. Allison [2001]: 38; Teufel [2017]: 110), that the transcendental deduction of this principle is more extended in the text than what Kant explicitly states.

<sup>15</sup> For the moment, it is unnecessary to opt for a particular interpretation of this notion of *necessity*. In the following I will argue that, despite what one might think at first sight, the necessity in question is not the nomic necessity of the law, but its conceptual necessity as the specification

with regard to them [the empirical laws] we judge the unity of nature in accordance with empirical laws and the possibility of the unity of experience (as a system in accordance with empirical laws) as contingent. But since such a unity must still necessarily be presupposed and assumed, for otherwise no thoroughgoing interconnection of empirical cognitions into a whole of experience would take place, because the universal laws of nature yield such an interconnection among things with respect to their genera, as things of nature in general, but not specifically, as such and such particular beings in nature, the power of judgment must thus assume it as an a priori principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable, in the combination of its manifold into one experience possible in itself. Consequently, since the lawful unity in a combination that we cognize as in accordance with a necessary aim (a need) of the understanding but yet at the same time as contingent in itself is represented as a purposiveness of the objects (in this case, of nature), thus the power of judgment, which with regard to things under possible (still to be discovered) empirical laws is merely reflecting, must think of nature with regard to the latter in accordance with a principle of purposiveness for our faculty of cognition, which is then expressed in the maxims of the power of judgment given above. (Kant [1790]: 183-185; 70-71)

This passage is made problematic by the fact that, in it, Kant resorts to the notions of «unity of experience» and «unity of nature», which he does not explain. However, whatever these might mean, the structure of the argument is clear – it explains the necessity of adopting the principle of purposiveness of nature, and is structured in the following way:

- I. If the laws of nature are regarded as contingent, the unity of nature is to be regarded as contingent
- II. If the unity of nature is regarded as contingent, the unity of experience is not possible
- III. But the unity of experience must be possible
- IV. ∴ (I, II, III): Nature must be conceived as con-

---

of a more general law.

taining a lawful unity even though we have no insight into the necessity of empirical laws.

V. What is contingent and is in accordance with an aim is purposive

VI. The lawful unity of nature is in accordance with an aim of the understanding

VII. ∴ (V, VI) The lawful unity of nature is purposive with respect to the aim of the understanding

VIII. ∴ (IV, VII) Nature must be conceived as purposive with respect to our cognitive goals

IX. What it means to be conceived as purposive is expressed by the *maxims of judgement*.

As mentioned above, Kant does not explain what he means by «unity of experience» and «unity of nature», so that the meaning of Kant's argument is not immediately transparent. In particular, without reconstructing the meaning of *unity of experience* and *unity of nature* is not possible to give an account of Kant's argument. Nonetheless, there are three important lessons that can already be drawn from it.

First, a) from the structure of the argument, it is clear that, if the first part (I-IV) of the argument is to be valid, for nature to have a «unity» must be equivalent with it containing a «lawful unity».

Secondly, b) the lawfulness of this unity is put in contrast with the contingency of the empirical laws. In particular, the fact that Kant (IV) writes that we have to think nature as «lawful» *despite* we do not have any insight into the necessity of the empirical laws seems to imply that, b1) had we known the laws *a priori* (and therefore had an insight in their necessity), nature would have been *known* to have this lawful unity. Similarly, also the converse seems to hold: b2) to know nature's lawful unity would mean to have an insight in the necessity of empirical laws.

Third, c) most importantly, Kant's claim that to conceive nature as having a lawful unity is to conceive it as purposive (VI), when combined with his last claim (IX) – i.e. that to think of nature as purposive is to think of it according to the maxims of judgement – tells us that *to conceive nature as having a lawful unity is to conceive it according to the maxims of judgement*.

Now, as seen above (section 3), to conceive nature according to the maxims of judgement was to conceive it as a hierarchically ordered system of genera and species. In this way, as seen in section one, we take all our concepts and cognitions to be unifiable by being brought back to higher ones (i.e. by finding their principles). Therefore, e) the unity of nature, the «lawful unity» Kant is referring to in the deduction, must be taken to be the same one of the maxims of judgement, i.e. nature as a system of genera and species.

This is in turn decisive for understanding Kant's reference to the particular laws of nature and their *necessity*. Indeed, as mentioned above, Kant's argument seems to imply that, were we to know nature's lawful unity, we would have an insight into the necessity of empirical laws in question. However, given that, as we have seen, the lawful unity in question is the unity of nature as a system of genera and species, this means that, were we to have an insight into this unity, we could derive all the particular empirical laws *a priori*, from what we would know to be their principles. Accordingly, the necessity at stake in the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness is not so much the *nomie* necessity of the empirical laws of nature, but their necessity as part of the lawful unity of nature, and accordingly as the *necessary* consequences of higher laws: as illustrated in the first *Critique* for syllogisms, also in this case a judgement and what it expresses are known as necessary by bringing them back to a principle.

Lastly, the fact that nature's lawful unity is identified with the unity of nature as a system of genera and species helps us clarifying also how the *unity of experience* on which the argument hinges is to be understood, and the sense in which it is *necessary*. First, given how the principle of purposiveness of nature is expressed by the maxims of judgment and how this principle is a condition of possibility of this unity of nature, this *unity of experience* is to be understood as the systematic unity of our empirical cognitions which we have dealt with in section 1 and 3: that is, as the unity of our empirical cognitions under principles. Sec-

ondly, this makes in turn clear the sense in which this unity is *necessary*: not so much in that, without it, experience is not possible, but inasmuch as it is a *prescription* of our cognitive faculty themselves. In particular, the search for a systematic (i.e. complete) unity of our cognitions that, in the first *Critique*, was a consequence of our reason's prescription to find higher principles to unify our cognitions, is in the *KU* ascribed to reflective judgement, and spelled out in terms of universals and particulars.

Against this background the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness of nature seems to closely resemble the mechanism which was already present in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of the first *Critique*: a certain way of representing nature is entangled with a cognitive goal that, for Kant, is embedded in our faculties. In particular, the goal in question is to organize our cognitions in a completely systematic way. Although in the *KU* Kant does not dwell long in explaining why he takes this to be an intrinsic cognitive goal, it seems possible to explain this in analogy with the *KrV*: there, the goal of organizing our cognitions in a system was a direct consequence of the *reiteration* of the more basic goal of unifying them under principles, and this applies also to the *KU* and reflective judgement's prescription to find a universal for any particular (see section 3).

Secondly, this cognitive goal directly implies a certain representation of nature: to aim for a systematic unity of our empirical cognitions means to represent nature (i.e. the things represented by these cognitions) as analogously organized, that is: as a system of genera and species (see section 1, 3). In the deduction's text, this is conveyed by the aforementioned passages I-IV: if the «unity of experience» (i.e. a system of empirical cognitions) is to be «possible», what is cognized needs to be a «lawful unity» (i.e. organized in a systematic way). Moreover, as to represent nature as such a system is to represent nature in conformity with our cognitive goals, to represent it in this way means to represent it as *purposive for our cognitive faculty*.

Like the one of ideas in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, also this Deduction shows the necessity

of a certain representation of nature only in relation to a specific cognitive goal, which is not in itself a condition of possibility of experience. As a consequence, also in this case, Kant's argument does not prove that nature *is* in a certain way (in this case, purposive for our cognitive faculties): it proves only that it is legitimate for to *represent* nature as being in a certain way *in our search for yet to find universals*. Accordingly, also in this case, the way of representing nature which is dealt with in this transcendental deduction is legitimated only as a *regulative* principle and not as a constitutive one: we are legitimated to research the laws of nature as if nature were purposive for our cognitive faculty (i.e. systematic), but we are not legitimated to use this representation of nature as a principle for determining any object.

#### REFERENCES

- Allison, H., 2001: *Kant's Theory of Taste*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Caimi, M., 2013: *Zur Metaphysischen Deduktion der Ideen in der Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, "Methodus" 7, pp. 23-41.
- Capozzi, M., 2002: *Kant e la logica*, Vol. I, Bibliopolis, Napoli.
- Ferrarin, A., 2015: *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London.
- Geiger, I., 2003: *Is the Assumption of a Systematic Whole of Empirical Concepts a Necessary Condition of Knowledge?*, "Kant-Studien" 94, pp. 273-298.
- Ginsborg, H., 2015: *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's Critique of Judgement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Guyer, P., 1997: *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Guyer, P., 2003: *Kant on the Systematicity of Nature: Two Puzzles*, "History of Philosophy Quarterly" 20, pp. 277-295.
- Henrich, D., 1989: *Kant's Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique*, "Kant's Transcendental Deductions", ed. by Eckart Förster, Stanford University Press, Stanford, pp. 29-46.
- Kant, I., 1770: *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. II, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1912, pp. 385-419; transl. and ed. by D. Walford and R. Meerbote, *Concerning the Form and the Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World (The Inaugural Dissertation)*, in *The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant, Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 377-426.
- Kant, I., 1781/1787: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Erste Auflage*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. IV, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1903, pp. 1-252; *Zweite Auflage*, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1904; transl. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. V, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1913, pp. 165-485; transl. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, *Critique of Power of Judgment, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by P. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002.
- Kant, I., 1800: *Immanuel Kants Logik*, ed. by G.B. Jäsche nach Vorlesungsskripten und Notizen, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. IX, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1923, pp. 1-150; transl. by M. Young, in *Lectures on Logic, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 527-640.
- McLaughlin, P. 2014: *Transcendental Presuppositions and Ideas of Reason*, "Kant-Studien" 105, pp. 554-572.

- Meier, G.F., 1752 (2016): *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*. Halle Translated by Aaron Bunch, edited by Lawrence Parternack; Pablo Muchnik, *Excerpt from the Doctrine of Reason*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Rumore, P., 2007: *L'ordine delle Idee. Le origini del concetto di rappresentazione in Kant attraverso le sue fonti wolffiane (1747-1787)*, Le Lettere, Firenze.
- Sala, L. 2018a: *Usò logico e uso reale della ragione: origine e ruolo regolativo delle idee*, "Con-Textos Kantianos" 8, pp. 303-318.
- Sala, L., 2018b: *Verso una critica della capacità di giudizio: del Gusto come questione critica. "L'estetica tedesca da Kant a Hegel"*, a cura di L. Filieri, M. Vero, ETS, Pisa.
- Teufel, T., 2017: *Kant's Transcendental Principle of Purposiveness and the "Maxim of the Lawfulness of Empirical Laws"*, in Massimi, M., Breitenbach, A. (eds.), *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 108-127.
- Vanzo, A., 2012: *Kant e la formazione dei concetti*. Verifiche, Trento.
- Willaschek, M., 2018: *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics: The Dialectic of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Zammito, J., 1992: *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Zuckert, R., 2017: *Empirical Scientific Investigation and the Ideas of Reason*, in Massimi, M., Breitenbach, A. (eds.), *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 89-107.





**Citation:** A. Branca (2021) From the first to the third *Critique*. Judgment sensible position and Kant's concept of *Zweckmäßigkeit*. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 55-64. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13083

**Copyright:** © 2021 A. Branca. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## From the first to the third *Critique*. Judgment sensible position and Kant's concept of *Zweckmäßigkeit*

ANTONIO BRANCA

Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Milano  
ant.branca.ab@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Starting from Lyotard's definition of Kantian reflection as "judgment repercussion", my contribution aims to describe the logical side of this repercussion. To do this, I will focus on Kant's concept of "judgment", explaining it as the logical act of constitution of experience. I will then point out how judgment involves sensibility for its self-affection and restriction to sensibility. Finally, I'll give a nominal explication of Kant's concept of *Zweckmäßigkeit*, returning to Lyotard's interpretation. The purpose, in so doing, is to offer to Lyotard's key concept a logical validation, finding its foundation in the *Critique* of pure *Reason* itself. And thus to gain an aesthetical definition of Judgment principle, to read the third *Critique*.

**Keywords:** Kant, Judgment, Aesthetics, *Zweckmäßigkeit*, Lyotard.

### 1. JUDGMENT REPERCUSSION

In order to mark the difference between the Transcendental Aesthetics in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the aesthetics that Kant discusses in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Lyotard begins his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* with a very important claim. He starts from Kantian distinction between *feeling*, *Gefühl*, and *sensation*, *Empfindung* (Kant [1790]: 206)<sup>1</sup>, and, once that he has pointed out the cognitive finality of the latter, he uses an unusual image to describe the former. He compares feeling to the «inner repercussion» – in French: «*retentissement intérieur*» (Lyotard [1991]: 18) – that «affects thought as it thinks something» (*ibid.*), and by which it is aware of its state, of the *Gemütszustand*, on the occasion of his own operation. By this, he reaches a double goal. On the one hand, he acknowledges to the feeling an independent status. He thinks of feeling as «the *tautego-*

---

<sup>1</sup> I will refer to English translations only in case of direct quote. As usual, references to the first *Critique* refers to original editions page numbering.



ry of reflexion» (21): as the real αἴσθησις, that is «at once both a “state” of the soul and the “information” collected by the soul relative to its state» (13). On the other hand, he connects feeling to the act of thinking. Inasmuch as the *repercussion* is always *thought* repercussion, the reflexion of feeling must be, so to speak, logical operations *edge* or *turn-up*. Although by status different from logical judgment, feeling is exclusively *in this latter*, as «a resonance, almost a return in oneself, internal to feeling» (Desideri [2003]: 106). So that one must say: 1) that this resonance occurs at every act of thought as the judgment and the feeling in which thought itself judges «to be “good” or “bad” given the activity in which it is engaged» (Lyotard [1991]: 18). Judgment (in its aesthetic sense), feeling and reflexion are thus the same (17-32). 2) That, as such, for the difference between the various syntheses, feeling must have different gradations, different levels of proportion, one of which must be felt – *a priori* – as «the most favourable (*die zuträglichste*)» (Kant [1790]: 238; 123, transl. modified) for thinking. And 3) (Kant’s real problem) that this *resonance* can be criticised only insofar as it is ascribable to a special faculty, i.e., only qua produced by an *a priori* principle on its own, through which thought judges itself and its operation.

What Lyotard achieves in this way is, therefore, the identification of the power of judgment principle, i.e., of thought *Zweckmäßigkeit*, in the pure tautology of reflexion. Which can be *heuristic* – both in regard to *a priori* structures, *qua critique*, and to the effective, *a posteriori* synthesis, as teleological comprehension of the empirical – only insofar as it is *originally aesthetic* (see Lyotard [1991]: 32-40).

We have thus, from a *Lyotardian* point of view, the possibility to read the third *Critique* as a unitary movement, which: a) in his two Introduction, identifies the principle of Judgment; b) in the Critique of Aesthetics Judgment, develops the principle itself in the experience of it that we can make; c) in the Critique of Teleological Judgment, shows its applications in theoretical cognition.

Nevertheless, how must be conceived thought itself to assume such a reading key? How the *sim-*

*ple* repercussion – regardless of the ways it presents itself aesthetically?

The aim of the present paper is to answer to these questions, or rather to clarify the relation between Judgment and the aesthetical moment of experience. For even though Lyotard’s interpretation of the third *Critique* may represent the basis for reading it as a theory of shapes and *meaning* of experience as rising from the feeling of the logical institution of existence<sup>2</sup>, to formulate such a theory is first and foremost required to validate that basis. Kant itself seems indeed to presuppose Lyotard’s repercussion in at least two passages of the third *Critique*. 1. In the *Vorrede*, where it writes that the critique of aesthetics judgments «is the most important part of a critique of this faculty», the power of judgment in general, for «they belong to the faculty of cognition alone (read: they are a result of the act of thought) and prove an immediate relation of this faculty to the feeling of pleasure» (Kant [1790]: 169; 57). And 2. in the definitive Introduction, § VII, where he speaks about pleasure as something that «cannot become an element of cognition at all» but is «connected with it», maybe as «the effect of some cognition» (189; 75). We know, thus, *that* Kant himself thought of something like Lyotard’s repercussion. But *why* and *in which sense* cognition must have a repercussion as its own effect?

The answer to this question – that is the validation of Lyotard’s reading – can be found only if we step back from the third to the first *Critique* and take *the reverse path*, explaining what is for Kant thinking and why it implies a sensible moment. To do that, we will make three steps. A first one, on Kant’s determination of the act of thought, that is on judgment, in order to give a more precise definition of it, beyond certain prejudices. A second one, dealing with the way this act involves the aesthetic moment. And a third, finally, on Kant’s concept of *Zweckmäßigkeit* as corresponding to the inner repercussion.

We will have, by this way, not the aesthetical

<sup>2</sup> Reading, which is not here our point. Here I can only refer to Lyotard’s (1988), (1990) attempts.

development, but the *logical side*, the theoretical foundation (for future works) of an aesthetical reading of the third *Critique*.

## 2. JUDGMENT AS LOGICAL ACT OF CONSTITUTION

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can find two important definitions of judgment. A first and best known, in the Transcendental Deduction of 1787: the *transcendental* one (Kant [1787]: 141). And a second, only *logical*, in the Metaphysical Deduction. This latter is for us of great consequence because the Metaphysical Deduction itself have as its own goal to show that the act of thinking is judgment, and that judgment and the synthesis implied in experience are the same. The definition Kant gives here, in several times: a) starts indeed from the «*logische Verstandesgebrauch*» (92); b) notices that this *logical use of the understanding* is possible only through concepts (93); and c) once said that «the understanding can make no other use of these concepts than that of judging by means of them» (*ibid.*; 205), states that «judgments are functions of unity among our representations» (94; *ibid.*). That is: «unit[ies] of the action (*Handlung*: activity, deed)» (93; *ibid.*) to *give unity* to our representations. In § 10, Kant adds to this that, transcendently, this *giving unity* is nothing more than «the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition» (103; 210), i.e., *synthesis*. So that we have at least a first identification between the act of thought, judgment, and synthesis.

This is important for it goes against a very widespread idea, in secondary literature, according to which judgment correspond to the proposition, or to the *predicative moment* of our cognition. Heidegger, for example, thinks of judgment – in Kant and in general – as the statement (Heidegger [1925/1926]: 153-161, 306 ff.): the *Aus-sage* (etymologically, the *e-nunciation*) *expressing* the significance of things, always already given in intuition (on Heidegger's problematic position see at least

Costa [2003]). La Rocca goes so far as to identify it with linguistic acts, and interpret therefore the critique itself as a transcendental grammar (La Rocca [1999]: 33-53, 48-50). And even in Ferrarin, who aims to stress the synthetic, productive capacity of reason (Ferrarin [2015]: 106), Kant's concept of judgment is not related to synthesis itself, but clearly defined as «propositional expression» (126 ff., 259).

We can find thus in literature a tendency to reduce Kant's concept of judgment to the propositional moment of our cognition, that seems to have moreover very solid textual bases. La Rocca quotes, for example, a note from the *Entdeckung* (La Rocca [1999]: 38, 41 ff.; Kant [1790a]: 193 ff.) in which Kant writes that we must use words even in judgment we do not speak (like saying: judgment is linguistic), and a passage of the *Enzyklopädie* (Kant [1961]: 31) where Kant grounds the possibility of a general grammar of thought on the existence of languages grammars. But from our point of view these passages are not enough. For, if the point is to comprehend the proper activity of reason, the reduction of judgment to *Aus-sage* entails at least two problems.

First, the problem already pointed out by Ferrarin, on which depends his distinction between judgment and synthesis (Ferrarin [2015]: 107 ff., 126 ff.). If we turn to the problem of *synthetic a priori judgments* – he claims –, we can focus on judgment qua propositional expression rather than on the a priori synthesis only reducing Kant's reason «to a fixed mode of apophantic expression» (127) and excluding practical and aesthetical synthesis from the critique. (He concludes that we must focus on the a priori synthesis, for «the expression “a priori synthesis” applies to all instances of a priori extension, while “judgment” does not» (*ibid.*). Whereas I wonder if the problem is not, rather, the reduction of judgment to propositional expression).

Second: a problem dealing, instead, with our own standpoint. For, if judgment is nothing more than a proposition, in what sense can we speak about a *judgment repercussion*? True, we can think up an *ursprüngliche Lust der Prädikation*, an origi-

nal pleasure for predication springing from the correspondence between things and our claims (Hogrebe [1981]). But in this case what about the infinite variety of empirical pleasures? The sense of the *inner repercussion* is reduced by this way to a minimum: only to the pleasure we feel in claiming, or *in knowing*. While the transcendental status of feeling, for which it is *an independent faculty of mind* (see Kant [1790]: 177 ff.), seems to determine it as the principle leading to *every feeling*.

In order to solve these problems, it is required a wider horizon, in which arousing the interest *in consciousness in general*. And this through two passages. First, through the determination of the *subject* of judgment, or of *that which judges*. And second, explaining the results of the act of judging, and thus its meaning.

The beginning by its “subject” is necessary exactly to get out from judgment reduction to predicative moment. For, in this latter, subject is indeed always *empirical*. It is the I who speaks, thinks, or knows; as Schelling writes, always a universalization of my I: «*ein bloß empirischer, von eines jeden Ich abstrahirter Begriff*» (Schelling [1802]: 355). Whereas the *subject* of the critique, the only *transcendental* subject, is reason itself *in carrying out its tasks*. The image of the tribunal of reason, in which reason is, at the same time, judge and defendant, shows enough its subjectivity (Kant [1781]: XI; on this image and likewise on the reason as subject see Ferrarin [2015]: 267 ff.; [2019]: 153). However, one may also quote other passages from the first *Preface*: «I humbly admit [...] I have to do merely with reason itself and its pure thinking» (Kant [1781]: XIV; 102). Or from the second, for which it is *pure reason* who «can and should measure its own capacity» (Kant [1787]: XXIII; 113). As Kant himself writes in the Paralogisms Chapter, «Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x» (404; 414)<sup>3</sup>. Such that the real subject of judgment, for Kant, is only thought itself – or rather

*thinking*. This latter, moreover, has two sides: its *sensible* one, by which it is «awakened into exercise» (1; 136) and through which it receives its matter, i.e., it *is*. And the *intellectual* one, which elaborates the former. As intellectual act of thought (151) giving unity to representations – that is elaborating, *determining* the *existence* (748) –, judgment is, therefore, the deed that the *whole* reason – «inclusive of pure intuition, understanding, and reason proper» (Ferrarin [2015]: 108) – exercises once awakened. Its *result* is not, merely, *a cognition*, a theoretical act, but, *transcendentally* and more deeply, *consciousness in general*. Which, on the one hand, includes all reason instances, on the other cannot be, for that, the transcendental apperception.

The thesis that I want to support here is that the unity presupposed by reason in its acts, the unity *of reason itself* (the «qualitative unity»: Kant [1787]: 114; 217)<sup>4</sup>, is not the same unity, the unity *of consciousness*, reason produces. I accept by this way Ferrarin’s overturning of the classical interpretation of the Critique, according to which consciousness is not the *container* or the *owner* of reason, but its «*reflective result*» (Ferrarin [2015]: 255). But with two clarifications. A first concerning judgment itself, which by this way shows to be twofold – for if we quote, together, Kant’s transcendental definitions of judgment in B Deduction and in *Prolegomena*, we see that the act «to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception» (Kant [1787]: 141; 251) means the referring given being to reason, while in the «unification of representations in a consciousness» consciousness is the result (Kant [1783]: 304; 98). And a second, dealing instead with the proper sense of consciousness.

If, indeed, we must say that the consciousness reason *in general* produces is every given consciousness, every single determined event (or *being*), from a *transcendental*, a priori point of view, instead, the result of the pure act of thinking must be think of, in a formal, *constitutive* sense, as

<sup>3</sup> On this claim Vitiello repeatedly insisted (see Vitiello [1984]: 40; [2021]: 253).

<sup>4</sup> But see also Kant (1787): 131. On this topic, at least Desideri (2003): 109-116.

a *universal consciousness*, or as the *transcendental form* of it, in which, only, the various consciousness may be. This, as Kant claims in *Prolegomena*, is *the form of nature itself*: the condition of possibility of every being, or, in this sense, *the structure of the universe* (294-297, 318-322). In order that, not only the transcendental dimension opened by Kant's reason is, after all, on the same plane of Fichte's Light, of Hegel's *Logische*, or of Schelling's Nature and Transcendental Self-consciousness – for all these terms name indeed *the room of appearance of being*<sup>5</sup>. But, on a proper Kantian side, the fact that the result of judging is this kind of *consciousness* means that its *transcendental* function cannot be reduce to a propositional, neither to a gnoseological moment. Even though one may of course concede that every *effective* judgment is for Kant a propositional expression (or a cognition), between the effective judgments and the transcendental act of judging there is, indeed, the same relation as between the transcendental (describing the constitutive and a priori form of possible experience) and the empirical, situated consciousness. The formers are individuations of the latter, as well as the semantic articulations of the world, in Heidegger's sense, are *instantiation* of transcendental logic<sup>6</sup>. Such that, in conclusion, it is possible to reduce judgment to the predicative moment of cognition only if we remain on the effective plane, not on the proper transcendental.

We find thus the confirmation of the thesis with which we started, i.e., that the literature tends to fall in empirical considerations, whereas it is possible – and required by Kant – to think of judgment as the logical-transcendental act of constitution.

We have, with this, the first element for the validation of Lyotard's interpretation, that is a definition of Kant's concept of judgment allowing us

to extend the inner repercussion to every consciousness – for judgment qua constitutive act of *consciousness*, i.e., *qua synthesis*, is *the whole thinking*, insofar it *com-poses itself* into a (theoretical, as well as practical or aesthetic) content, and, in so doing, makes possible experience. We need now to do the second step. For in which ways does judgment, as constitutive act of thought, reflect, *echo* on itself? How and why must the intellectual act of thinking involves feeling?

### 3. SELF-AFFECTION AND REFLECTING JUDGMENT

To answer to these questions, we must articulate our second steps in other two. First, we have indeed to return to judgment activity, in order to explain how thinking involves sensibility. And second, we must connect the sensibility account resulting with reflective judgment.

As we saw in the previous paragraph, judgment is indeed the overall activity of the whole reason. It represents not only the intellectual act, but also thought aesthetic moment. Such that the problem we are facing can be solved only developing it in its concrete exercise. This is the object of the second part of the *Analytic* (see Kant [1787]: 172), that is of that *Analytic of Principles* Kant himself names in its entirety «transcendental doctrine of power of judgment» (171, 175; 268, 270). Which starts defining the power of judgment as «the faculty to subsume» (171; 268), but – having into itself also schematism – must continue specifying that subsumption itself is possible only for a reverse movement, through which imagination gives concepts their reality.

We have therefore an explication of judging in two moments: a *bottom-up movement*, that is «subsumption of an object under a concept» (Kant [1787]: 176); and at the same time a *top-down effect*, i.e., *restriction, application* of concepts to sensibility (see 179, 186). As La Rocca pointed out from a semantical point of view, both are complementary sides of the same deed (La Rocca [1990]: 33-36, 46 ff.). They are overall the above-

<sup>5</sup> I extend by this to the whole German Idealism Ferrarin's idea that Kant's reason is more similar to Hegel's, as scholars and literature admit (Ferrarin [2019]: 137-194). On Fichte's and Schelling's perspectives, see at least Schnell (2009).

<sup>6</sup> I interpret in this way the *Enzyklopädievorlesung* and the other passages on the same topic quoted by La Rocca.

mentioned *elaboration* of the *given* by the *understanding*.

Now, although Kant stress always the former, the first thing we must say is that judgment proper activity is the latter. For, if with judgment we take the constitutive act of experience, what the *transcendental* doctrine of power of judgment describes through schemata and in *Grundsätze* is the way in which thought makes itself sensible in Nature. Its result is thought act, insofar it is the *determination of the ontological framework of space and time*. So that, even thought, *logically*, a judgment is more subsumption than restriction – because logically, i.e., from the point of view of the *Erkenntnisvermögen*, we consider intuition as already given<sup>7</sup> – *transcendentally*, instead, (like saying: regarding judgment objective realisation) we cannot distinguish subsumption from restriction.

Although transcendental analysis can isolate in thought different forms, that connect back to different sources (faculties), for Kant thought *truth* or effectiveness consists only in its activity (Ferrarin [2015]: 116 ff.). This truth, as Vitiello showed (Vitiello [1984]: 39-42), is schematism, that gives reality to every concept, especially to categories – «for otherwise they would be without all content, and thus would be mere logical forms, and not pure concepts of the understanding» (Kant [1787]: 175; 270). Such that, even though sensibility must be independent from the understanding; even though its a priori forms cannot be reduced to categories, for the forms with which *thinking* thinks are not the same through and in which it *is* – we must say that sensibility, for Kant, *can be* not yet thought *but still given*, only if judging constitutes *givenness* itself.

As Kant writes, «*the forms of intuition*» and not only the formal intuitions of space and time, i.e., *space and time themselves*, are indeed the first product of imagination, at the moment in which thought is given. They – Kant continues – «can be nothing other than the way in which the mind is

affected by its own activity, namely *this positing of its [of the activity] representation*, thus the way it is affected through itself» (Kant [1787]: 67 ff.; 189; italics mine)<sup>8</sup>. In fact, they, space and time, are thinking opening itself into consciousness horizon, or rather the forms of this horizon *insofar it happens*. Whereas categories are of course forms of the same horizon, but as *thought*, or *as determined*. *Through the act of judging* and its schematisations, space and time are the ways in which reason represents its being: the product of *the figurative synthesis of the imagination*, which in turn is nothing other than the «synthetic influence of the understanding on the inner sense» (154; 258). As such, a product of *Urteilkraft* (Kant [1914]: 212). In order that sensibility cannot be separated from thought activity but is involved as its first effect on the *subject*.

We have with this the answer to the questions posed at the end of the previous paragraph. For, combined with judgment definition in terms of concepts sensible realisation, Kant's theory of self-affection explains the way in which judgment exercises on itself *a repercussion* – «that action on the *passive* subject, whose *faculty* it is, about which we rightly say that the inner sense is thereby affected» (*ibid.*) –, thanks to the fact that every time we have a consciousness, this *having* cannot be only logical, a concept, but *is*, and is *sensibly*. To *judgment position* corresponds a being in space and time, an affection, through which thought have or is aware of its occurrence. This, in turn, from the point of view of cognition (consciousness *objective* determination) is a sensation: a modification on the state of consciousness, corresponding to an object. But as simple modification of the state of mind, i.e., *subjectively*, as we have seen, for Kant it is not sensation: is *a feeling*. We can therefore conclude that to every act of thought, to every judgment must correspond a modification in *consciousness having itself*, i.e., a feeling of pleasure or displeasure.

Insofar as judgment *is*, feeling is *the subjective side of this being*. It is «that which must always

<sup>7</sup> This is the reason why Kant defines judgment always in terms of subsumption (see Kant [1787]: 131; [1914]: 201; [1790]: 179).

<sup>8</sup> See *contra* Ferrarin (2015): 203 ff., and, against him, Scaravelli (1980): 19 ff., 23, 105, 145.

remain merely subjective» (Kant [1790]: 206; 92), namely the fact that judgment *has itself*, its judging, merely *as judging*: as *activity*, without any regard for the objects this activity produces. Such that thought, *reason* position, on the one hand, must produce a *Sinnlichkeit*, an *objective* sensibility, in which it finds its being as content (*Sinn*) of its own deed. But, on the other, it implies for thought an only subjective «*Vermögen oder Empfänglichkeit*» (Kant [1914]: 207), the possibility, the *faculty* of a self-passivity – we could say: of judgment (or *subject*) *being subjected to itself* –, through which this latter feels its own state.

The transcendental power of judgment *in general*, the *logical* power of thinking, must from this point of view involve a reflexion not for an additional function, different from the logical determination of its position, but as repercussion of this position itself. Reflecting is in this sense every single judgment, transcendental as well empirical (see *contra* Guyer [2003]: 29, which claims that determining and reflecting are the same only in empirical judgments), insofar the power of judgment is (and is aware of itself) only in feeling. A judgment is therefore reflecting *insofar it is determining*, and determining only for reflecting. Both are two sides of the same coin: of the same faculty (*activity*). Which, as Kant writes, *logically* is not a proper, independent *Vermögen* (on Kant [1914]: 202, he claims that is «*gar nicht selbständiges*», like saying: it is only a moment of whole reason, its power to be effective). But as *inner repercussion*, as *reflecting* power of judgment, must be thought of, instead, as a constitutive principle on its own (Kant [1790]: 177), or rather as the transcendental *Vermögen* of reason for which there can be a feeling of pleasure or displeasure at every thought occurrence.

We gain, thus, the second step of the validation of Lyotard's concept of *retentissement intérieur*, that is the demonstration of how and why to every act of thought must relate a sensible position and a feeling. In the guise as introduction of its aesthetical meaning we want to pose only one last question. That is: in which way Kant himself comprehends reflection? Or rather: why

he names the (logically) so described reflection *Zweckmäßigkeit*?

#### 4. IN THE GUISE AS CONCLUSION: THE CONCEPT OF ZWECKMÄSSIGKEIT AND THE FINALISATION OF EXPERIENCE

In the previous paragraphs we followed a precise path. We started from Lyotard's concept of judgment inner repercussion, taking it as a possible reading key from the third *Critique* and asking for its validation. To find this latter, we tried to redefine the transcendental meaning of Kant's judgment as thought constitutive act, producing consciousness. In the second step, we explained then the way in which this act involves sensibility and implies a reflection in a feeling. Now, in conclusion, I want to make a final step, to present a first, temporary clarification of the concept as which Kant labels aesthetical dimension.

Following § V of the *Erste Einleitung* (Kant [1914]: 214-216) and §§ IV, V of the published Introduction (Kant [1790]: 179-186), this «special a priori concept that has its origin strictly in the reflecting power of judgment» (181; 68) is the concept of *Zweckmäßigkeit*. In order to gain a first comprehension of what Kant means with, it is maybe required to return to Lyotard and his way of thinking about repercussion.

Because of the initial focus of our discussion, Lyotard's interpretation may offer lots of suggestion, indeed, especially if we abide by the distinction between the *tautegory of reflection* and its heuristic use. For us, this latter is extremely important to *centralise* Kant's presentation of the concept. For in the first and definitive Introductions, Kant starts from a too wide perspective. In both, he begins from the problem of empirical laws, moves then on to the experience as system, and finally arrives to transcendental principle (179 ff.; Kant [1914]: 202 ff., 208-211)<sup>9</sup>. Whereas Lyotard focuses on *pure* reflection starting directly

<sup>9</sup> For a reconstruction of the two Introductions, see at least, respectively, Anceschi (1979) and Garroni (1986): 283-296.

from the feeling as accordance of thought faculties, and only then return to the finality as a correspondent «*harmonie qui est toute logique*» (Lyotard [1991]: 14). The distinction between tautegorical subjectivity and heuristic use of reflection is the next step (17-23, 32-38), that gives him the possibility to isolate feeling – and allows us to find in this context a more specific way to think of *Zweckmäßigkeit*.

In order to present the reflective manners *in general*, Lyotard turns indeed to Kant's essay on *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* (Kant [1786]), in analogy with which he defines the transcendental situation of thinking as correspondent to that of the I.

As well as to orient oneself empirically is needed «the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right and left hands» (134; 8), from a transcendental point of view is required for Lyotard a «all subjective non-congruence» (Lyotard [1991]: 42) on thinking, through which this latter is aware of (or feels) its own state. Before the distinction between heuristic and tautegorical, reflection, in general, is this. It is this the mere *Zweckmäßigkeit*, which for the tautegory becomes heuristic, thus *orientational*. That is the *mere subjectivity*, or rather that *thinking without thoughts* we above defined as *Empfänglichkeit*.

Confirmations of this may be found, for instances, in Kant's *First Introduction to the Critique of Power of Judgment* (Kant [1914]: 207 ff., 232-234), and even more in the semantic shift in Kant's use of *heautonomy*, which in the first Introduction is referred only to aesthetic judgments (225), while in the *Critique* defines the overall being principle of Judgment to itself (Kant [1790]: 185 ff., 288, 385). In this sense, if we want to clarify the sense of Kant's *Zweckmäßigkeit*, we can think of it as the *purposive assumption* of thinking for itself, which can be shown even in a nominal and etymological translation of the term.

Far from saying indeed a mere *purposiveness*, as it is usually translated in English, the idea Kant underlies in German is that of the mere fact that *something* is *in compliance*, *gemäß*, with the pur-

pose. This *something*, in the case of a pure and a priori principle, is not *a thing* but a simple consciousness, a given judgment, insofar it *conforms to* (*sich stimmt... zusammen*) the possibility of experience. What in *Zweckmäßigkeit* complies (or, *aesthetically*, is *in accordance*: at once, *gemäß* and *übereinstimmend*) with the purpose is, therefore, *a thought*, of which *thinking* is aware as corresponding to its forms. Purpose is in this sense the transcendental synthesis of constitution of experience, not for but *in* which the *given* synthesis *conforms to* itself. Such that – as we have seen –, this *conforming* is not an additional logical moment in the synthesis of the experience but *the reflection of this synthesis*, in both the genitive senses.

If the logical function of the power of judgment is the act of determining with which thought subsumes under its forms the given and elaborates it objectively, the reflecting judgment must be defined overall, instead, – we can conclude – as the *Empfänglichkeit*, the repercussion or the *inflection* of thought position, to which it is *subjected*. As concept of this transcendental dynamic, *Zweckmäßigkeit* means this judging movement through and in which it *is*. That – to return to the sketch of reading of the third *Critique* given from Lyotard – in its aesthetical case find a completely pure experience, i.e. the pure principle itself. Whereas in the heuristic cases (of teleology, but for Lyotard [1991]: 15 ff., 37 ff. also of the same critique) has its theoretical applications, or its *reflection* on cognition (see for example Kant [1790]: 194). The difference between the two cases leads on the determination of the purpose, *Zweck*, that in the second is no more judging itself, the accordance of thought mere faculties (*Vermögen*, possibilities; see Kant [1790]: 189 ff., 287), but a *given* and *determined* thought. I.e., the determination of an object, which possibility (which *form*) is comprehended as produced in accordance with its concept.

We have by this an overview of the third *Critique* to develop, grounded on a logical explication of its central concept.

## REFERENCES

- Anceschi, L., 1979: *Considerazioni sulla Prima Introduzione alla Critica del Giudizio di Kant*, in Kant, I., *Prima introduzione alla Critica del Giudizio*, ed. by P. Manganaro, Laterza, Roma-Bari, pp. 5-53.
- Costa, V., 2003: *La verità del mondo. Giudizio e teoria del significato in Heidegger*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.
- Desideri, F., 2003: *Il passaggio estetico. Saggi kantiani*, il melangolo, Genova.
- Ferrarin, A., 2015: *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London.
- Ferrarin, A., 2019: *Thinking and the I. Hegel and the Critique of Kant*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Garroni, E., 1986: *Senso e paradosso. L'estetica, filosofia non speciale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Guyer, P., 2003: *Kant's Principles of Reflecting Judgment*, in Guyer, P. (ed.), *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment. Critical Essays*, Rowman&Littlefield, Lanham, pp. 1-61.
- Heidegger, M., 1925/1926: *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 102 voll., vol. XXI, ed. by W. Biemel, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M., 1976.
- Hogrebe, W., 1981: *Die ursprüngliche Lust der Prädikation*, in Funke, G. (ed.), *Akten des 5. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, vol. I/2, Bouvier Verlag, Bonn, pp. 731-736.
- Kant, I., 1781/1787: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Erste Auflage*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. IV, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1903, pp. 1-252; *Zweite Auflage*, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1904; transl. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Kant, I., 1783: *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. IV, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1911, pp. 253-283; transl. by G. Hartfield, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to come forward as Science*, in Kant, I., *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by H. Allison and P. Heath, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 50-169.
- Kant, I., 1786: *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. VIII, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1928, pp. 131-147; transl. by A.W. Wood, *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*, in Kant, I., *Religion and Rational Theology, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by A.W. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 7-18.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. V, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1913, pp. 165-485; transl. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, *Critique of the Power of Judgment, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by P. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002.
- Kant, I., 1790a: *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. VIII, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1928, pp. 185-251; transl. by H. Allison, *On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one*, in Kant, I., *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781, The Cambridge Edition of Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by H. Allison and P. Heath, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 283-336.
- Kant, I., 1914: *Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*,



- ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. XX, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1942, pp. 193-251; transl. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, *First Introduction to the Critique of Power of Judgment*, in Kant, I., *Critique of Power of Judgment*, ed. by P. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 1-51.
- Kant, I., 1961: *Philosophische Enzyklopädie*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. XXIX, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1980, pp. 1-45.
- La Rocca, C., 1990: *Strutture kantiane*, ETS, Pisa.
- La Rocca, C., 1999: *Esistenza e Giudizio. Linguaggio e Ontologia in Kant*, ETS, Pisa.
- Lyotard, J.-F., 1988: *L'inhumain. Causeries sur les temps*, Galilée, Paris.
- Lyotard, J.-F., 1990: *Pérégrinations. Loi, forme, événement*, Galilée, Paris.
- Lyotard, J.-F., 1991: *Leçons sur l'Analytique du sublime. Kant, Critique de la faculté de juger*, § 23-29, Klincksieck, Paris, 2015.
- Scaravelli, L., 1980: *L'Analitica trascendentale. Scritti inediti su Kant*, ed. by M. Corsi, La Nuova Italia, Firenze.
- Schelling, F.W.J., 1802: *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by K.F.A. Schelling, vol. I/4, Cotta'scher Verlag, Stuttgart-Augsburg, 1859, pp. 333-510.
- Schnell, A., 2009: *Réflexion et spéculation. L'idéalisme transcendantal chez Fichte et Schelling*, Millon, Paris.
- Vitiello, V., 1984: *Ethos ed Eros in Hegel e Kant*, ESI, Napoli.
- Vitiello, V., 2021: *Immanuel Kant. L'architetto della Neuzeit*, Inschibboleth, Roma.



**Citation:** A. Lanza (2021) Husserl's *Teleologie der «tiefen» Assoziationen* as Foundation of the Theory of Judgment in comparison with Millikan's Teleosemantic Theory. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 65-78. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13152

**Copyright:** © 2021 A. Lanza. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Husserl's *Teleologie der «tiefen» Assoziationen* as Foundation of the Theory of Judgment in comparison with Millikan's Teleosemantic Theory

ANDREA LANZA

University of Florence, Italy  
andrea.lanza@unifi.it

**Abstract.** The paper inquires Husserl's immanent teleology of conscious life, conceived as a *Teleologie der «tiefen» Assoziationen*. The associative genesis entails synthetical processes in the primordial-associative field, driven by the general concept of interest. The resulting syntheses ground the various forms of judgments, both judgments on experience and predicative ones in general. Since the theory's foundation relies on pre-predicative experience, then it must encompass its teleological dimension and, in this sense, the concept of evidence – pivotal in the theory – mirrors the result of the synthesis of fulfilment. This latter, in turn, is driven in an asymptotic path towards a teleological idea of adequacy. This account expresses the complementary mirroring that characterizes the relationship between judging and teleology, without the need to separate teleology from reason. In order to highlight the significance of this framing, the paper is closed by a brief comparison with R. Millikan's teleosemantic theory, whose concept of teleology is shown as flawed by the general concerns proper to naturalism.

**Keywords:** Absolute cognition, Passive syntheses, Regulative function, Teleosemantics, Evolutionary conditions.

---

1. Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is significantly characterized by teleological concepts and especially by the idea of a teleological constitution of cognitive life (see Husserl [1950]: 12-13; Husserl [1950a]: 213; Husserl [1973]: 380; Bernet [1979]: 119-120). His theory of knowledge proceeds on the basis of a functional ideal of absolute cognition, playing a teleological role, without this implying the involvement of any outdated form of rationalism. By way of contrast, Husserl programmatically acknowledges the limits of human knowledge, emphasising the need to always take into account the possibility of delusion. This radical awareness of human finitude produces a significant tension between the research of absolute cognition and every ordinary practical attempt of gaining such *desideratum* (see

Miettinen [2014]: 6). Consequently, if, on one side, this leads to the constant frustration of the cognitive ambitions aiming at absolute knowledge of things in themselves, on the other hand, this is not meant to doom the meaning of the teleological dimension to irrelevance (see Aldea [2017]: 111).

We will illustrate how such apparent contradiction has been resolved by Husserl through his interpretation of the thing-in-itself as a mere «idea in the Kantian sense» (Husserl [1950a]: § 143). In fact, although Husserl considers absurd the idea of an *intuitus originarius* (Husserl [1973a]: §§ 33-34; 48-49; 51-53, 65; *Beilage V*), the striving toward an even more complete and detailed acquisition of knowledge assumes the function of a regulative principle. One of the most explicative dynamics, which could illustrate such tension between what can be cognitively sought after and what is cognitive attainable, calls into question the fundamental notion of *Abschattungen*. This notion is a classic concept of the Husserlian philosophical lexicon (see Husserl [1984]: § 3; Husserl [1950]: §§ 3, 41, 149; Husserl [1950a]: § 61) and translates the phenomenon of perspective involved in visual perception of spatial objects. We shall immediately point out that this shift onto visual perception does not contradict nor narrow-down the mainframe of the teleological structure of cognition. In fact, it is precisely on the concept of visual perception as the fundamental form of cognition that Husserl grounds his whole epistemology. It follows that to focus on this specific kind of perception is everything but a mean to downsize a broader issue. On the contrary, we would like to illustrate why Husserl's immanent teleology of conscious life should be primarily conceived as a *Teleologie der «tiefen» Assoziationen*<sup>1</sup>, i.e., as a teleology applying to that multiplicity of correlated passive syntheses which

<sup>1</sup> We have chosen to borrow this label, partly modifying its form, from the expression Brudzińska used to illustrate the Freudian paradigm (Brudzińska [2019]: § 7.1.5). We believe that this choice is justified in relation to the author's own thesis that: «Ein Rückgriff auf Husserls Ergebnisse bietet m. E. den Freudschen Thesen zur Tiefenassoziation ein festes epistemologisches Fundament».

constitute the *genetic plot* of every perceptual knowledge.

Briefly, the phenomenological analysis of an usual perceptual experience provides that spatial objects would never be fully given in intuition with respect to all their sides and aspects: visual perception only grasps the front of an object, whereas the back and the other sides of the item fall entirely outside of the visual field, producing adumbrations (i.e., *Abschattungen*)<sup>2</sup>.

The essentially perspective nature of the visual perception entails that an adequate cognition of an entirely determined object is an unobtainable goal, since even a continuous examination of the object will never yield a complete perception of all sides simultaneously. This means that the ideal to which the knowledge of what is transcendent refers, is transformed into a conception of an endless progress of cognition itself (see Bernet [1997]: 120).

We will show later that, incidentally, this dynamic translates into an *ethics* of theoretical praxis, requalifying the philosophical task as potentially endless. Meanwhile, however, it should also be borne in mind that the phenomenological reduction excludes every reference to real objects as they are conceived in a natural attitude. Therefore, the ideal of adequate cognition becomes an ideal of adequate representation.

The term «representation», at least as it is addressed in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, broadly designates the connection between the appearance and what appears: the represented object is the intentional object and an adequate representation of it can be reached for Husserl only when the intuitive intention is completely fulfilled. In other words, we have an adequate representation when the appearance brings the fully determined object to absolute self-giveness. Conversely, a representation is inadequate when it is not purely intuitively given, for example, when we perceive just an

<sup>2</sup> See also Husserl (1966): *Einleitung*, §1 (*Originalbewusstsein und perspektivische Abschattung der Raumgegenstände*). The relationship between this kind of analysis of perception and *Gestaltpsychologie* is a recurrent topic: see, for example, Heinämaa (2009).

adumbration of a three-dimensional object. This partial self-givenness is always accompanied by an empty co-intentional content, which, essentially, belongs to the perception itself as an anticipatory consciousness of further possible self-givennesses.

In fact, according to Husserl, we always intend to see the entire thing and, also in reflection, the side properly seen refers to the as-yet-unseen sides and to the thing as a whole (see Bernet, Kern, Marbach [1993]: 116). Husserl defines «authentic (*eigentliche*) appearance» what is actually seen, whereas he calls «inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) appearance» the apperceptive surplus, or the empty co-intention (see Husserl [1973a]: §16 *et passim*). The authentic character of the perceptual act derives from its original self-givenness in intuition, «in its physical (*leibhaft*) presence» and not by means of an image or of a conventional sign representing the object. This intuitiveness comes from the complex of sensuous data interwoven with the apperceptive act (see Bernet, Kern, Marbach [1993]: 117-118). The apperceptive surplus, instead, lacks sensuous data and the determination of its possible fulfilment depends, indeed, on the kinaesthetic course. Therefore, the partiality of the authentic appearance implies the necessity of a supplement, thanks to which a dynamization of the process of constitution through kinaesthetics is produced, according to a co-implied horizon pointing to diverse possibilities.

Thus, since every appearance always refers to other possible co-implied appearances of the same object, the chance to yield an adequate knowledge of the object must be excluded. This applies even with respect to a single side, since there is always the possibility for a new, different determination to be added. Consequently, the only result seemingly obtainable is a set of multiple appearances, progressively constituted in an infinite experiential process. In other words, the essentially incomplete nature of this cognitive process seems to make it impossible to reach adequacy, hence the teleological meaning of such principle seems to lose its sense.

As we have already anticipated, Husserl provides a solution to this apparent paradox, high-

lighting the regulative function of the aforementioned teleological principle (see Husserl [1950a]: §§ 143, 149; Kant [1781/1787]: B672/A644; Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch [1995]: 27-30). In fact, although transcendent objects cannot be adequately perceived in a *closed appearance*<sup>3</sup>, Husserl maintains that:

*als «Idee» (im Kantischen Sinn) ist gleichwohl die vollkommene Gegebenheit vorgezeichnet - als ein in seinem Wesenstypus absolut bestimmtes System endloser Prozesse kontinuierlichen Erscheinens, bzw. als Feld dieser Prozesse ein a priori bestimmtes Kontinuum von Erscheinungen mit verschiedenen aber bestimmten Dimensionen, durchherrscht von fester Wesensgesetzlichkeit. (Husserl [1950a]: 331)<sup>4</sup>*

In other words, the *idea* of perfect givenness as *telos* predesignates the continuum of appearances. This *idea* is presented in intellectual seeing and corresponds by essence to an infinity, but:

*[d]ie Idee einer wesensmäßig motivierten Unendlichkeit ist nicht selbst eine Unendlichkeit; die Einsicht, daß diese Unendlichkeit prinzipiell nicht gegeben sein kann, schließt nicht aus, sondern fordert vielmehr die einsichtige Gegebenheit der Idee dieser Unendlichkeit. (Husserl [1950a]: 331)<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> «Prinzipiell kann ein Dingreales, ein Sein solchen Sinnes in *einer abgeschlossenen Erscheinung* nur “inadäquat” erscheinen. Damit hängt wesensmäßig zusammen, daß keine auf solch einer inadäquat gebenden Erscheinung beruhende Vernunftsetzung “endgültig”, keine “unüberwindlich” sein kann» (Husserl [1950a]: 319; *our italics*).

<sup>4</sup> See also Husserl (1983): 342: «[...] *perfect givenness is nevertheless predesignates as «Idea»* (in the Kantian sense) – as a system which, in its eidetic type, is an absolutely determined system of endless processes of continuous appearances, or as a field of these processes, an a priori determined continuum of appearances with different, but determined, dimensions, and governed throughout by a fixed set of eidetic laws».

<sup>5</sup> See also Husserl (1983): 342: «[T]he idea of an infinity motivated in conformity with its essence is not itself an infinity; seeing intellectually that this infinity of necessity cannot be given does not exclude, but rather requires, the intellectually seen givenness of the *idea* of this infinity».

Therefore, on one hand, there is the teleological function of this ideal of adequateness, while, on the other, there is the objective unity progressively constituted by the continuous synthesis of appearances. The form of unification that allows to constitute the perceived thing as a unity of multiple appearances is mainly, according to Husserl, the temporal form of the flow of consciousness, which is provided through syntheses of coexistence and succession.

In the *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (1928), focused precisely on the temporal constitution of pure sense-data (but also on the self-constitution of phenomenological time), Husserl argues that every perception of enduring objects consists of three moments necessarily interconnected one to another: the «*primal impression (Urimpression)*» or a series of primordial sensations occurring in a «*momentary simultaneity (Momentanzugleich)*»; the *retention*, «a continuity of primary memories» as consciousness that simultaneously holds back; a last moment consisting in an expectation or *protention*, i.e., a projection in the immediately approaching of the moment just passed (see Bernet Kern, Marbach [1993]: 102). Together, they describe the process of apprehension of a temporal object, which continues to take place as a progressive flow of impressions, retentions and protentions<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the continuous synthetic coordination of appearances with the same appearing object also requires a continuous synthesis of identification, which is performed by means of association.

Association is the basic law of the immanent genesis and operates according to a paradigm of similarity that can be basically expressed with the formula «this recalls that». It functions as a purely immanent connection with regard to the content and can be described phenomenologically as a genesis, where one of the elements is, in relation to consciousness, that which evokes, while the other is that which is evoked. Originally, associa-

tion determines the most general synthesis of sensuous data connected in immanence: for example, given a homogenous perceptual field, an individual datum raises into prominence since it contrasts with something else, for instance, its background. But contrast goes hand in hand with similarity, producing the coming into prominence of the unlike from the basis of the common. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are, in fact, the criteria according to which syntheses of identification are performed, differing in degrees until the limit-case of a complete likeness. In the case of enduring objects, thanks to retention, the present content is unified with a non-present (prior or subsequent) one: passing from likeness to likeness, the content of the new alike comes to a perfect coincidence with that of the first, realizing what Husserl defines as blending (*Verschmelzung*) (See Husserl [1985]: 78).

The ever-new, synthetic and continuous identification of the changing content is necessarily maintained in the progressive constitution of immanence and, at the same time, forms the system of coexistence ordered according to a succession (See Kant [1780/1781]: B233). The uniqueness of the temporal position is, therefore, none other than the correlate of the form of identification, hence consciousness can re-awaken the object and grasp it again as the same recognizable item.

If the subject wants to reactivate a past experience of the same object, then a repetition occurs; but if a new apprehension/explication of the same object takes place, then it will be experienced with a familiar horizon of «acquired cognitions» (see Husserl [1985]: 128). In other words, every new possible appearance has an horizon made up of possible appearances, each assuming the form of determinate but empty intentions, a characterization which allows to maintain both the validity of past experiences and the openness to new contents. These pre-cognitions are not arbitrary, but rather more or less pre-determined or «motivated»<sup>7</sup>. They

<sup>6</sup> This structure is rooted in Augustinian's reflections on time; see, for example, Book XI of *Confessions*.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of motivation plays a central role in the analysis of time consciousness and passive synthesis, since the «hanging together» of data reflects the motiva-

do not push the same way for their actualization. Their motivational force can depend on relations of compatibility and contiguity between either the inauthentic appearance and the related authentic one or with the retained, elapsed past continuum of appearances. On the other hand, the motivational force can also be driven by the specific interest of the perceiving subject.

The role of the concept of interest (*Interesse*) is particularly relevant in Husserlian genetic analyses. Incidentally, Husserl argues that every act of perception has to be accompanied by an interest of some sort, more precisely, by a perceptual one (see Husserl [2004]: 103). Together with the so-called notion of «focused intentionality», that is, attention, interest is involved as a fundamental pre-condition within the general domain of objectifying experiences<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, interest and attention are deeply intertwined and their role is especially significant for objectifying acts of perception.

At the level of the active sphere, we recognize egoic motivations of interest, conceived as active tendencies to aims or voluntary actions; while, at the level of perceptual experience, this same cognitive interest expresses itself as a striving toward an adequate knowledge of the thing. This striving towards the perceived object expresses the core of the epistemic process in its concreteness: the tension between actual intentions and their potential

---

tional character of experience and implies its subjective structure.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of perceptual interest was originally referred to the act of «attending», described by Husserl, using Carl Stumpf's words, as *Lust am Bemerken* (see Husserl [2004]: 108). In early manuscripts from 1898 on *Attention as Interest*, the introduction of the notion of *spezielle Meinung* (or *Sonderwahrnehmung*) describes the specificity of the act of singling out an object as the target from a general objective context. But this act corresponds to the formal condition of attention, whereas the full phenomenon must also involve a concrete interest, motivated by or referring to an intended object. This striving towards the perceived object expresses the core of the epistemic process in its concreteness and thus the core of intentionality itself, since the achievement of an adequate perception of the object demands for a certain tension involving the subject.

fulfilment in ongoing perceptions, describable as a general perceptual drive, can suggest, for example, the inspection of different appearances of the same object from different perspectives. Here, *kinaestheses* come into play, since also kinaesthetic paths depend on this specific interest which actively motivates the kinaesthetic course and, correlatively, the further perceptual course.

A sort of genetic impulse initiates, therefore, the active process of perceiving and then lets it keep going towards further objectifying processes. The intensity of the involvement, of the interest, influences the process of noticing: the perceiving subject prefers one object or certain parts of it, structuring, unseen, the field of perception according to focus and horizon, foreground, and background of consciousness.

The ultimate goal remains the achievement of the most adequate perception of the object, as close as possible to an ideal completeness. For this reason, the performance of the synthesis of continuous appearances, driven by the cognitive interest, is primarily a synthesis of fulfilment, which incorporates the attempt to obtain such goal.

In this sense, the idea of the teleological anticipation of absolute cognition, as the unity of present and possible appearances, constitutes the general principle of reference. It is «embodied» in the perceptual cognitive drive and, therefore, guides the process of synthesis of fulfilment, which, we may say, has an «asymptotic» path with respect to its ideal of adequacy. For this reason, Husserl himself, on occasions, speaks of the satisfaction of the cognitive interest through *optimal* givenness rather than a complete/adequate one (See Husserl [1973a]: § 32, 36f; also see Doyon [2018]).

But it is equally true that every incomplete process of cognition structurally implies the idea of adequate cognition as *telos*, although, this way, the perceptual process ends up being unfeasible. This teleological structure, characterizing perception, can be applied to theoretical activity in general, since «the teleological aspiration for absolute cognition of objective being becomes a pursuit of the infinite advancement of the process of cognition» (Bernet [1979]: 130).

2. The assumption that the perceptual consciousness constantly strives to reach its object while plainly aware to fail such task, expresses and reflects Husserl's general teleological conception about human life. According to Husserl, human life is «latent auf Vernunft ausgerichtet» (Husserl [1954]: 13) and this implies an «existential involvement», which requires bringing the latent rationality of *Lebenswelt* into manifestation (see Huang [2021]: § 3).

According to Husserl, in fact, the history of western philosophy itself, since its infancy, has adopted this same commitment to a certain primacy of reason, striving after knowledge for its own sake. This history can be read as the constant attempt to approximate such goal and, for Husserl, phenomenology, thanks to its special scientific procedures, is the most serious effort to continue in this direction (see Bernet [1978]).

Within this frame, the role of the ideal of adequate cognition results clearer: it is not only the necessary theoretical extreme of a dyadic adequate-inadequate/complete-incomplete structure: it is a goal, which in turn implies and at the same time motivates a voluntary activity of the ego as an authentic, general interest-in-knowledge (*Erkenntnisinteresse*). In other words, the infinite nature of theoretical task does not deter but rather encourages the philosophical inquiry and, according to Bernet, it is exactly this practical dimension, as a motivating impulse, that make the teleological function of the ideal of absolute cognition intelligible (see Bernet [1979]: 131).

Moreover, the fact that the subject accepts to undertake this path of infinite research takes on an ethical dimension for Husserl, insofar as the acceptance of this commitment translates into a form of responsibility. Such responsibility does not only extend itself to the theoretical investigation but to human life as a whole, assuming the form of an absolute self-responsibility (see Bernet [1979]: 131)<sup>9</sup>. According to Husserl, reason is the

specific element characterizing human beings and a humanity that conceives itself as rational – that is, a humanity understanding it is rational precisely because of its will to target apodictic reason – understands that this means a life dedicated to rationality and to the efforts to achieve it.

Human existence assumes, therefore, a specific sense, i.e., the sense of an ultimate self-understanding of human beings as responsible beings:

*ein Selbstverständnis als Sein im Berufen sein zu einem Leben in der Apodiktizität – nicht nur abstrakt und in gemeinem Sinne apodiktische Wissenschaft treibend – sondern eine ihr gesamtes konkretes Sein in apodiktischer Freiheit zu einer apodiktischen, zu einer in allem tätigen Leben ihrer Vernunft – in der sie Menschheit ist – verwirklichende. (Husserl [1954]: 275)<sup>10</sup>*

Hence, once established that apodictic reason is the ultimate goal of man as such, this implies that being a man means to embody this teleological dimension, this ought-to-be, since this teleology dominates every action and every egological project (see Husserl [1954]: 290).

Finally, this recognition by reason of an apodictic *telos* in everything, this self-understanding according to a-priori principles, can only be brought forward by the philosophical practice (see Husserl [1954]: 290). Philosophy sheds light on the horizon of reference shared by all humans, grounded on the concept of validity, which, in turn, proves essential to human living. It follows that, for Husserl, reason brings to revelation the communitarian sharing of the same human spirit thanks to which the overcoming of the differences in modes of apprehension, bond to single cultures, becomes possible, thus leading to a humanity joint and in harmony.

<sup>10</sup> See also Husserl [1970]: 340: «(a) *self-understanding as being in being called to a life of apodicticity*, not only in abstractly practicing apodictic science in the usual sense but [as being mankind] which realizes its whole concrete being in apodictic freedom by becoming apodictic mankind in the whole active life of its reason —through which it is human».

<sup>9</sup> Husserl refers to Descartes' project of radical intellectual honesty with regard to the demand for self-responsibility (see Husserl [1950]: § 2).

In fact, this principle of reason equates to a supra-national spirit pushing every culture towards goals apparently proper to each one though, actually, relative since, all in all, they express the adherence to a broader existential aim. By showing the unity of a same human spirit, this universal *telos* both spans through history and «shapes» it in each of its manifestations, subtending its own meaning in an «intentional co-implication» (see Ghigi [2017]: 94). This harmonic unity is defined, by Husserl, *Einstimmigkeit* (agreement and unity) of mankind: it crosses every time of history and repeats itself in every age within the ever-different *Weltanschauungen*. This builds the core of Husserl's philosophy of history understood as interpretation and reconstruction of the very *telos* of history itself<sup>11</sup>.

According to Husserl, only the gaze of a philosopher can catch a glimpse at this universal sense – at this *historische Besinnung* (see Ghigi [2017]: 96). Phenomenology in particular, by addressing not only ideal and a priori structures but, above all, the act of theorizing in itself and what it can offer to us, incorporates an awareness of the teleological idea (that aforementioned *telos* produced by humanity) which acts, in a historical perspective, as co-author of its own historicity (70, note 29).

---

<sup>11</sup> Following many theorists of cultural relativism, this conception of human life in historicity would sound very controversial: as radical differences exist among cultures, the necessity of a relativistic assessment of value-systems and theoretical commitments seem to many unavoidable (see, for example, Herskovits [1955]). On the contrary, Husserl's position seems to embody an anti-relativist universalism, since he retains that, notwithstanding the different contexts in which a culture is formed, still there is one true world, from which all cultures are generated. It is Husserl's conviction, moreover, that all humanity has the same rational capacity, the full expression of which, however, depends on the degree of awareness of the people in question. This is the dimension of relativity that emerges, but we do not have neither the expertise nor the intention to analyse the possible resilience of Husserl's thesis in relation to a debate that is beyond the argumentative direction of the present work (see Husserl [2008]: 673ff.)

Moreover, the philosophical-theoretical attitude morphing into a phenomenological attitude, opens up to a supra-historical perspective removing those «occlusions of sense» (see Costa, Spinicci, Franzini [2002]: 232) that put philosophy under the crisis lamented by Husserl in his last work. In fact, phenomenology in virtue of its peculiar ability of critical re-evaluation of the conditions of validity at the base of scientific thought, is able to reform the history of mankind towards an acknowledgement – both individual and communitarian – of that sense handed down throughout history as eventual *telos* of its own living (see Husserl [1954]: 503).

To this extent, Husserl introduces the notions of *universale Zweckidee* (see Husserl [2014]: 256) and human-*Lebensinn* to point out the sense which hides «behind the curtains of rational behaviour» yet moves the intentionality of reason throughout history. In other words, this sense, as rational motivation, brings along an intention of higher level that is, one which is not individual but rather shared by the whole humanity, in turn, tending to realize itself into it.

Now, the phenomenologist shall ask: what does universal reason tend towards in its unfolding in history? Is there, perhaps, a *telos* of spirit from which we may derive not just a *telos* of history – revealed by the presence of reason – but also *in* history (as *Weltteleologie*; See Husserl [2014]: 254)? Husserl answers that the rational essence of the human being determines his acting in virtue of «die absolute Wahrheit, im vollen und ganzen Sinn als das *unum verum bonum*» (Husserl [2014]: 250)<sup>12</sup> which has a regulative function. This absolute *logos* works as norm for the action and is revealed by reason through its endless task of producing finite ideas addressing this absoluteness.

The proceeding of reason points, therefore, towards an idea of infinity that justifies the finite. Such an idea generates in history and it is only history itself that may let it re-emerge as product of the reason drawing on the absolute. This is how

---

<sup>12</sup> Author's translation: «the absolute Truth, in a full and total sense as the *unum verum bonum*».



the idea of an *absolute Teleologie* is outlined: as the sense underlying the historic explicitation of reason (see Husserl [2014]: 249).

3. The ideal of absolute truth pursued by reason at the historical level also grounds the Husserlian theory of judgement. In this section we will briefly illustrate how this founding relationship is structured with special reference to *Erfahrung und Urteil*.

Judgments, in general, appear as alleged knows but most of what is presented as knowledge is subjected to mistake. The need for a critique of judgments as to their truth stems from here. Generally, the study of logic has dealt with the laws of judgments' formation that is, the formal principles and rules as sufficient conditions of knowledge in general. These laws apply exclusively in virtue of their form, hence regardless of their material content. In this sense, they are characterized as prescriptive conditions aimed at reaching the truth: if a judgment infringes these formal conditions, it shall never achieve truth as result. On the other hand, following Husserl, even when the judgment satisfies such formal conditions, this is still not enough to fulfil its aim. Thus, Husserl poses the problem of what must be added to the formal conditions in order for truth – or evidence, so to put it in subjective terms – to be gained. These conditions concern «die subjektiven Charaktere der Einsichtigkeit, der Evidenz und die subjektiven Bedingungen ihrer Erzielung» (Husserl [1985]: 26; *Einleitung* §3)<sup>13</sup>.

In other words, the argument of the inquiry splits in two, here: on one end there is the problem of the forms of judgment and their validity; on the other end, we have the issue of the subjective conditions needed to reach the evidence. This latter theme considers judgment as subjective activity, for it addresses those operations of consciousness in which the judgmental formations pretending to be expressions of knowledge origi-

nate. In other terms, Husserl advances a phenomenological clarification about the origin of judgment and consequentially a phenomenological genealogy of logics in general. These themes have, as starting point, the problems bond to the definition of evidence, which, according to Husserl, were discarded by the scholars of traditional logics<sup>14</sup>.

To talk about «evidence» means nothing else, to Husserl, that to talk about self-giveness that is, the way an object might be designated as present «in flesh and blood (*leibhaft da*)». This characterization rivals the re-presentation – for example in remembrance or fantasy – as in the case of external perception when an object is given in an effective perception. Therefore, an act of consciousness results clear when it characterizes itself as what is giving the very object.

Actually, every thought implies that some objects must already be given, hence wherever a generic activity of thought might take place and, in particular, in the case of judgmental activity, there must be representable objects previously given. In fact, the judgment as activity directed towards knowledge, points necessarily at what exists, which must be given in advance in order to stand as the object of the judging itself. Yet, to the extent for judgments to be clear, the application of the formal rules of logics to these self-givenesses is not sufficient. The achievement of knowledge presupposes, in fact, that also the conditions for the modes of pre-giveness of the very objects as to their content must be given.

Every species of object has its own mode of self-giving, i.e., evidence; for example, as we have seen, spatial objects possess a kind of evidence, an originary self-giving of their own, that does not

<sup>13</sup> Author's translation: «the subjective characteristics of intelligibility, of evidence, and the subjective conditions for achieving it».

<sup>14</sup> Husserl links up this notion to the Cartesian tradition, hinged on the *methode* of *clare et distincte percipire/concevoir clairement et distinctement* (Descartes [1641]: 13-14). The criteria of clarity and distinction drawn up in the *Meditations* stay, for Descartes, as the only condition of true and exact knowledge, hence they become signs of evidence (Descartes [1641]: 27, 35). However, according to Husserl, Descartes was blind to the need to discover the level of certainty within the ego (Husserl [2002]: §15).

match cases of adequate givenness or apodictic intuition<sup>15</sup>. Anyway, whatever the kind of evidence might be at place, the givenness of an object does not include any predicative form: on the contrary, to get to a predicative judgment, the object must necessarily be given in evidence. Such assumption, that is the foundation of predicative evidence onto the pre-predicative one, seems absolutely obvious as to the judgments based on experience. Husserl, however, would demonstrate that any possible predicative judgment generally evident depends on the foundation on pre-predicative evidence.

Therefore, also the judgments usually called into play by logics, thus referring to a kind of apodictic evidence, do not have indeterminate truths in themselves as their content. They rather refer to a «world» of substrates and to the conditions of objective evidence with which these substrates are given. Hence, what grounds the pretence to knowledge is not something to be found in judgments: it is mandatory to trace up to the modes of pre-givenness of the objects of judgment.

The seeking for the character of objective evidence is the search for the evident givenness of individuals, and such evidence gives back, broadly, to the concept of experience. The theory of pre-predicative experience (namely that experience giving the most originary substrates sporting objective evidence) makes for the founding incipit of the phenomenological theory of judgment. For this reason, the search must begin from the consciousness of pre-predicative experience to follow, thereafter, the rise of evidences of higher level.

Starting from the one grounded on experience as the most elementary form of judgment, it is precisely on the basic, immediate kind of experience that we need to focus on: this is none other than the experience of the sensible substrates conceived as *concrete world*. Thus, the analysis is focused on judgments grounded on external perception and, moving from there, it identifies the structures of predicative judging in general and its self-construing on pre-predicative operations.

It is in order to get to this result, that the phenomenological analysis has devoted primarily to the study of pre-predicative experience and to the general structure of receptivity, distinguishing, as we have seen, several structures as the one of passive pre-givenness and that of interest along with different forms of synthesis.

Through the phenomenological analysis of the pre-predicative structures of consciousness, in the previous section we attempted at showing how the Husserlian theory of cognition and, in particular, his analysis of perception, depend on a teleological concept of absolute truth. We shall infer, therefore, that if the theory of judgment is grounded on pre-predicative experience, then it must encompass that teleological dimension. In this sense, the concept of evidence, on which the theory of judgments hinges, mirrors the result of the synthesis of fulfillment. This latter, as we have clarified, is driven in an asymptotic path towards an ideal of adequacy.

From this we derive, conclusively, that the teleological dimension affects the foundation of judgments in a circular movement's fashion, since it stems from nature (the concrete world) assumed as experience of sensible substrata to reach the originary structures of consciousness. This makes for a roundtrip, eventually getting to the deepest nature of mankind to be found in reason, which implies an ideal of absolute truth playing a regulative function within a teleological context.

4. In order to enhance the significance of this complementary relation between judgment and teleology, which, as we have presented, has the benefit of not amending reason, we believe it could be useful, at this point, to put it against the benchmark of a conception of teleology which is very different with regard to both its ontological and epistemological presuppositions.

We are referring to the so-called *teleological theories of semantics* or *teleosemantics*: a group of theories belonging to a more contemporary research context, focusing primarily on a quest for a place for mind in the realm of nature.

Such doctrines endorse a naturalistic framework aimed at portraying the dynamics of rep-

<sup>15</sup> On the problem of givenness in Husserl, see Palette (2018).

representational states at play in nature. The general issue these theories tackle is the one of naturalizing mental intentionality, which, in turn, can be re-defined in terms of the so-called problem of «aboutness»: the fact that many mental states share the property of being about something. As Ruth Millikan recently pointed out, this is probably the most important unsolved issue at stake within a naturalistic theory of the mind: «[f]ailure to account for our capacity to represent individuals in language and thought has been, perhaps, the most serious failing common to contemporary naturalist theories of content» (Millikan [2004]: 43).

Briefly, if objects like contents, references and true conditions as semantic properties were to enter the physicalist framework, they would need to be unfolded according to non-semantic conditions, since only natural properties count for science.

Initially, a paradigm of causality seemed to fit the explanatory needs in the quest for a naturalistic account of intentional mental states, given that causal chains are already integrated into the mechanical framework. The interaction between the body and the environment have always been discussed in causal terms, by associating sense organs' stimulations with cerebrally located processes of electrical dissipation and kinaesthetic as well as behavioural outputs.

In 1981, Fred Dretske advanced one of the most relevant theories of causal representation hinged on the notion of intentional content as presupposing a counterfactual link between the stimuli and the conveyed information (see Dretske [1981]). Yet, his proposal (and in general all theories based on a similar model) has met several objections, linked for example to the solutions proposed in order to resolve the *Quinean* problem of indeterminacy or even the difficulties to account for instances of misrepresentation (see Fodor [1984]: 1987). This discussion cannot be summarised here without detracting from the complexity of the arguments<sup>16</sup>. We will there-

fore limit ourselves to illustrate a point crucial for understanding the point of moving from the causal to the teleological paradigm.

Dretske's theory impasse regarding the content ascription can be summarized saying that the potential information carried by a given signal results as the conjunction of all the possible contents associated with it. This makes it impossible to discriminate which one, among all the possible causal information that a vehicle might carry, properly explains an organism's behaviour (see Zipoli Caiani [2014]: chap. 5). Consequently, the problem of content ascription should be re-formulated introducing normative constraints, therefore asking how to pinpoint the *right* representational content from the complex environmental information flow.

Teleosemantic theories propose, as a solution, to ascribe to a representational system the purpose of carrying a specific informational content, precisely the relevant one among all the others involved. This means that such theories attribute to mental states the biological function of vehiculating contents pre-selected according to evolutionary criteria. Therefore, it is implied that the organism is endowed with a teleological perspective.

---

temnacy, affecting Dretske's theory but also the causal model in general, led to the need to devise new strategies for discriminating between equivalent content (as originating from the same causal source) that could be ascribed to the same representational vehicle. In order to avoid this ambiguity, Dretske introduced a correlation between ascribable contents and a limited period of causal stimulation, called «learning period» (Dretske [1981]: 194-195). This proposal met especially the objections of Fodor because it did not specify whether this learning period was supposed to last for a lifetime or restricted to a given period (Fodor [1984]: 241). Even after Dretske introduced the corrective function of a teacher to ensure that the learning process took place without errors (exchanges between similar contents), Fodor's objections did not cease: such an extrinsic interference did not fit at all with a naturalistic perspective such as the one they both shared (242). The other problem concerns the difficulties that causal theories encounter in explaining cases of mystification, i.e., those cases in which the mental state is tokened in a certain individual, but its typical external causal condition of truth is not. Fodor named this problem «the disjunction problem» (Fodor [1987]: 102).

---

<sup>16</sup> For the sake of completeness, we shall briefly sketch some key-arguments: the Quinean problem of inde-

In particular, Ruth Millikan introduced, during the '80es, the notion of function, derived from the background of evolutionary biology, in order to address the normative aspects concerning content ascription<sup>17</sup>. This account of function sports the peculiar feature of explicating the conditions of truth of representational states by means of their evolutionary functions.<sup>18</sup> An important mean to this extent was the concept of *proper functions*, corresponding to those particular traits motivating the survival and evolution of a given organism (be it biological or an artifact) in time. Put in other words, if a certain trait proves to have been maintained in the historic evolution of an organism, then it can be told having been selected because of the crucial role it played in the biological adaptation of that organism.

Now, since in this framework adaptation stands as teleologically connoted, the paradigm of teleosemantics assumed by Millikan sets the representation of the surrounding environment as primary adaptive function, since the ability to select and grasp relevant informative contents has enormous impact on the chances of survival and perpetration of a species.

Millikan addresses the task of defining what environmental information are by associating

them with mental representations in light of an inner modelling of the outside world. This cognitive capacity matches the evolutionary conditions because the cognitive system which actualizes it is integral to the organism and the organism itself is the result of an evolution. Reformulating all this according to Millikan, the cognitive system arranges that mental states are vehicles of content because such function of representation boosts the achievement of the biological purpose of the organism as a whole, increasing its chances to prosper (see Millikan [1989]).

Following this line, the proper function of mental states depends on the organism's evolutionary history since the criteria that pre-determine contents are established by evolutionary selection. For example, it could be told that the mechanism producing mental states as beliefs intends to contribute to the production of inferences that might turn useful in terms of adaptation. This way, following Millikan, it would be possible to avoid the aforementioned disjunction problem, highlighted by Fodor (Fodor [1987]: 102), affecting causal models and, at the same time, to leave room for cases of misrepresentation. Let it be added, as a side note, that Millikan has the ambition to account in a teleological frame not only the content of mental representations but also the meanings of linguistic expressions (see Millikan [1984]).

In any case, to proceed on the basis of a purposive criterion while keeping within naturalistic borders could be misleading: tracking an organism's evolutionary history, for example, saying that the actual exemplars are the best result after a natural selection, implies to attribute evaluation skills to a completely non-intentional process<sup>19</sup>. In fact,

---

<sup>17</sup> The appeal to biology is an appeal to a conception of natural-scientific, and therefore implicitly causal, lawfulness. Millikan transfers explanatory priority to evolutionary theory, which functions not only as a theory but as an instantiation of the lawfulness of nature (see Millikan [1993]).

<sup>18</sup> Accounts of biological function with reference to natural selection generally state that «a trait's functions causally explain the existence or maintenance of that trait in a given population via the mechanism of natural selection» (see Allen, Neal [2020]). Millikan, together with William Wimsatt and Karen Neander, believes that the excursus of natural selection corresponds to the selection process that legitimises the notion of biological function. This approach is considered a direct natural selection approach but others sustain an indirect one: for example, Norbert Wiener and colleagues argued in favour of an indirect account, aimed to provide a naturalized explanation for the goal-directed behaviour of biological systems through reference to their organization (see Rosenblueth, Wiener, Bigelow [1943]; also see Wimsatt [1972]; Neander [1991]).

---

<sup>19</sup> In this sense, a naturalized teleology, as teleosemantics, should be called into play to offer an appropriate role to values: they should be considered, therefore, not just as effects that tend to bring about their own production, but good effects for their own production. This conception is the core of *value theories* or evaluationism, which Fulford synthetically has defined as follows: «the values-out counterpart of a value theorist is a fact theorist: the values-in counterpart of naturalism is evaluationism»

crediting the natural selection with the capacity to discern options on the basis of an ideal optimum, thus predicting future scenarios, results in the adoption of an axiological kind of reasoning which implies the presupposition of a «mindful caregiver» (see Bedeau [1991]). By the way, no naturalistic scientist could ever accept that the process of natural selection *cares* about something since, in the evolutionary history of an organism, only reproductive events count<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, to discuss biological functions in teleological terms may only be a colloquialism, at the most, since to attribute purposiveness means to attribute intentionality (see Zipoli Caiani [2014]: §6.1). When we say something has an aim, we mean precisely that something is directed towards something else, hence the possibility of teleological accounts of mind would produce a vicious circle. To conclude, it seems eventually clear that the effort of integrating a teleological approach into a materialistic framework, even when the account of teleology used has been taken from a clearly scientific context (such as the concept of function belonging to evolutionary biology), rises some serious difficulties<sup>21</sup>.

Although both Millikan and Husserl recognised the importance of such a teleological approach in order to properly account for inten-

tionality, the deep divergency in their conceptions of the world impacts dramatically on the results of such accounting. While Husserl ascribes a teleological significance to the process of constituting lived experience, on which his theory of judgement is based, Millikan's teleological approach is conditioned by the general concerns of naturalism: by excluding the role of consciousness and the transcendental perspective, her attempts to integrate the mental dimension with rationality, and thus her hopes of illuminating the profound nature of human life, remain rather questionable.

#### REFERENCES

- Aldea, A.S., 2017: *Making Sense of Husserl's Notion of Teleology: Normativity, Reason, Progress and Phenomenology as "Critique from Within"*, "Hegel Bulletin" 38 (1), pp. 104-128.
- Allen, C., Neal, J., 2020: *Teleological Notions in Biology*, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N. Zalta, Spring Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/teleology-biology/>.
- Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. by E.B. Pusey, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1948.
- Bedeau, M., 1991: *Can Biological Teleology be Naturalized?*, "Journal of philosophy" 88 (11), pp. 647-655.
- Bedau, M., 1992: *Where's the Good in Teleology?*, "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research" 52 (4), pp. 781-806.
- Bernet, R., 1978: *Endlichkeit und Unendlichkeit in Husserls Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, "Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie" 40 (2), pp. 251-269.
- Bernet, R., 1979: *Perception as a teleological process of cognition*, in Tymieniecka, A.T. (ed.), *Analecta Husserliana Vol. IX, The Teleologies in Husserlian Phenomenology*, Reidel, Dordrecht, pp. 119-131.
- Bernet, R., Kern, I., Marbach, E., 1993: *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL).
- Brudzinska, J., 2019: *Bi-Valenz der Erfahrung. Assoziation, Imaginäres und Trieb in der Gen-*

---

(Fulford [2000]: 78, note a). Briefly, the idea would be that a trait is for the sake of any effect by virtue of which it is naturally selected, i.e., by virtue of which one natural selection favors. There are different grades of teleology corresponding to different etiological roles for value: see Bedeau (1992). However, evaluationism seems to remain incompatible at least with narrow naturalism.

<sup>20</sup> It must be reported, however, that there are some voices within the contemporary debate seemingly arguing in the opposite direction, such as Andrea Gambarotto, who re-proposes Hegel's position on Romantic *Naturphilosophie*: in his reading, the Hegelian proposal results in «a theory of biological individuality in which teleology is understood as internal purposiveness, i.e., autonomous self-organization» (Gambarotto [2018]: XXII).

<sup>21</sup> This general consideration does not imply that the contemporary debate has not offered interesting attempts to naturalize teleology: for example, see Nagel (1979): 276 ff., 298 ff.; Wright (2020): 26 ff., 56 ff. On this topic, see also Bedeau (1991) and Koutroufinis (2013).

- esis der Subjektivität bei Husserl und Freud*, Springer 229, Cham.
- Costa, V., Spinicci, P., Franzini, E., 2002: *La fenomenologia*, Einaudi, Torino.
- Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R., Murdoch, D., 1995: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Desideri, F., 1998: *L'ascolto della coscienza. Una ricerca filosofica*, Feltrinelli, Milano.
- Descartes, R., 1641: *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, in *Œuvres de Descartes*, 13 voll., vol. VII, Ch. Adam & P. Tannery, Vrin, Paris, 1966.
- Doyon, M., 2018: *Husserl on Perceptual Optimality*, "Husserl Studies" 34, pp. 171-189.
- Dretske, F., 1981: *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Fodor, J., 1984: *Semantics Wisconsin Style*, "Synthese" 59, pp. 231-250.
- Fodor, J., 1987: *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Fulford, K.W.M., 2000: *Teleology Without Tears: Naturalism, Neo-Naturalism, and Evaluationism in the Analysis of Function Statements in Biology (and a Bet on the Twenty-First Century)*, "Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology" 7 (1), pp. 77-94.
- Gambarotto, A., 2018: *Vital Forces, Teleology and Organization*, Springer, Cham.
- Ghigi, N., 2017: *L'univocità del senso nella storia dell'umanità. Introduction and translation to E. Husserl: Tre scritti sulla filosofia della storia*, Città Nuova, Roma.
- Heinämaa, S., 2009: *Phenomenological responses to gestalt psychology*, in Heinämaa, S., Reuter, M. (eds.), *Psychology and philosophy*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 263-284.
- Herskovits, M.J., 1955: *Cultural anthropology*, Knopf, New York.
- Huang, D., 2021: *Normativity and Teleology in Husserl's Genetic Phenomenology*, "Husserl Studies" 37 (3), pp. 1-19.
- Husserl, E., 1950: *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Husserliana I, ed. by S. Strasser, Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Husserl, E., 1950a: *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, Husserliana III, ed. by W. Biemel, Nijhoff, Den Haag; transl. by F. Kersten, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy. First Book: general introduction to a pure phenomenology*, Nijhoff, the Hague, 1983.
- Husserl, E., 1952: *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch. Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, Husserliana IV, ed. by W. Biemel, Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Husserl, E., 1954: *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana VI, ed. by W. Biemel, Nijhoff, Den Haag; transl. by D. Carr, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970.
- Husserl, E., 1966: *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten, 1918-1926*, Husserliana XI, ed. by M. Fleischer, Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Husserl, E., 1973: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass, Dritter Teil, 1929-35*, Husserliana XV, ed. by I. Kern, Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Husserl, E., 1973a: *Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907*, Husserliana XVI, ed. by U. Claesges, Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Husserl, E., 1984: *Logische Untersuchungen. Bd. I. Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, Husserliana XIX/1, Niemeyer, Halle.
- Husserl, E., 1985: *Erfahrung und Urteil*, ed. by L. Landgrebe, Meiner, Hamburg.
- Husserl, E., 2002: *Einleitung in die Philosophie: Vorlesungen 1922/23*, Husserliana XXXV, Kluwer, Dordrecht.
- Husserl, E., 2004: *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1893-1912)*, Husserliana XXXVIII, ed. by T. Vongehr, R. Giuliani, Springer, Dordrecht.
- Husserl, E., 2008: *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihre Konstitution. Texte*

- aus dem Nachlass [1916-1937], *Husserliana* XXXIX, ed. by R. Sowa, Springer, Dordrecht.
- Husserl, E., 2014: *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* XLII, ed. by R. Sowa, T. Vongehr, Springer, Dordrecht.
- Kant, I., 1781/1787: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Erste Auflage*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich-Preussische (then: Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 voll., vol. IV, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1903, pp. 1-252; *Zweite Auflage*, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1904.
- Koutroufinis, S., 2013: *Teleodynamics: A neo-naturalistic conception of organismic teleology*, Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (MD).
- Miettinen, T., 2014: *Teleology Beyond Metaphysics: Husserlian Phenomenology and the Historical Consciousness of Modernity*, "The Journal of Speculative Philosophy" 28 (3), pp. 273-283.
- Millikan, R., 1984: *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Millikan, R., 1989: *Biosemanantics*, "Journal of Philosophy" 86, pp. 281-297.
- Millikan, R. G., 1993: *White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Millikan, R., 2004: *Varieties of Meaning*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
- Neander, K., 1999: *Fitness and the Fate of Unicorns*, in Hardcastle, V.G. (ed.), *Where biology meets psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), pp. 3-26.
- Nagel, E., 1979: *Teleology Revisited and Other Essays in the Philosophy and History of Science*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Palette, V., 2018 : *Le donné en question dans la phénoménologie et le néokantisme. Des critiques du positivisme au débat avec Kant*, Springer, Cham.
- Rosenblueth, A., Wiener, N., Bigelow, J., 1943: *Behavior, Purpose and Teleology*, "Philosophy of Science" 10, pp. 18-24.
- Rump, J., 2018: *On the Use and Abuse of Teleology for Life: Intentionality, Naturalism, and Meaning Rationalism in Husserl and Millikan*, "Humana Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies" 11 (34), pp. 41-75.
- Wimsatt, W.C., 1972: *Teleology and the Logical Structure of Function Statements*, "Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science" 3, pp. 1-80.
- Wright, L., 2020: *Teleological explanations*, University of California Press, Oakland (CA).
- Zipoli Caiani, S., 2014: *Mindsets. Conceiving Cognition in Nature*, Mimesis International, Milano.



**Citation:** O. Kiiianlinna (2021) Contradiction That Never Was: Epigenesis versus Modularity in Evolutionary Aesthetics. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 79-91. doi:10.36253/Aisthesis-13054

**Copyright:** © 2021 O. Kiiianlinna. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Contradiction That Never Was: Epigenesis versus Modularity in Evolutionary Aesthetics<sup>1</sup>

ONERVA KIIANLINNA  
University of Helsinki (Finland)  
[onerva.kiiianlinna@helsinki.fi](mailto:onerva.kiiianlinna@helsinki.fi)

**Abstract.** Coevolutionary aesthetics has been forming since the early 2010s. Its contribution of great value has been the inclusion of cultural evolution into Darwinian theories on the origins of art and aesthetic judgement. Coevolutionary aesthetics – or non-modular evolutionary aesthetics as it is sometimes called – emphasizes that aesthetic behavior develops in a specific social environment. Coevolutionary aesthetics suggests that traditional evolutionary aesthetics, drawing from evolutionary psychology, has ignored this. The critical position stems from the widely accepted notions that humans adapt plastically to changing conditions and that there is no «innate» aesthetic module in the mind. What has not been examined is that modularity itself is often considered a condition for plasticity of mind. My main argument is that aesthetic inference is a metarepresentational module without direct fitness-increasing functions. Coevolutionary and evolutionary psychological aesthetics are thus more complementary than contradictory. Combining modular and coevolutionary thinking is the most consistent way forward in evolutionary aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic judgement, Cognitive gadgets, Coevolutionary aesthetics, Modularity of mind, Metarepresentational modules.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Positioning human cognitive and sensory systems in a continuum with those of other animals, it seems intuitive that evolution – amongst other factors – affects the way we arrive at aesthetic judgements, such as «this rose is beautiful». However, there is no consensus on what the impact of evolution exactly means in the case of aesthetic judgements.

The most recent debate concerns how the capability for making aesthetic judgements forms for an individual, and how it is inher-

---

<sup>1</sup> I weave my article into the terminology and discourse of coevolutionary aesthetics by using the term «epigenesis». Here, it refers to environmental factors other than DNA affecting our behavior. It does not directly refer to epigenetics, a field of biology studying the regulation of DNA sequences.



ited without there being «innate» predispositions that are specific for aesthetic behavior. Several scholars have presumed for some while that no single evolutionary adaptation is necessary or sufficient for all instances of aesthetic judgement (Pitkänen [2009]: 18; Chatterjee [2014]; Richards [2019]: 24-29)<sup>2</sup>. Aesthetic behavior may well be a nonadaptive by-product or a collection of different adaptations and exaptations to various environmental conditions, which together with cultural transmission and niche construction enable aesthetic judgement<sup>3</sup>. The scope of coevolutionary aesthetics is to explore this process.

The shared reasoning behind the various arguments in coevolutionary aesthetics goes roughly along the following lines: many kinds of components affect human behavior, some of which we can explain with natural selection and some of which we cannot, but most of which overlap and merge. This can be easily agreed with, and I support Mariagrazia Portera and Mauro Mandrioli (Portera, Mandrioli [2015]: 60-61), who, speaking in favor of overcoming dichotomies like «nature/culture, universalism/relativism, and objectivism/subjectivism», summarize a stand that I believe can be adopted by all in the field of coevolutionary aesthetics. Although I agree with the general plea for non-modular evolutionary aesthet-

<sup>2</sup> Adaptations are traits an organism – or, more specifically, a phenotype – manifests that have been preserved in natural or sexual selection due to a positive fitness value they provide their bearer with over several generations. Positive fitness value refers to better likelihood of survival of the DNA, compared to the DNA of individuals without the trait.

<sup>3</sup> Exaptations are: a) by-products of adaptations, i.e., traits that do not increase fitness, so that it would explain that the trait endures, and b) secondary adaptations, i.e., traits that have been preserved in natural or sexual selection due to a positive fitness value they provide their bearer with, but have after several generations begun to serve a different evolutionary function that also increases the bearer's fitness, which now explains that the trait endures. Niche construction means that the actions of an organism form its environment so that rather than adapting to pre-existing environmental conditions, it participates in creating its own ecological niche.

ics defined as moving away from constructing a strictly adaptationist hypothesis for existing categories of aesthetic behavior, I maintain some reservations.

Before theorizing on the evolutionary history of aesthetic behavior, it is important to clarify what the evolving entity is thought to be. Much effort in coevolutionary aesthetics has been directed at expanding on how there is not an «innate» aesthetic module in the mind with a consistent evolutionary history. Coevolutionary aesthetics positions itself against previous claims that our aesthetic behavior could serve some evolutionary function or be a by-product of such behavior. What has been left out is that the human mind is most likely modular, according to the massive modularity hypothesis from evolutionary psychology<sup>4</sup>. This is so even when there is probably not a specific aesthetic adaptation or instinct.

<sup>4</sup> By «modularity», I do not refer to Jerry Fodor's original thoughts from 1983 but to massive modularity (see, for example, Carruthers [2006]: 1-7). In the latter, modularity means functional specialization instead of a more automatic and rigid system (Barrett, Kurzban [2006]: 629-630). «Fodor-modules» demonstrate domain specificity, mandatory operation, limited central accessibility, fast processing, informational encapsulation, «shallow» outputs, fixed neural architecture, characteristic and specific breakdown patterns, and lastly, characteristic ontogenetic pace and sequencing. Modules in massive modularity, or «Carruthers-modules», in turn, indicate dissociability, weak neural localizability, and central inaccessibility (Robbins [2017]). Besides neatly contrasting the two, Philip Robbins (2017) shows that the concept of module in massive modularity is not only much weaker but that at the same time mind is seen as modular throughout the central systems. In addition to Fodorian narrow-scope information encapsulation, wide-scope encapsulation allows the system at work to utilize some outside information: «the hypothesis at issue for theorists like Carruthers might be best understood as the conjunction of two claims: first, that input systems are modular in a way that requires narrow-scope encapsulation; second, that central systems are modular, but only in a way that does not require this feature» (Robbins [2017]). Modules do not have to be domain-specific, because the subject matter the module can process, its domain, can be flexible while the module's internal operations can be somewhat independent from other systems (Carruthers [2006]: 5).

Massive modularity is a controversial idea and has both advocates and opponents. Even though more research is no doubt needed to settle the debate, I am using it here as a working hypothesis since I have understood it is so far the best explanation for plasticity (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 74). I rely on Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber's conception of a module rather than using it as a synonym for adaptation<sup>5</sup>.

Module means a functional mechanism – such as an anatomical or behavioral trait – with the ability to process certain input in certain environments. It can consist of sub-modules, it can be a sub-module itself, and it can be a part of a group of modules that, in turn, forms a module. Modules do not necessarily have to be products of natural selection, but they can have culturally evolved functions. According to Mercier and Sperber, alongside many others, the modularity of complex organisms is a necessary condition for adaptive flexibility, because modularity allows organisms to plastically actualize different modules and their combinations in different environments (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 73-75). This is so even if the mentioned flexibility is not a sufficient evolutionary explanation for why modularity evolves (Clune, Mouret, Lipson [2013]: 1).

The main claims of this article are threefold: First, I claim that a common premise in evolutionary aesthetics has been that the aesthetic way of inference is an independent entity, a phenomenon whose operating principles cannot be reduced to some more general or any other phenomenon. Second, I claim that evolutionary aesthetics could benefit by better articulating its relation to modularity rather than blacklisting the word and founding a totally unmodular evolutionary aesthetics, which, I suggest, is an oxymoron<sup>6</sup>. Third, I claim

that the mechanism for aesthetic judging can be treated as a metarepresentational module with a possible selectionist history. This means reconceptualizing coevolutionary aesthetics as explicitly utilizing evolutionary psychology. Finally, I briefly explore what strands my argumentation opens up for future research in evolutionary aesthetics.

## 2. CAPACITY FOR AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT AND ITS EVOLUTION

One of the largest common denominators in evolutionary aesthetics is that there is such an entity as an aesthetic way of inference, aesthetic judgement, or taste<sup>7</sup>. Theorizing often starts from the notion that aesthetic judgement is the object of inquiry, as Eveline Seghers describes: «Evolutionary aesthetics attempts to explain the human ability to perceive objects, conspecifics and the surrounding environment in an aesthetic manner – i.e. in an emotional and evaluative way resulting in a positive or negative appraisal – by referring to the evolutionary history of our functional, cognitive make-up» (Seghers [2015b]: 73)<sup>8</sup>.

Although aesthetics as a coherent academic discipline is not an old idea, the conception of aesthetic perception as a coherent whole sits tight in evolutionary aesthetics – even when the aim is not to argue for its coherent evolutionary history

---

not tied to perceptual modules and rigidly defined functions, but is characterized by degrees of freedom and by a native and indeterminate plasticity» (Desideri [2013]: paragraph 20).

<sup>7</sup> While evocriticism can be seen as a part of evolutionary aesthetics, it does not have to take a stance on the matter.

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the scope is more restricted: for example, Stephen Davies only includes judgements concerning beauty, sublime and their counterparts (Davies [2012]: chapter 1). I refrain from the analytical aesthetics' discussion concerning cognitive and emotional aspects of aesthetic judgements. For the purposes of this article, a general statement that emotions are part of cognitive processes suffices. See, for example, Chatterjee and Vartanian (2014): 370-371 for an account of sensory-motor, emotion-valuation, and meaning-knowledge neural systems at play in aesthetic judgement.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Kramnick (2011): 321-322 criticizes literary Darwinism for utilizing the conception that a module answers for an adaptation.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Fabrizio Desideri advocates abandoning modularity in favor of plasticity: «As an alternative, I suggest that the human mind should be rather defined, from a species-specific perspective, appealing to the emergence of the aesthetic as an unmodular device, a device, that is

(see, for example, Dutton [2009]: 206; Schellekens [2011]; Davies [2020]: 70). This is characteristic for the philosophical discussion in evolutionary aesthetics and also many empirical experiments in cognitive aesthetics and neuroaesthetics. For example, the possibility of humans and chimpanzees sharing a similar «aesthetic sense» is sometimes used as grounds for the argument that further comparative studies are worthwhile to shed light on the evolutionary history of the human trait of making aesthetic judgements (Seghers [2014]: 270-271).

Could evolutionary aesthetics' underlying view on one aesthetic inference<sup>9</sup> – in Seghers's words, «an emotional and evaluative way resulting in a positive or negative appraisal» – be false? Inspiration for such skepticism can be found in empirical aesthetics. Martin Skov and Marcos Nadal suggest that the idea of psychologically or neurobiologically specific and special aesthetic experiential states – for example, aesthetic emotions as a different group from other types of emotions – is an unfounded assumption (Skov, Nadal [2019]: 2). Having said this, universality of the appearance of aesthetic objects, and hence aesthetic judgements, has often been articulated during the course of evolutionary aesthetics (for example, Deacon [2006]: 22; Malotki, Dissanayake [2018]: 47; Davies [2020]); therefore, it is understandable, and even advisable, that scholars start speculating why this is so. However, is there any reason to assume common evolutionary history of a skill behind all aesthetic judgements, even if it had little to do with natural selection?

Elisabeth Schellekens (2011) points out the common, and justified, concern that in empirical

studies, aesthetics' concepts can be used carelessly, even leaving their core aspects out. The same plea for conceptual openness also applies to the way philosophers use their own concepts and construct new ones in evolutionary aesthetics. When studying universal aesthetic judgements, scholars rely on both the concepts and epistemologies from the contemporary framework for academic thought. This distorts imagining different possibilities and might already steer the scholars away from how the human mind has evolved (Dissanayake [2018]: 116). One such distortion could be the very notion of aesthetic judgement, and the conception that its mechanism is uniform in all cases grouped as aesthetic.

Scratching beneath the surface, what exactly is being explained in evolutionary aesthetics seems hard to reduce to necessary and sufficient conditions. Alongside singular aesthetic judgements that come and go, examination focuses on the potentiality of them as a universal human trait. I follow Schellekens (2011) and speak about aesthetic judgements rather than aesthetic experiences, because aesthetic experiences can be even harder to define accurately. I do not deny the existence or relevance of aesthetic experience in our inner worlds per se but here leave the concept out for the sake of clarity. I see aesthetic judgements as a way of inference, similarly as Mercier and Sperber see reasoning as one way of inference. According to Mercier and Sperber, justifications *follow* a conclusion in the process of reasoning (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 125-126). It resembles aesthetic judgements in that experience comes first, followed by a judgement. I will return to this process later in this article.

The capacity for aesthetic judgements, aesthetic sensibility, should not be seen as a static trait of the subject disconnected from environmental impact. Evolutionary aesthetics does not concern an individual mind or its capacity to take in sensory input at the expense of the aesthetic object. Rather, the objective of evolutionary aesthetics depends on both environment – including the social one – and the subject as an interactive mesh (for a similar account, see Desideri [2015]: 35). It

---

<sup>9</sup> By «aesthetic inference», I refer to the process of forming aesthetic judgements in humans. The reason I use these somewhat overlapping two terms is that my argumentation relies on cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. Mercier and Sperber (2017): 53-54, 59, adopt the wide Humean definition of «inference» as «[...] extraction of new information from information already available, whatever the process» that can be deliberate, automatic, or anything in-between and that is typical for all cognitive systems.

does not get us far to ponder if we should explain mind or aesthetic cultures as behavior, either. Their interaction has become so evident that by virtue of its office, *aesthetic inference with accompanying metacognitive intuitions* are evolutionary aesthetics' sphere<sup>10</sup>. Aesthetic judgement as a product of aesthetic inference is not computing and conserving the surroundings «as they are», but inherently involves interpreting and creating meanings, without the judging being either automatic or deliberate. How this mechanism emerges for each individual is largely shaped by culture.

Hence, I fully endorse the program to incorporate more factors into evolutionary aesthetics by coevolutionary aesthetics. Coevolutionary aesthetics adopts a plea for epistemic modesty as it broadens the explanatory frameworks from adaptationist thinking. It argues for a more holistic – in my reading, more consilient – approach, as it hopes to include knowledge not only from natural sciences to aesthetics but also from analogies and humanities in evolutionary hypotheses. In addition to the existing outline, theories on cultural transmission and social learning strategies will complement the move to coevolutionary aesthetics (Verpooten, Dewitte [2017]: 20-21; Kiiianlinna [2018]: 62-68; Bartalesi [2019]). At the same time, I remain reserved toward the rhetoric that this would or should be a turn *away* from evolutionary psychology, as coevolutionary aesthetics often positions itself. For example, Portera and Bartalesi position themselves against evolutionary psychology in evolutionary aesthetics by opposing a strong innateness of aesthetic cognition and appealing to the uselessness of the nature/nurture dichotomy: «We will argue that the EP and EA way of understanding the relationship between nature and culture – *nature* being innate and universal and *culture* being acquired, local, and contingent – is not the best way to try to explain the

development of *aesthetic preferences*» (Portera, Bartalesi [2016]: 380).

Portera and Bartalesi highlight the dichotomy evolutionary psychology versus environmental impact. Although I agree with that there is a good reason to move on from and enrich strictly nativist views in evolutionary aesthetics<sup>11</sup>, I find that Portera and Bartalesi paint an unnecessarily divaricate caricature of the mainstream evolutionary aesthetics scholars by stating they value adaptations higher than anything else affecting an aesthetic judgement:

*evolutionary psychologists – whose perspective currently prevails within the field of evolutionary aesthetics – conceive sexual and environmental preferences as innate, universal and species-specific, a sort of «universal basement» compared to which cultural differences are no more than superficial accidents. (Portera, Bartalesi [2016]: 384)*

I take up a counterexample from a major branch of evolutionary aesthetics focusing on storytelling. According to literary Darwinist Joseph Carroll, claiming that evolutionary psychology ignores anything else but adaptations is an unhappy misunderstanding, which requires constructing an erroneous view that learnt behavior and evolutionarily adaptive behavior could be separated from each other (Carroll [2012]: 408). «Nature» and «nurture» are not separate from each other, despite the common language dichotomy Portera and Bartalesi refer to as an erroneous basis of evolutionary aesthetics. Learning and learnt things are necessarily part of evolutionary thinking. There is no measure that allows comparing if vague «genes» or «environment» are primary for the realization of any behavior or cognitive mechanism, because these are not separable causes (Keller [2010]: 6, 75). All scholars can do is to study different factors influencing the behavior or mechanism in question – in this case, the capacity of forming aesthetic judgements – and at best position it in a continuum based on the level of

<sup>10</sup> Mercier and Sperber define intuitions, or intuitive inference, as «[...] the output of a great variety of inferential modules, the output of which is to some degree conscious while their operations remain unconscious» (Mercier and Sperber [2017]: 133).

<sup>11</sup> Denis Dutton (2009): 206 is an example of a nativist thinker in evolutionary aesthetics.

its malleability in the course of maturing (Keller [2010]: 82; Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 69).

Evolutionary psychology would be hard to discard, as in many cases it offers explanations for the cognitive systems that affect the way we gather and process inferences (Sperber [2001]: 402). Concerning evolved cognition, an evolutionary aesthetics explanation inevitably touches upon these systems. Learning capabilities produced by evolution are an important factor when explaining our cultural behavior and how culture shapes us: what we can learn, what kinds of things we can transmit culturally, and in what kinds of environments we tend to rely on different learning strategies. Thus, I agree with Seghers, for example, that although the traditional evolutionary psychological studies of art are not only highly partial but often also lacking sufficient empirical evidence, evolutionary psychology itself is valid as an approach (see Seghers [2015a]: 233).

The turn away from evolutionary psychology is justified by pointing out that when it comes to aesthetic judgements, the human mind is most likely *not* modular in the way evolutionary psychologists claim; there is no aesthetic module (Portera, Mandrioli [2015]: 59). However, the claims concerning modularity are based on different uses of the concept of module. Critics of evolutionary psychology often oppose that there would be a determined art (form) module in the human mind; mind is not constructed like a Swiss army knife, where artistic activity would be but one more corkscrew in the overall package. What is interesting is that the other side seems to agree. As already stated, many contemporary scholars using evolutionary psychology in their research on art actually advocate for the plastic mind prone to adapting to changing environmental conditions – rather than consisting of cognitive modules fit for only some singular activity, like artmaking. Some evolutionary psychologists reckon that plasticity of mind in fact results from and therefore relies on modularity (Barrett, Kurzban [2006]: 635; Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 74). In other words, coevolutionary aesthetics seems to be based on modularity in a broad sense insofar as it concerns behavioral

dispositions relevant for aesthetics, regardless of whether they are inbred or acquired.

Analyzing the development of all aesthetic preferences that influence and guide our aesthetic judgements is a rigorous task because they do not develop in unison. Some aesthetic preferences are individual, some coincidental, some universal, and some have to do with a unique cultural environment. Most fall into multiple classes at the same time. Factors that play into a specific aesthetic judgement are manifold, as they are not only sensory stimuli or perceptual input; also, an individual's homeostatic needs, expectations, and behavioral concerns shape the output (Skov, Nadal [2019]: 8). There is no aesthetic judgement that would be purely biological, purely cultural, purely subjective, or purely objective.

Although we may on average have tendencies for certain kinds of aesthetic reactions, an aesthetic judgement is also affected by other factors. Evolutionary aesthetics has room for mapping out all kinds of factors affecting aesthetic judgements and their universality, diversity, and changing in time. If some of these factors are more directly connected to natural selection than others, this by no means denotes that they are theoretically more important or trivial than the rest. With humans being an ultrasocial species, it would be surprising if a certain kind of aesthetic judgement could only be explained by an evolutionary hypothesis without any support of culturally transmitted values, learnt habits, or historically specific processes. The explanation in evolutionary aesthetics concerns phenotypes, or the way an organism functions in its environment rather than merely its DNA and the proteins DNA codes.

In a nutshell, the omission to acknowledge the wide and contemporary definition of a module leads to puzzling theoretical positions. For Portera (2020): 313 – who positions herself in the same group as Fabrizio Desideri, namely, non-modular evolutionary aesthetics – there seems to exist an aesthetic sense or disposition no matter how diverse and unique its development is. Both claim that there is an aesthetic behavioral disposition and argue for plasticity of this tendency. There-

fore, although Portera positions herself against modularity, it is upon modularity that she builds her thesis. Desideri in turn, uses the notion of an «aesthetic device», drawing on Terrence Deacon's ideas, and speaks about the «unitary core of our aesthetic experience» (Desideri [2013]: paragraph 20)<sup>12</sup>. So, is there an aesthetic module after all?

### 3. FORMING AESTHETIC JUDGEMENTS AS A METAREPRESENTATIONAL MODULE

The traditional category of an underlying aesthetic sense or sensibility seems obscure from an empirical point of view. Neuroaesthetics has illustrated that specifically aesthetic receptors, emotions, and cognition do not exist from the physiological viewpoint, but various neural systems activate flexibly in experiences described as aesthetic (Chatterjee [2014]: 183-184).

Perhaps, then, all aesthetic judgements do not share the same evolutionary aspects, but in the evolutionary sense they might be less related. Here, aesthetic judgement would be treated as a philosophical concept, not a specific inferential mechanism, and explanation would be focused on particular judgements. Rather than talking about an «aesthetic mechanism», «aesthetic sense», or «art instinct» (see, for example, Davies [2020]: 70; Dutton [2009]: 7), evolutionary aesthetics might be better off looking at other – and from the viewpoint of aesthetics, narrower – modules, such as imagination or perceiving symmetry with larger domains than that of aesthetics. The same would apply to more restricted accounts of some behaviors traditionally seen as entities, which does not mean that they would be natural entities from the evolutionary viewpoint.

---

<sup>12</sup> See also Desideri (2015): 35: «[...] we cannot identify the aesthetic mechanism with a particular faculty or a specific function and, even less, we can locate it in a single area of the brain. We have to think, rather, of a blending between different attitudes of dispositional nature. A non-modular device that can synthesize these attitudes in an original and advantageous way, moving from attractors or affordances offered by the environment».

In other words, all evolutionary aesthetics could do was to provide knowledge consisting of several significantly smaller contributions to much more specific instances or modules than have traditionally been studied in the field, such as art or aesthetic judgement as an entity. Also, some aesthetic qualities<sup>13</sup>, such as beauty, may be hard to incorporate in evolutionary aesthetics as such. Being used as a very wide description, the possibility that evolutionary theory anachronistically explains something else than beauty as a category increases. Moreover, treating beauty as an evolutionary category and not only a philosophical one may not make sense because different experiences of beauty are processed in different parts of the brain (Chatterjee [2014]: 65-66)<sup>14</sup>.

Focusing on other categories than beauty, one can still embrace the existence of specifically aesthetic behavior (for example, appreciation of beauty) as a human universal; the principal object of inquiry – aesthetic inference – remains. Leaving some core aesthetics concepts without an evolutionary history of their own might save the thinking *within* evolutionary aesthetics from unnecessarily constructing yet another mental module. If anything, this brings evolutionary aesthetics into closer cooperation with its neighboring fields, including philosophical aesthetics and neuroaesthetics. It opens up the exchange both ways, not

---

<sup>13</sup> For the sake of clarity and curbing the topic at hand, I speak about aesthetic qualities rather than aesthetic value. Many of the references employed use the term «aesthetic value», and therefore it appears in this article. For my purposes, however, it suffices to note that aesthetic qualities often indicate aesthetic value – which differs from artistic value since not all aesthetic judgements concern art, and art can also be judged in other than aesthetic terms – without going into too much detail about the extensive philosophical discussion concerning aesthetic value itself.

<sup>14</sup> However, theorizing about perceiving perennial aesthetic properties would still not be doomed per se, because we use the same cognition for different things. This becomes evident, for example, in Angela Breitenbach's (2020) argumentation for imagination as the same mental activity at play in both perceiving beauty and reaching cognitive understanding.

only borrowing concepts from other fields but also, ideally, contributing to them.

The role of an evolutionary aesthetics explanation would then be to map out already existing modules at play in a given aesthetic judgement, see how they are articulated, and finally form a picture that has been of interest for aesthetics: why does it seem so central for us as a species to care so much about aesthetic qualities. To put it in the words of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science, aesthetic judgements may operate at the level of virtual rather than real domains, which would make finding the core unity of an aesthetic mechanism difficult. Yet, next I proceed to argue that there is a way forward with maintaining that aesthetic judgement employs a group of more specialized skills.

According to Mercier and Sperber (2017): 81, representations of certain regularities in the world provide information about facts or goals. Modules that function for providing representations of representations are in turn called metarepresentational modules. They perform inferences from certain types of input: «The representation of a regularity doesn't *do* anything by itself, but it provides a premise that may be exploited by a variety of inferential procedures. A dedicated procedure *does something*: given an appropriate input, it produces an inferential output» (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 87).

Metarepresentational modules are virtually domain-general because inferences can be about anything. This fits well with the case of aesthetics, where judgements vary from artifacts to nature, from the sense of the everyday to tact in human communications. Most often, inferences concern classifications (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 91-93). Here, respectively, inferring aesthetic qualities are the focus.

Another notion about metarepresentational modules that fits well with aesthetics is that metarepresentational modules are not about the world in general but have smaller real domains – in the case of aesthetics, aesthetic qualities. Aesthetic judgement feeds on aesthetic qualities that can be seen as types of representations, by defini-

tion, containing meaning (for representations, see Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 92-93).

I suggest that aesthetic judgements can be seen as a way of intuitive inference in the same way that Mercier and Sperber see reasoning, namely, as another metarepresentational module (90). Mercier and Sperber's argumentation describes the metarepresentational module at work by clarifying the relationship between intuitions of explanations and the things being explained:

1. Our intuitions about good and bad explanations are not the same as our intuitions about the things explained.
2. Our intuitions about explanations exploit properties such as cogency, generality, or coherence that are properties of the explanations themselves and not of things explained.
3. Our intuitions about explanations (which make us prefer good explanations) is nevertheless a major source of insight about the things explained. (103).

I analogically combine this model, which illustrates metarepresentational modules performing inferences, with theories on aesthetic value, or what Fabian Dorsch calls «a standard picture» (Dorsch [2014]: 77)<sup>15</sup>. It means a view that differentiates between nonaesthetic features or lower-aesthetic qualities (such as color) and aesthetic qualities (such as beauty), relating to each other so that the former define the latter (see, for example, Sibley [1965]: 137-139; Levinson [1996]: 6)<sup>16</sup>. Treating forming aesthetic judgements as a

<sup>15</sup> «According to a standard picture, aesthetic values are realized by aesthetic qualities, which are again realized by non-aesthetic properties (see, e.g. Sibley [1965/2001] and [1959/2001]; Budd [1999]; Zangwill [2001])». Rather than tripartite categorization, I only use a two-step one, as noted above.

<sup>16</sup> I speak about lower-level aesthetic properties rather than nonaesthetic properties for the following reason. In contrast with Jerrold Levinson, Robert Stecker thinks aesthetic quality stems from lower-level aesthetic properties directly (for example, in the case of appreciating a sunset; see Stecker [2019]: 24). Stephen Davies would agree (Davies [2012]: chapter 1). This does not need to be a problem here, because even when «low-level perceptual features» constitute aesthetic qualities, aesthetic infer-

metarepresentational module is not saying that aesthetic judgements go back to specific preconditions of the object but only that they – as perceived by the individual at a certain place and time – are used as grounds for aesthetic judgements. In other words, I am talking about aesthetic sensibility understood in the way John Bender proposes – as the ability to «identify certain features, properties, or relations of a work as being aesthetically significant, i.e., as either being value-making or value-lowering» – as a metarepresentational module (see Bender [2001]: 74).

Finally, relating the philosophical argumentation to forming a representation of a representation proceeds as follows:

1. Our intuitions about good or bad explications (about lower-level aesthetic properties) are not the same as our intuitions about the lower-level aesthetic properties.
2. Our intuitions about aesthetic qualities exploit lower-level aesthetic properties – and in the case of aesthetic appreciation of systems, knowledge – that need not match aesthetic qualities: according to aesthetic holism, depending on the instance, the same lower-level aesthetic property may indicate either aesthetic quality or the lack of it.
3. Our intuitions about the lower-level aesthetic properties are nevertheless a major source of insight about aesthetic quality.

Another way to conceptualize the aesthetic metarepresentational module that performs aesthetic inferences is to look at a case of aesthetic judgement. When I form the judgement «this rose is beautiful», I derive it with the help of oth-

---

ence is at play. We do not merely compute and register features but process them as aesthetic qualities, although they could also be treated as mere classificatory perceptual qualities. It is important to note that my aim is not to divorce aesthetic judgements from direct sensory experiences. Quite the contrary, inference comes with perception; we cannot help it (for inference in perception in more detail, see Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 57-60). Inferential processes vary in how fast they are and how much effort they require (59). Aesthetic judgements, therefore, need not be explicitly formed in order to be inferences.

er modules, such as smell, perceiving symmetry and color, and feeling smoothness and softness by touch. The actual normative aesthetic judgement stands for the «meta-level» of this process revolving around classification. Making the inference is most often, if not always, largely intuitive, meaning that we cannot access the exact principles of the process (Dorsch [2014]: 83-84). Quoting Merlin Donald (2001): 178: «There is simply *no* direct awareness of the brain's activity and no possibility of achieving it. Brain activity is the end of the line. It is the source, never the object, of direct experience»<sup>17</sup>.

Treating forming aesthetic judgements as a metarepresentational module means giving up aesthetic empiricism. Aesthetic empiricism holds, Dorsch (2014: 75) points out, «that empirical evidence may – and often does – suffice to provide defeasible justification for our first or higher-order aesthetic judgements», whereas I claim that the process involves meta-level inference that is not totally reducible to modules such as perceiving symmetry. I am thus closer to aesthetic rationalism, according to which perceiving aesthetic properties requires cognitive inference – or, in other words, processing empirical features instead of only registering them (Dorsch [2014]: 78)<sup>18</sup>. The ways in which metarepresentational modules work describes this intuitive inferential procedure and thus offers support for aesthetic rationalism.

To recap, the processing system at work in aesthetic judgements may be a metarepresentational module as a functional part of the ensemble of other metarepresentational modules or it may

---

<sup>17</sup> Mercier and Sperber note the same issue and add that it is a common illusion to assume that the process of inference is directly available to the subject. This is the very reason why empirical methods defend their ground – although not overriding the philosophical approach – in aesthetics (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 59, 115).

<sup>18</sup> Dorsch proceeds to take a normative stand on «the best method for the recognition of many aesthetic qualities, and more or less all aesthetic values» from the viewpoint of aesthetic rationalism (Dorsch [2014]: 96). I do not espouse this particular statement, since the issue is beyond the scope of this article.



consist of several metarepresentational modules that activate according to different stimuli in different cases of aesthetic judgement (for example, when experiencing music on one hand and tact on the other). Metarepresentational modules have large, even general, virtual domains whose real domains are smaller than what has been anticipated in evolutionary aesthetics focusing on studying aesthetic judgements as instincts, not mechanisms (for virtual domain-generality, see Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 104-105). The contribution of all of this for evolutionary aesthetics is that hence it is possible to maintain the idea of a domain-general «aesthetic mechanism»<sup>19</sup> producing multi-modal and elastic aesthetic schemes without direct fitness-increasing functions *and* base this understanding on evolutionary psychology, that is, combining cultural evolution with modularity.

Lastly, I sketch some future directions in coevolutionary aesthetics and draw an analogy to reading as being modular but not a genetic evolutionary adaptation. Aesthetic judgement, too, may belong to modules produced by practice: it could have developed either so that habit and experience shape it to appear as having specialized from some other evolved system or so that there is developmental specialization into different modules phenotypically, although it still utilizes the same evolved system (for reading capability, see Barrett, Kurzban [2006]: 639). It is an important topic of further investigation if the mechanism of aesthetic judgement is, like that of reading, not a cognitive

---

<sup>19</sup> Desideri describes this mechanism: «[b]ecause of its epigenetic nature, the mechanism by which an aesthetic mind arises is conceivable as an operative sub-structure capable of producing schemes (patterns) that have neither the fluidity of the emotional-affective schemes nor the articulation in specific categorical domains that characterizes the cognitive schemes. Compared to the affective and cognitive schemes, the aesthetic ones are elastic, multimodal, and lacking a specific domain. Their internal differentiation is based on the relevance and the role assumed in them, jointly or separately, by each of the four moments (mimesis, seeking, preference, and play). Thanks to its internal differentiation, the aesthetic mechanism holds degrees of freedom relative to both its functioning and development» (Desideri [2015]: 36-37).

instinct but a cognitive gadget shaped by a culturally inherited and individually unique route construction (Heyes [2018]: 19-20). How aesthetic judgements develop in the course of coevolution with aesthetic objects indicates that the capacity for aesthetic judgement may be a product of cultural evolution. This is what I think Portera is after when claiming that there is no innate psychological module for the aesthetic capacity (see Portera [2020]: 313). The argument is backed up by demonstrating the wealth rather than the poverty of stimulus in acquiring the mechanism from the environment – a case she advocates herself. Like the rest of metacognition, it is possible this mechanism is not only culturally transmitted but also even refined for the purpose by cultural rather than natural selection (Heyes, Bang, Shea, Frith, Fleming [2020]: 351-352).

Regarding reasoning, the module does not motivate but only explains and justifies intuitions (Mercier, Sperber [2017]: 112). Consequently, I suggest that the aesthetic module does not work to make us experience aesthetically – and here I distinctly part from the majority of earlier evolutionary aesthetics – but only to construct aesthetic judgements. This being the case, the focal point for future research could be in aesthetic judgement as a cognitive module, not as a genetic adaptation. Some of the recent neuroaesthetics research echoes Kant in hypothesizing that an aesthetic experience activates systems of «liking» instead of «wanting» (Chatterjee, Vartanian [2014]: 372)<sup>20</sup>. The consequence and product of aesthetic experience should be differentiated so that the latter only concerns the stimulus perception instead of gravitating toward pleasant stimuli:

---

<sup>20</sup> This is an interesting opening in empirical aesthetics, because the roots of naturalism and hence also evolutionary aesthetics have been in *opposing* the Kantian idea of aesthetic engagement for its own sake, separate from other purposes – and some philosophical aesthetics researchers have had concerns about applying empirical knowledge to aesthetics because they find it to be discarding the independence of the aesthetic. For an article discussing the Kantian autonomy of aesthetic judgements and empirical aesthetics, see Schellekens (2011).

«[...]modulation of neural activity in reward, perceptual and motor areas during aesthetic experience and positive attitudes to stimuli may not so much be segregated in their neuroanatomical organization, but rather in their temporal dynamics and ultimate outcome» (Kirsch, Urgesi, Cross [2016]: 65).

However, an explanation about how the module for aesthetic judgement evolves would only follow the clarification of what the capacity for aesthetic judgement is, rather than assuming it is a genetic adaptation for favoring positive stimuli and avoiding the negative. Cecilia Heyes lists that a selectionist theory for a cognitive mechanism needs a hypothesis on: «(1) the entities that are evolving; (2) the routes of their inheritance; and (3) the kinds of social learning that provide an inheritance system» (Heyes [2018]: 37). I have only touched upon the first and glanced at the second item. Even so, the article at hand has laid out a reason to believe the capacity for aesthetic judgement is a promising candidate for being a) a cognitive mechanism with b) a selectionist history.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article is part of the ongoing paradigm shift in evolutionary aesthetics: moving away from the traditional research questions, such as whether aesthetic sensibility has been preserved in natural selection, or what function what we see as artistic behavior has served in the Pleistocene. As answers to these questions have become more and more agnostic, new research questions emerge. They concern mechanisms alongside with skills<sup>21</sup>. Evolutionary aesthetics should not ask whether we make aesthetic judgements because of evolution but what evolutionary factors influence aesthetic inference, the judgements we make about aesthetic qualities. For some behavioral trait to evolve, it

does not matter whether it is genetically inherited or not. Making aesthetic judgements entails both our cognitive systems being at work and them working in a certain kind of an environment, including that of the body itself and our previous experiences.

I have argued that speaking of aesthetic inference as an evolutionary entity is problematic. The scope of research questions in evolutionary aesthetics widens as what was once known as aesthetic instinct becomes an aesthetic niche (Menary [2014]; Richards [2019]; Portera [2020]). I have claimed that the idea of totally unmodular evolutionary aesthetics is an oxymoron, and the juxtaposition of coevolutionary aesthetics (that emphasizes plasticity and the role of environment in the development of aesthetic inference) versus evolutionary psychology (that relies on looking at «innate» modules) is disproportional. As I have shown, it is possible to treat aesthetic inference as a metarepresentational module without seeing it as a coherent mechanism or having direct fitness-increasing functions. This is a new – and I hope – consolidating contribution to an emerging division that is not so much due to actual disagreement but different, or at least blurred, uses of the concept of «module». If this gap can be bridged – and I think it can – the best parts of both approaches can be picked and combined: evolutionary psychology offers insight into cognitive systems and, more specifically, the evolutionary adaptations, such as plasticity, that are typical for humans. Coevolutionary aesthetics, in turn, offers means to include more comprehensively than what has been previously done in evolutionary aesthetics ever-changing factors that characterize aesthetic inference and how it is inherited.

In short, contrary to what David Fishelov among others claims, the common ground of all evolutionary approaches to art research is not an assumption that art or a certain art form would be adaptive (see Fishelov [2017]: 274). I propose that the common ground is – as surprising as it might seem considering the impending partition between evolutionary psychology and coevolutionary aesthetics – modularity. Acknowledging

<sup>21</sup> Heyes uses a metaphor of mills for mechanisms and grist for skills – including ideas and behaviors – and claims that adding cultural evolution to evolutionary psychology makes it more apparent that some mechanisms, too, are inherited socially (see Heyes [2018]: 44).

that modularity of mind and cultural evolution are complementary brings evolutionary aesthetics closer to both contemporary, or cultural, evolutionary psychology and humanities. Despite the fact that openings have been made, it still remains to be studied more carefully what skills the capacity for aesthetic judgement exploit and link together, what its developmental process is, and how cultural – or social – learning influences the development and functioning of the mechanism<sup>22</sup>.

#### REFERENCES

- Barrett, H., Kurzban, R., 2006: *Modularity in Cognition: Framing the Debate*, “Psychological review” 113 (3), pp. 628-647.
- Bartalesi, L., 2019: *From the aesthetic mind to the human cultures: Towards an anthropology of aesthetic*, “Aisthesis” 12 (1), pp. 15-26.
- Bender, J.W., 2001: *Sensitivity, Sensibility, and Aesthetic Realism*, “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism” 59 (1), pp. 73-83.
- Breitenbach, A., 2020: *One Imagination in Experiences of Beauty and Achievements of Understanding*, “The British Journal of Aesthetics” 60 (1), pp. 71-88.
- Carroll, J., 2012: *An Open Letter to Jonathan Kramnick*, “Critical Inquiry” 38 (2), pp. 405-410.
- Carruthers, P., 2006: *The Architecture of the Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Chatterjee, A., 2014: *The Aesthetic Brain: How We Evolved to Desire Beauty and Enjoy Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Chatterjee, A., Vartanian, O., 2014: *Neuroaesthetics*, “Trends in cognitive sciences” 18 (7), pp. 370-375.
- Clune, J., Mouret, J-B., Lipson, H., 2013: *The Evolutionary Origins of Modularity*, “Proceedings of the Royal Society. B, Biological sciences” 280 (1755), pp. 1-9.
- Davies, S., 2012: *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.
- Davies, S., 2020: *Adornment: What Self-decoration Tells Us about Who We Are*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Deacon, T., 2006: *The Aesthetic Faculty*, in Turner, M. (ed.), *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 21-53.
- Desideri, F., 2013: *On the Epigenesis of the Aesthetic Mind. The Sense of Beauty from Survival to Supervenience*, “Rivista di estetica” 54 (3), pp. 63-82.
- Desideri, F., 2015: *Epigenesis and Coherence of the Aesthetic Mechanism*, “Aisthesis. Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico” 8 (1), pp. 25-40.
- Dissanayake, E., 2018: *Ancestral Minds and the Spectrum of Symbol*, in Malotki, E., Dissanayake, E. (eds.), *Early Rock Art of the American West: The Geometric Enigma*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, pp. 91-129.
- Donald, M., 2001: *A Mind so Rare: the Evolution of Human Consciousness*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Dorsch, F., 2014: *The Limits of Aesthetic Empiricism*, in Currie, G., Kieran, M., Meskin, A., Robson, J. (eds.), *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 75-100.
- Dutton, D., 2009: *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Fishelov, D., 2017: *Evolution and Literary Studies: Time to Evolve*, “Philosophy and Literature” 41 (2), pp. 272-289.

<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to Arto Haapala, Petri Ylikoski, Emma Vitikainen; Alexis Makin, and others at the Visual Perception (Bertamini) Lab at the University of Liverpool; Minna Lyons, Sanna Lehtinen, and Hanne Appelqvist for their feedback, discussion, and, not least, encouragement, which have been pivotal for creating this article. I would also like to thank everyone at the University of Helsinki Aesthetics researcher seminar; the Nordic Society for Aesthetics 2021 Conference, especially Oiva Kuisma; the European Society for Aesthetics 2021 Conference; and the International Society for Human Ethology 2021 Conference; as well as the anonymous reviewer for their invaluable insight. I am grateful for Albion Butters and Bradley Reynolds for editing my English grammar. Finally yet importantly, I am thankful to the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters who funded me during work on this article.

- Heyes, C., 2018: *Cognitive Gadgets: The Cultural Evolution of Thinking*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Heyes, C., Bang, D., Shea, N., Frith, C.D., Fleming, S.M., 2020: *Knowing Ourselves Together: The Cultural Origins of Metacognition*, "Trends in Cognitive Sciences" 24(5), pp. 349-362.
- Keller, E.F., 2010: *The Mirage of a Space between Nature and Nurture*, Duke University Press, Durham & London.
- Kiianlinna, O., 2018: *Valinnasta välittymiseen. Voidaanko kulttuuri evoluution ajatusta soveltaa evoluutioestetiikkaan?*, Master's thesis, University of Helsinki.
- Kirsch, L.P., Urgesi, C., Cross, E.S., 2016: *Shaping and Reshaping the Aesthetic Brain: Emerging Perspectives on the Neurobiology of Embodied Aesthetics*, "Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews" 62, pp. 56-68.
- Kramnick, J., 2011: *Against Literary Darwinism*, "Critical Inquiry" 37 (2), pp. 315-347.
- Levinson, J., 1996: *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Malotki, E., Dissanayake, E. (eds.), 2018: *Early Rock Art of the American West: The Geometric Enigma*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Menary, R., 2014: *The Aesthetic Niche*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 54 (4), pp. 471-475.
- Mercier, H., Sperber, D., 2017: *The Enigma of Reason: a New Theory of Human Understanding*, Penguin Books, London, 2018.
- Pitkänen, R., 2009: *Miten evoluutio selittää esteettisiä mieltymyksiä*, "Tieteessä tapahtuu" 27 (2), pp. 15-22.
- Portera, M., Mandrioli, M., 2015: *Tastes of the Parents: Epigenetics and its Role in Evolutionary Aesthetics*, "Evental Aesthetics" 4 (2), pp. 46-76.
- Portera, M., Bartalesi, L., 2016: *Aesthetic Preferences: An Evolutionary Approach*, in Serrelli, E., Panebianco, F. (eds.), *Understanding Cultural Traits: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Cultural Diversity*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 375-388.
- Portera, M., 2020: *Babies Rule! Niches, Scaffoldings, and the Development of an Aesthetic Capacity in Humans*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 60 (3), pp. 299-314.
- Richards, R., 2019: *The Biology of Art (Elements in the Philosophy of Biology)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Robbins, P., 2017: *Modularity of Mind*, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/modularity-mind/>.
- Schellekens, E., 2011: *Experiencing the Aesthetic: Kantian Autonomy or Evolutionary Biology?*, in Schellekens, E., Goldie, P. (eds.), *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy & Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, chapter 12.
- Seghers, E., 2014: *Cross-Species Comparison in the Evolutionary Study of Art: A Cognitive Approach to the Ape Art Debate*, "Review of General Psychology" 18 (4), pp. 263-272.
- Seghers, E., 2015a: *The Artful Mind: A Critical Review of the Evolutionary Psychological Study of Art*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 55 (2), pp. 225-248.
- Seghers E., 2015b: *Of Darwin and Other Demons: the Evolutionary Turn in Aesthetics*, "Kultuura-Spoleczeństwo-Edukacja" 2 (8), pp. 73-90.
- Sibley, F., 1965: *Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic*, "The Philosophical Review" 74 (2), pp. 135-159.
- Skov, M., Nadal, M., 2019: *The Nature of Perception and Emotion in Aesthetic Appreciation: A Response to Makin's Challenge to Empirical Aesthetics*, "Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts" 15 (3), pp. 470-483.
- Sperber, D., 2001: *An Evolutionary Perspective on Testimony and Argumentation*, "Philosophical Topics" 29 (1&2), pp. 401-413.
- Stecker, R., 2019: *Intersections of Value: Art, Nature, and the Everyday*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Verpooten, J., Dewitte, S., 2017: *The Conundrum of Modern Art: Prestige-Driven Coevolutionary Aesthetics Trumps Evolutionary Aesthetics among Art Experts*, "Human Nature" 28 (1), pp. 16-38.





**Citation:** B. Santini (2021) Teleologia come via per la religione. Hölderlin e l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 93-100. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13214

**Copyright:** © 2021 B. Santini. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Teleologia come via per la religione. Hölderlin e l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio

### Teleology as a way to religion. Hölderlin and the antinomy of judgement

BARBARA SANTINI

Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy)  
barbara.santini@unipd.it

**Abstract.** The paper discusses Hölderlin's reading of the Kantian antinomy of the faculty of judgement from a letter to Hegel in January 1795. Its meaning is first explored in relation to a kind of distinctiveness that Hölderlin recognizes to the solution of the antinomy, to the point of considering it the place where the entire spirit of the Kantian system comes to the fore. Secondly, the prototypical role of the antinomy of the faculty of judgement for the other antinomies is shown according to a feature they share in the way in which they are solved. The aim of the paper is to bring out the distinctive feature of Hölderlin's theoretical confrontation with the *Critique of teleological judgement* as a task and orientation of Hölderlin's philosophical commitment itself, which understands Kant's efforts from a different perspective than the one of his contemporaries.

**Keywords:** Hölderlin, Kant, Antinomy of judgement, Teleology, Religion.

---

A fine gennaio 1795 Hölderlin scrive a Hegel una lettera estremamente significativa sotto il profilo filosofico che rappresenta, per la densità delle riflessioni teoretiche, l'andamento e la tessitura dei passaggi tematici e le categorie concettuali impiegate, una delle testimonianze decisive del lavoro interpretativo e speculativo del periodo trascorso a Jena. Le considerazioni di carattere filosofico esposte nella lettera vertono sostanzialmente su due nuclei argomentativi che si differenziano per il livello di affondo teorico messo in atto, per l'intento programmatico che sta loro alla base e per il contesto sottinteso in relazione a Hegel come destinatario e interlocutore. Il primo nucleo, il più dettagliato tra i due, discute la teoria fichtiana dell'Io assoluto e dà modo di ripercorrere con buona verosimiglianza anche le fasi del confronto con il pensiero di Fichte che Hölderlin intra-

prende già a Walterhausen nella seconda metà del 1794<sup>1</sup>. Il secondo nucleo argomentativo, delineato solo nelle linee essenziali e in conclusione della lettera, riguarda invece l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio della terza *Critica* di Kant e viene introdotto dal riferimento al lavoro sui concetti di religione a cui Hegel si sta dedicando in quel periodo a Berna. A tale proposito Hölderlin scrive:

*Che tu ti accosti ai concetti della religione è certo cosa buona e importante, per molti versi. Il concetto di provvidenza lo tratti senz'altro in parallelo con la teleologia di Kant; il modo in cui questi unisce il meccanismo della natura (dunque anche del destino) con la finalità della natura stessa, mi sembra contenere propriamente l'intero spirito del suo sistema; ed è lo stesso modo con cui compone tutte le antinomie. Riguardo alle antinomie Fichte ha un pensiero davvero notevole, ma preferisco scrivertene un'altra volta. Da tempo mi occupa la mente l'ideale di un'educazione del popolo, e siccome Tu Ti occupi ora di una parte della stessa, la religione, sceglierò forse la Tua immagine e la Tua amicizia come conductor dei pensieri verso il mondo sensibile esterno e in tempi buoni scriverò in alcune lettere a Te, che tu giudicherai e correggerai, quello che forse avrei scritto più tardi. (Hölderlin [1795]: 949)*

L'analisi e l'interpretazione di questo brano della lettera a Hegel sono gli obiettivi a cui mirano le considerazioni che seguono. Nel dettaglio questo contributo si propone in prima battuta di ricostruire la riflessione hölderliniana sull'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio, da un lato esaminando le affermazioni estremamente sintetiche contenute nella lettera e dall'altro cercando di contestualizzarle rispetto a ciò che costituisce, in merito a questo specifico nucleo argomentativo, il contenuto implicito della comunicazione a Hegel, sul quale Hölderlin può certamente fare affidamento a partire dalla presupposizione di uno scenario comune e di una rete di rimandi noti ad entrambi. Sulla scorta di una tale ricostruzione il saggio si

<sup>1</sup> Per una discussione di questo primo nucleo argomentativo incentrato sul rapporto di Hölderlin con il pensiero di Fichte si vedano Henrich [1992], Waibel [2000], Kreuzer [2003], Kreuzer [2012], Santini [2016].

prefigge in secondo luogo di far emergere la cifra distintiva del confronto teorico di Hölderlin con la *Critica del giudizio teleologico* e di determinarla sia in ragione della capacità di comprensione del pensiero kantiano secondo una prospettiva diversa da quelle dominanti tra i suoi contemporanei, quanto soprattutto in relazione all'assunzione dell'eredità kantiana secondo un'investitura che si declina come compito e orientamento dello stesso impegno filosofico di Hölderlin.

1. Nell'esaminare il brano della lettera sopracitato si prende avvio dal punto in cui Hölderlin, riferendosi a Kant, afferma che «il modo in cui questi unisce (*vereiniget*) il meccanismo della natura (dunque anche del destino) con la finalità della natura stessa, mi sembra contenere propriamente l'intero spirito del suo sistema; ed è lo stesso modo con cui compone tutte le antinomie» (Hölderlin [1795]: 949). In questo passaggio sono da rilevare due questioni cruciali che, una volta esplicitate, sollevano un problema di compatibilità di istanze, per lo meno inizialmente. La prima questione risiede nel riconoscimento di una sorta di eccezionalità alla soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà del giudizio, tale da essere considerata da Hölderlin il luogo in cui ne va dell'intero spirito del sistema kantiano che proprio qui si troverebbe dischiuso. La seconda questione riguarda il collegamento che Hölderlin stabilisce tra la soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio e la soluzione delle altre antinomie, nel momento in cui evidenzia che condividono come tratto comune il modo in cui vengono appianate. A un primo sguardo sembra essere difficile comprendere lo statuto che Hölderlin assegna alla soluzione della antinomia della facoltà di giudizio, perché essa viene contraddistinta con una nota assolutamente peculiare, che le conferisce un significato senza eguali, mentre le si attribuisce allo stesso tempo però anche un tratto che la pone sullo stesso piano delle soluzioni delle altre antinomie, in qualche modo rideterminando almeno parzialmente la prerogativa che la manteneva in uno stato di eccezione rispetto a tutte le antinomie.

Ciò che crea difficoltà è il fatto che in entram-

be le affermazioni Hölderlin si riferisca al modo in cui l'antinomia viene risolta, escludendo così la possibilità di individuare eventualmente il tratto di eccezionalità dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio negli elementi che sono in conflitto sin dall'inizio, ovvero il principio del meccanismo e il principio teleologico. Se, come viene scritto, il modo in cui l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio viene risolta è lo stesso procedimento messo in atto per appianare le altre antinomie, risulta decisamente vago, se non proprio incomprensibile, il motivo per cui Hölderlin possa e intenda sostenere che nel modo di risolvere l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio è contenuto lo spirito intero del sistema kantiano. Senza il chiarimento della ragione della peculiarità riconosciuta all'antinomia questa affermazione rimane però priva di giustificazione e avrebbe forse solo il valore enfatico di una specie di dichiarazione, seppur dirompente. L'obiettivo del presente contributo è provare a stabilire se ci sia una prospettiva interpretativa del testo kantiano dalla quale sia legittimo sostenere che il modo in cui viene risolta l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio abbia un legame tanto con lo spirito del sistema di Kant, quanto con le soluzioni di tutte le altre antinomie, o detto altrimenti che la soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio abbia un significato sistematico e allo stesso tempo istanzi un modello prototipico. Dalla determinazione di una simile prospettiva possono poi essere ricavate le prime coordinate per riuscire a comprendere cosa Hölderlin intenda con l'espressione "intero spirito del sistema kantiano".

Nel tentativo di rendere ragione, o quanto meno di andare a fondo, delle affermazioni di Hölderlin, concedendo loro anche provvisoriamente una forma di coerenza interna come ipotesi per poterle analizzare più da vicino, si fanno largo due domande a cui è necessario rispondere prima di poter liquidare tali affermazioni come irrilevanti o non particolarmente acute, salvo poi scoprire che in esse ne va invece di un nodo cruciale dell'interpretazione hölderliniana dell'intera terza *Critica* e più ampiamente del pensiero kantiano nel suo complesso.

Le due domande che è necessario porsi sono tra di loro strettamente collegate. La prima mira a

chiarire in cosa Hölderlin rinvenga propriamente la soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio quando si riferisce al modo dell'unificazione. Affrontare questa domanda implica in un secondo momento anche dover rendere conto dell'accostamento che Hölderlin, allontanandosi dalla lettera kantiana, istituisce tra meccanismo della natura e meccanismo del destino, andando a comporre in modo più complesso e stratificato il conflitto antinomico tra il versante del meccanismo e il versante della teleologia. Per comprendere il senso e il ruolo di questo accostamento si deve però guardare alla contestualizzazione delle affermazioni di Hölderlin nel quadro degli scambi epistolari con il suo interlocutore e della temperie accademica e culturale a cui questi rimandano. La seconda domanda invece ha lo scopo di appurare quali antinomie Hölderlin abbia in mente quando si riferisce a «tutte le altre antinomie» che, secondo lui, condividono con l'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio il medesimo procedimento di risoluzione in grado di appianare il conflitto.

Il modo in cui il principio del meccanismo della natura e il principio teleologico della tecnica della natura vengono unificati, dando risoluzione all'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio<sup>2</sup>, è esposto da Kant nel §78 della *Critica del Giudizio* con il ricorso a un principio che «deve essere messo in qualcosa che è fuori di loro, ma che contenga il fondamento di entrambi, vale a dire nel soprassensibile, e i due modi di spiegazione debbono essergli riferiti» (Kant [1790]: 231). Si tratta di un principio trascendente i limiti della facoltà conoscitiva umana, «che può essere indicato, ma mai conosciuto determinatamente» (Kant [1790]: 231) e del quale quindi non possiamo avere che il concetto indeterminato di un fondamento intellegibile «della possibilità della natura in generale [...] secondo un accordo universale delle due specie di leggi (le leggi fisiche e quelle delle cause finali), sebbene non possiamo scorgere il modo di tale accordo» (Kant [1790]: 231-232). Il ricorso all'am-

<sup>2</sup> Su questa interpretazione della soluzione all'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio si rinvia a Allison [1991], Förster [2008] e Watkins [2009].



missione necessaria di «qualcosa di soprasensibile, il cui concetto è soltanto un'idea e non permette una vera conoscenza» (Kant [1790]: 166) è il tratto comune in cui si accordano le tre specie di antinomie, ciascuna relativa a una facoltà di conoscere superiore, come viene illustrato da Kant nella nota II al §57 della *Critica del giudizio*. Da questa esposizione emerge il punto di unione di tutte le facoltà a priori e allo stesso tempo l'articolazione delle tre idee del soprasensibile, in virtù della quale il sostrato intelligibile della natura viene pensato come indeterminato dall'intelletto, come determinabile dalla facoltà di giudizio e come determinato dalla ragione.

Avendo accertato sulla scorta del testo kantiano cosa propriamente Hölderlin consideri come la chiave di soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio, quando mette in primo piano «il modo di unificare», e avendo identificato quali siano «tutte le antinomie»<sup>3</sup> a cui egli si riferisce nel sottolineare l'efficacia della medesima strategia di soluzione del conflitto, appare chiaro in che senso ciascuna antinomia possa essere considerata come l'istanziamento di un medesimo modello prototipico che nell'esigenza di «guardare al di là del sensibile» (Kant [1790]: 163) trova l'unica «via di uscita per mettere la ragione in accordo con se medesima» (Kant [1790]: 163). Nel modo in cui la soluzione dell'antinomia del giudizio istanzia il ricorso all'ammissione necessaria dell'idea del sostrato soprasensibile Hölderlin rinviene però qualcosa che rende l'unificazione del principio del meccanismo e del principio teleologico il luogo in cui è contenuto e si dischiude lo spirito intero del sistema kantiano, o più radicalmente un luogo in cui ne va del carattere sistematico della filosofia trascendentale stessa. Come si deve interpretare questa affermazione, una volta che è stato mostrato in che senso la soluzione dell'antinomia del giudizio si pone in assoluta continuità con quella

delle altre antinomie? In altri termini, in che cosa risiede l'eccezionalità specifica che Hölderlin le riconosce in rapporto all'intero programma della filosofia di Kant? Nel modo in cui viene risolto il conflitto delle due massime del giudizio riflettente, ponendo il fondamento della loro unificabilità «in qualcosa che non è né l'uno né l'altro (né il meccanismo, né il legame finale), ma è il sostrato soprasensibile della natura di cui non possiamo conoscere nulla» (Kant [1790]: 233), Hölderlin vede soddisfatta quell'esigenza ultima che struttura l'intera articolazione della *Critica del Giudizio* e che Kant esplicita in modo inequivocabile nei §§ II e IX dell'*Introduzione*. Nonostante l'abisso incolmabile che si apre tra il dominio della natura e quello della libertà, deve essere possibile che il secondo abbia un effetto sul primo, cioè:

*il concetto della libertà deve realizzare nel mondo sensibile lo scopo posto mediante le sue leggi, e la natura, per conseguenza, deve poter essere pensata in modo che la conformità a leggi, che costituiscono la sua forma, possa almeno accordarsi con la possibilità degli scopi, che in essa debbono essere realizzati secondo le leggi della libertà. – Sicché vi deve essere un fondamento dell'unità tra il soprasensibile che sta a fondamento della natura, e quello che il concetto della libertà contiene praticamente; un fondamento il cui concetto è insufficiente, in verità, a darne conoscenza, sia teoreticamente che praticamente, e quindi non ha alcun dominio proprio, ma che permette nondimeno il passaggio dal modo di pensare secondo i principi dell'uno al modo di pensare secondo i principi dell'altro. (Kant [1790]: 12-13)*

Nelle affermazioni di Hölderlin sull'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio si rivela il livello di profondità del confronto che egli intrattiene con la *Critica del Giudizio*<sup>4</sup> ed emerge la sua visione nitida del progetto sistematico che costituisce l'intellectuale e la destinazione dell'opera kantiana e che nella *Dialettica del giudizio teleologico* trova il suo baricentro con l'idea di una finalità della natura,

<sup>3</sup> In altra direzione su questo punto si muove l'interpretazione di Waibel (2015) che individua nella terza antinomia della ragione pura e più in generale nelle antinomie della *Critica della ragion pura* il termine di riferimento delle affermazioni di Hölderlin.

<sup>4</sup> Sull'assiduo confronto di Hölderlin con le tematiche della parte della facoltà del giudizio estetico si rimanda a Henrich [1992], Kreuzer [2001], Santini [2013].

idea in virtù della quale soltanto si può conoscere «la possibilità dello scopo finale, che può essere realizzato soltanto nella natura, e d'accordo con le sue leggi» (Kant [1790]: 30).

2. Il significato complessivo delle affermazioni di Hölderlin si coglie però soltanto se esse vengono contestualizzate tanto rispetto a ciò precede e segue nel brano della lettera, quanto rispetto al contenuto implicito che riguarda la rete di rimandi a cui esse alludono. In altre parole, le considerazioni hölderliniane sull'intero spirito del sistema kantiano<sup>5</sup> si comprendono pienamente soltanto alla luce del ruolo che Hegel gioca come interlocutore e destinatario della lettera, e con tutta probabilità anche come intermediario nei confronti di Schelling con il quale Hölderlin dopo l'uscita dallo *Stift* sembra aver momentaneamente sospeso le comunicazioni (Hegel [1795]: 111).

Tenendo conto degli scambi epistolari intercorsi tra Hegel e Hölderlin e tra Hegel e Schelling, segnatamente tra la fine del 1794 e l'inizio del 1795, si delinea innanzitutto uno sfondo comune rispetto al quale si collocano gli interessi e le occupazioni filosofiche a cui i tre distintamente si dedicano in quel periodo. Ciò che accomuna Hölderlin, Hegel e Schelling è l'aspra polemica nei confronti dell'ambiente accademico dello *Stift* di Tubinga nel quale, come in nessun altro luogo, «si riproduce così fedelmente il vecchio sistema» (Hegel [1794]: 104), vengono estratti ingredienti dalla superficie del sistema kantiano, così che tutti «i possibili dogmi sono ora già qualificati come postulati della ragione pratica» (Schelling [1795]:106) e i teologi «se ne stanno intenti con il loro zelo di formiche a procurarsi un'impalcatura critica per il consolidamento del loro tempio gotico» (Hegel [1795]: 110). Tutti e tre constatano amaramente e respingono in modo nettissimo la

strumentalizzazione a scopi apologetici della filosofia kantiana, in particolare della concezione della ragione pratica, e allo stesso tempo esprimono la convinzione che, se in realtà «Kant ha spazzato via tutto» (Schelling [1795]: 107), «tra il materiale che sottraggono alla pira kantiana per impedire l'incendio della dogmatica, essi portano a casa anche carboni incandescenti; - e facilitano così la diffusione generale delle idee filosofiche» (Hegel [1795]: 110). In aperta polemica con la lettura teologica dello *Stift*, Hölderlin, Hegel e Schelling trovano nell'espressione «regno di Dio» (Hölderlin [1794]: 919; Hegel [1795]: 111) e nella sua risemantizzazione filosofica, presentata da Kant nella *Religionsschrift*, un vessillo comune e riconoscono in «ragione e libertà» parole d'ordine condivise e nella «chiesa invisibile» il loro punto di incontro (Hegel [1795]: 111).

Nel contesto degli scambi epistolari non si può dunque ritenere un caso che le affermazioni, in cui viene attribuito alla soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio un ruolo emblematico per l'intero sistema kantiano, siano introdotte dal riferimento ai lavori di Hegel sui concetti di religione e dall'interpretazione che in un solo cenno, densissimo, Hölderlin tenta di restituire del concetto hegeliano di provvidenza. Tanto meno è un caso che alle affermazioni sullo spirito del sistema kantiano facciano seguito le dichiarazioni hölderliniane sulle riflessioni che sta conducendo in quegli stessi anni intorno all'ideale dell'educazione popolare, di cui la religione sarebbe una parte. Al contrario, su un simile sfondo si profila una costellazione tematica che lega insieme il concetto di provvidenza, a cui per altro Hegel fa riferimento anche in una lettera a Schelling sempre di fine gennaio 1795 (Hegel [1795]: 110), quello di teleologia e infine il concetto di religione. Si tratta di una costellazione che prelude al famoso *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* in cui convergono le questioni etiche, estetiche, politiche e religiose al centro delle loro riflessioni, che testimoniano quanto vasto e articolato sia lo spettro delle tematiche che Hölderlin, Hegel e Schelling condividono.

Purtroppo il materiale disponibile dell'epistolario di Hölderlin ed Hegel di questo periodo è

<sup>5</sup> In una considerazione più ampia, che va oltre il brano della lettera preso in esame, per comprendere cosa sia per Hölderlin lo spirito del sistema kantiano si deve necessariamente far riferimento alla presa di distanza nei confronti della filosofia del principio unico di stampo reinholdiano, prima, e fichtiano, poi. Su questo punto si rinvia a Henrich [1992] e Santini [2016b].

solo parziale e consta esclusivamente di due lettere indirizzate dal primo al secondo. Come si evince dalle affermazioni che Hegel riporta in due lettere a Schelling, dove si fa riferimento al fatto Hölderlin scriva frequentemente da Jena (Hegel [1795]: 111, 119), sembra infatti si possa legittimamente ritenere che manchino all'appello diverse lettere di Hölderlin. Considerando tutti gli aspetti si può comunque sostenere a buon diritto che Hölderlin avesse familiarità con le riflessioni di Hegel sui concetti di religione e sul concetto di provvidenza, riflessioni di cui lo stesso Hegel è ragionevole supporre lo avesse messo a parte, probabilmente in lettere analoghe a quelle inviate nel medesimo lasso di tempo a Schelling.

All'interno di questa costellazione, il riferimento al concetto di provvidenza si rivela particolarmente significativo per esplicitare alcuni aspetti del contenuto implicito del brano della lettera di Hölderlin a Hegel che aiutano nell'interpretazione della sua lettura della terza *Critica* kantiana. Innanzitutto l'affermazione di Hölderlin secondo la quale Hegel tratterebbe il concetto di provvidenza in parallelo con la teleologia di Kant, suggerisce di leggere nel conflitto tra il meccanismo della natura e la finalità della natura anche un altro livello in gioco, che spiegherebbe in qualche modo perché Hölderlin usi l'espressione problematica «meccanismo del destino» accanto a meccanismo della natura. Riformulato alla luce di questa stratificazione concettuale si verrebbe così a configurare un conflitto tra meccanismo del destino e provvidenza che si lascerebbe sovrapporre a quello tra meccanismo della natura e finalità della natura. L'espressione «meccanismo del destino» allude alle circostanze della vita e dell'agire le cui cause sono sottratte alla comprensione e al controllo dell'uomo e chiama in causa l'idea dell'uomo come automa spirituale di cui Kant nella *Critica della ragion pratica*, in riferimento alla concezione leibniziana della libertà, parla in termini di «libertà di un girarostro» (Kant [1788]: 213). L'idea di provvidenza, d'altra parte, va considerata all'interno del quadro concettuale della *Metodologia del giudizio teleologico* e, in riferimento alla fede pratico-morale, si

presenta strettamente connessa con il concetto di speranza. Per questa ragione, si tratta di un'idea, che nell'impianto kantiano è lontana da categorie di stampo teista, o addirittura confessionale. A conferma della plausibilità della lettura che Hölderlin propone del concetto hegeliano di provvidenza in parallelo con la teleologia di Kant e più ampiamente nell'orizzonte della fede pratico-morale kantiana può essere fatto valere inoltre quanto Hegel riferisce a Schelling circa la propria intenzione di «determinare più da presso in che misura – dopo il consolidamento della fede morale, possiamo utilizzare retrospettivamente l'idea così legittimata di Dio, ad es.: nella spiegazione del rapporto teleologico ecc.; cioè trasferirla dalla etico-teologia alla teologia fisica e disporre così di essa in questo ambito (Hegel [1795]: 110).

3. Dall'analisi delle affermazioni di Hölderlin sulla soluzione dell'antinomia della facoltà di giudizio e dalla loro contestualizzazione nel quadro di riferimento, che si delinea nel momento in cui si considera da vicino il ruolo di Hegel come interlocutore e destinatario della comunicazione, emerge una prospettiva interpretativa della filosofia trascendentale che, a differenza di quanto tentato dai contemporanei di Hölderlin, rinviene lo spirito interno del sistema kantiano nel concetto di *Vereinigung*, a partire dal quale si può pensare un «fondamento dell'unità del soprasensibile, che sta a fondamento della natura, e quello che il concetto della libertà contiene praticamente» (Kant [1790]: 11). Rintracciare in questo concetto lo spirito dell'intero sistema kantiano significa in primo luogo riconoscere che la *Dialettica del giudizio teleologico*, nella sua corrispondenza con le istanze poste nell'*Introduzione*, squaderna il valore sistematico della terza *Critica* e getta uno sguardo retrospettivo sulle altre due *Critiche*, riarticolandolo plasticamente e performativamente il pensiero kantiano nel suo complesso sotto il segno dello schema con cui si conclude l'*Introduzione*. In secondo luogo significa anche considerare la *Dialettica del giudizio teleologico*, nel suo strettissimo legame con la *Metodologia del giudizio teleologico*, come il passaggio indispensabile per far sì che l'i-

dea pura della libertà, che «è l'unico concetto del soprasensibile che dimostri la sua realtà oggettiva nella natura [...] mediante gli effetti che può avere in essa» (Kant [1790]: 288), renda perciò «possibile il legame delle altre due [Dio e l'immortalità] con la natura, e tutte e tre in una religione» (Kant [1790]: 288).

Gli esiti e le risonanze della interpretazione hölderliniana della *Critica del Giudizio* nel suo insieme non si arrestano però a questo punto. Aver esplicitato il ruolo prototipico della teleologia nella stratificazione di senso ospitata dall'antinomia del giudizio apre alla possibilità di considerare la *Critica del Giudizio* prospetticamente come la condizione indispensabile per inaugurare il discorso sulla religione, mostrando che senza un concetto di natura in grado di accogliere la realizzazione dei fini della libertà, la teoria morale correrebbe il rischio di non poter essere attuata. In questo senso la teleologia, una volta chiarito il suo significato esclusivamente nell'ambito della particolare natura delle facoltà umane e stabilito il suo appropriato rapporto con la teologia, è senz'altro la via verso la religione pura.

Nell'interpretazione della *Dialettica del giudizio teleologico*, dalla quale si riescono a tracciare le coordinate principali del confronto di Hölderlin con il pensiero di Kant come sistema, rivestono dunque un ruolo cruciale il concetto di unificazione (*Vereinigung*) e quello di religione che stanno ad indicare due direzioni a partire dal principio teleologico, una in direzione delle premesse e una in direzione delle conseguenze del sistema kantiano. Entrambi questi concetti rappresentano una sorta di investitura con cui l'eredità kantiana è declinata da Hölderlin nei termini di un compito. Lungo la direttrice indicata dal concetto di unificazione si dispiega la riflessione epistemologica e ontologica di Hölderlin che nel frammento *Giudizio ed essere* ha il suo fulcro speculativo e che si configura nello schizzo programmatico inviato a Niethammer come il progetto radicale con cui «trovare il principio che [...] spieghi le separazioni che informano il nostro pensiero e la nostra esistenza, ma che sia anche in grado di far sparire il conflitto tra il soggetto e l'oggetto, fra il nostro Sé e il mondo, e

anche fra ragione e rivelazione» (Hölderlin [1796]: 994). Nel segno del principio teleologico, e dei concetti di scopo della natura e di natura come sistema dei fini, Hölderlin si impegna nella determinazione di ciò che costituisce la condizione prima «di ogni vita e di ogni organizzazione» (Hölderlin [1788]: 1089), la quale non solo presiede alla configurazione degli estremi della traiettoria eccentrica in cui ne va della destinazione dell'uomo<sup>6</sup>, ma sta alla base della possibilità di rappresentare filosoficamente «l'ideale di ogni società umana» (Hölderlin [1788]: 1118) come comunità religiosa. Da ultimo, lungo la direttrice indicata dal concetto di religione nel suo legame con quello di natura vivente, affinché la libertà possa realizzare il suo scopo finale nel mondo sensibile, Hölderlin sviluppa invece nel frammento *Sulla religione* la concezione dei rapporti religiosi come quei legami tra gli uomini che superano l'unilateralità tanto dei rapporti intellettuali e meccanici quanto dei rapporti morali e formali. La realizzazione della libertà nel mondo sensibile si configura nei termini del processo poetico che dà origine alla religione di ciascuno e di tutti, in virtù del sentimento della gratitudine nei confronti di ciò che Hölderlin chiama la connessione umana più alta, la cui legge vivificante è in ultima analisi proprio lo spirito.

#### BIBLIOGRAFIA

- Allison, H.E., 1991: *Kant's Antinomy of Teleological Judgment*, "Southern Journal of Philosophy" 30 (Supplement), pp. 25-42.
- Förster, E., 2008: *Von der Eigentümlichkeit unseres Verstands in Ansehung der Urteilskraft (§§ 74-78)*, in Höffe, O., Goy, I. (a cura di), *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Klassiker Auslegen, Berlin, pp. 259-274.
- Hegel, G.W.F., 1794, 1795: *Epistolario I.*, a cura di Manganaro P., Guida Editore, Napoli, 1983.
- Henrich, D., 1992: *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795)*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt.

<sup>6</sup> Sul rapporto tra il concetto di organizzazione e la teoria della traiettoria eccentrica si rinvia a Santini (2020).

- Hölderlin, F., 1794, 1795, 1796: *Lettere*, in Reitani, L. (a cura di), *Prose, teatro e lettere*, Mondadori, Milano, 2019.
- Kant, I., 1788: *Critica della ragione pratica*, trad. it. di F. Capra, Laterza, Bari, 1997.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Critica del giudizio*, trad. di A. Gargiulo rivista da V. Verra, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1995.
- Kreuzer, J., 2001: *Ästhetik als Ethik. Überlegungen im Anschluss an die „Kritik der Urteilskraft“*, in Lawitschka, V. (a cura di), *Hölderlin. Philosophie und Dichtung (Turm-Vorträge 5. 1992-98)*, Isele, Tübingen, pp. 7-23.
- Kreuzer, J., 2003: *Hölderlins Kritik der intellektuellen Anschauung*, in Mojsisch, B., Summerell, O.F. (a cura di), *Platonismus im Idealismus. Die platonische Tradition in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, Sauer, München-Leipzig 2003, pp. 119-137.
- Kreuzer, J., 2012: «und das ist noch auffallender transcendent, als wenn die bisherigen Metaphysiker über das Daseyn der Welt hinaus wollten»: *Hölderlins Kritik der intellektuellen Anschauung*, in Gerhard, M., Sell, A., de Vos, L. (a cura di), *Metaphysik und Metaphysikkritik in der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie*, Meiner, Hamburg 2012, pp. 115-132.
- Santini, B., 2013: *Soggetto e fondamento in Hölderlin. Tra filosofia trascendentale e pensiero speculativo*, Verifiche, Trento 2013.
- Santini, B., 2016a: *Bewusstsein, Antinomien und System. Hölderlins Auseinandersetzung mit der Fichteschen Philosophie (1795-1796)*, “*Studia theodisca. Hölderliniana*” 2, pp. 53-69.
- Santini, B., 2016b: *Hölderlin und das „spekulative Pro und Contra“*, in Waibel, V., Brinnich, M., Danz, C., Hackl, M., Hühn, L., Schaller, P. (a cura di), *Im Ausgang von Kant. Wegmarken der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie*, Ergon, Würzburg, 205-222.
- Santini, B., 2020: *Zwischen Anlage und Bestimmung. Hölderlin und die Frage nach dem Wesen des Menschen*, in Valpione, G. (a cura di), *L’homme et la nature: Politique, critique et esthétique dans le romantisme alleman*, Lit, Berlin-Münster-London-Wien-Zürich, pp. 163-176.
- Waibel, V., 2000: *Hölderlin und Fichte: 1794-1800*, Brill, Schöningh-München-Wien-Zürich.
- Waibel, V., 2015: *Kants Lehre der Antinomien “scheint mir den ganzen Geist seines Systems zu enthalten” – Anmerkungen zu Hölderlin und Hegel und ein Rekurs auf Fichte*, in Schmidt, S., Karydas, D., Zovko, J. (a cura di), *Begriff und Interpretation im Zeichen der Moderne. Beitrag für die Festschrift für Andreas Arndt zum 65. Geburtstag*, de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 33-50
- Watkins, E., 2009: *The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment*, “*Kant Yearbook*” 1, pp. 197-221.



**Citation:** F. Desideri (2021) Labyrinth, Ruin, Junkspace, Monad: dialectical images of the contemporary city. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 101-109. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13213

**Copyright:** © 2021 F. Desideri. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Labyrinth, Ruin, Junkspace, Monad: dialectical images of the contemporary city<sup>1</sup>

FABRIZIO DESIDERI

University of Florence (Italy)  
fabrizio.desideri@unifi.it

**Abstract.** The theoretical presupposition of the discourse developed here is Benjamin's conception of a dialectical image applied to the experience of the modern and contemporary city. The starting point is that of the radical strangeness between the inner life of the individual and the time of the modern metropolis. In this regard, we compare some verses taken from the third book of the *Stundenbuch* by Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Simmel's essay, *Die Großstädte und das geistige Leben*, at the center of which is the *Nervenleben* as an intensification of the perceptive life typical of the experience of the modern city. We then move on to focus on the theme of the labyrinth analyzed by Benjamin in some passages of the *Passagenwerk*. In this regard, it is emphasized how the modern city realizes the ancient dream of the labyrinth elevating it to the sphere of language. The experience of the city as a labyrinth is interpreted as a «monotonous wandering», which is not delayed in a senseless roaming. In conclusion, the image of the Generic City and of the Junkspace theorized by Rem Koolhaas is compared, as an image that describes our present in the interweaving of the virtual city of cyberspace with the real city, as an alternative image to that of monad. As a monad, the image of the city still reserves the possibility of experiencing the truth, in a paradoxical gaze that captures the original idea of the city from the inside. This confirms that in the connection between city and monad already underlined by Leibniz “the true has no windows”, according to one of the most esoteric passages of the *Passagenwerk*.

**Keywords:** Modern and contemporary city; Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Rem Koolhaas, dialectical images, ruin, Labyrinth, Junkspace, Generic city, Monad.

---

In Benjamin's notion of a dialectical image coexist two instances, the anarchically irreducible one of the images in their not conceptual presentation and the ordered one of synthesis capable of conferring historical depth to the materials represented. The being of a certain image in those authentically historical objects which are the

---

<sup>1</sup> Here I publish the text of the Conference held on November 5 for the activities of the research group “Projecto Experiência da Cidade” coordinated at the Universidade Nova in Lisbon by Prof. Filomena Molder and Prof. Nélcio Conceição. I thank the organizers for this wonderful opportunity.

«dialectical images» exists first of all as an expression of historical phenomena, such as the passages, the streets of Paris, the commodities in the shop windows, the prostitutes etc., phenomena that concern us, as if they casted us an alienating glance in the form of clues and suggestions waiting to be grasped by thought. On that moment in which the image can deny itself, almost disappearing, to resurrect dialectically to a new life. As a dialectic, the image is thus transformed into an authentically historical object whose truth can be known in the catastrophic intermittences of the *Jetzt-Zeit*.

In the passage between its first appearance, its first historical-temporal appearance and its transformation into a dialectical image, the historical phenomenon, in the radical contingency of its origin, already has the character of ruin. As Benjamin perfectly understands about the passages, considering them as monuments of memory, persistent remains of something that is no longer:

*Being past, being no more, is passionately at work in things. To the historian trusts for his subject matter. He depends on this force, and knows things as they are at the moment of their ceasing to be. Arcades are such monuments of being-no-more. And the energy that works in them is dialectics. The dialectic takes its way through the arcades, ransacking them, revolutionizing them, turns them upside down and inside out, converting them, since they no longer remain what are, from abodes of luxury to <x>. And nothing of them lasts except the name: Passages. And: Passage du Panorama<sic> (Benjamin [2002a]: 833)*

Through the filter of the name, through the language that – as we shall see – lies in intimate correlation with the city, the passages as a ruin that attests the restlessness of their non-being, assume the character of dialectical images and this allows us to consider dialectically, by virtue of the micrological arrangement that marks Benjamin's thought, the very image of the modern metropolis. The first image through which the modern metropolis, as a fusion in its origin between the city of consumers and that of producers at the center of the fundamental Weberian analysis,

offers itself to thought is, however, a not-dialectical image, with respect to which the constitutive elements of every experience are dissociated, to the point of witnessing that trait of irreconcilability ready to pass into a hostile strangeness.

1. If we disregard some anticipations contained in Nietzsche's Zarathustra, the sense of a radical estrangement from the modern metropolis is expressed in the words of poetry, rather than those of philosophy. Here I am thinking to some verses of the Third Book of the *Stundenbuch* by Rainer Maria Rilke, entitled *Von der Armut und vom Tode*. We are at the time when Rilke goes to Paris in the name of Rodin, and it is on this occasion – as the letters to Lou von Salomè in the summer of 1903 attest – that Rilke's experience of a Paris already filtered through the reading of the *Tableaux Parisiens* is that of an absolute strangeness. It is an experience characterized by a "distressing astonishment" because of which the same anguish of the poet from the dimensions of a «remote village» takes on that of «a city, a large city in which the unspeakable happens» (Letter to Lou dated July 18, 1903 cited in Rilke [1994]: V. II, 786-788). The words contained in the letter to Lou of July 1903 converge in condensing the relationship with Paris and with the modern metropolis in general in the sense of a tormented poverty where the soul becomes a speculum, a counter-image, a reflection of the monstrous excess of the city that sows dismay in its inhabitants. The radical strangeness and misery of the metropolitan experience return in the Rilkean verses:

*Die großen Städte sind nicht wahr; sie täuschen / den Tag, die Nacht, die Tiere und das Kind. (Rilke [1994]: V. II, 250)*

*[The big cities are not true; they deceive / the day, the night, the animals and the child.]*

Their silence lies:

*Nichts von dem weiten wirklichen Geschehen, / das sich um dich, du Werdender, bewegt, / geschieht in ihnen [...] (Ibidem)*

[*Nothing of the broad actual happening that moves around you, to you as you become, happens in them*].

What dominates is the split between the poet's self, the universal voice of everyone, and the lying time of the city: the latter's happening is different from what happens in the soul. A disordered and insatiable expansion is opposed to the composition of an inner growth. Another, radically and threateningly different is the logic that cities obey in their becoming that is one with the ravenously destructive fury of time:

*Die Städte aber wollen nur das Ihre / und reißen alles in ihren Lauf. (Rilke [1994]: V. II, 268)*  
[*The cities, however, only want theirs / and tear everything in their course*].

An autonomous form is therefore that of the modern city which imposes itself with the force of a second wild nature that overwhelms everything. The rhythm and telos of its transformations, which enslaves its inhabitants without balance and measure, is that dictated by money that "grows and sucks all energy" with the force of a devastating wind., Similar here to the storm called progress of the Benjaminian *Theses on the concept of history*. And of all this, Rilke observes, above all his poor suffer, driven from every home, «like strangers who wander in the night».

The city, therefore, as a space for a desolate wandering and dispersion. For this reason, the image that the city gives here represents the perfect antithesis to that of the labyrinth, where getting lost, wandering always nourishes the hope of finding oneself grasping the right thread that leads to the goal. If we were to find a philosophical counterpoint to Rilke's poetic word around that experience of the modern metropolis of which Paris offers the most eloquent emblem even literally, we should look at Georg Simmel's contemporary essay, *Die Großstädte und das geistiges Leben*, perhaps – together with the one on Fashion – the most masterfully expressive essay on the fundamental analyzes of the dynamics of the Modern represented by great works such as the *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) and *Soziologie* (1908). Compared

to the terrified Rilkean experience, the lucid and disenchanting Symmelian diagnosis can be considered as completely complementary. Where in Rilke dominates the Stimmung of anguish that becomes a city to reflect the perverse self-finalism of an artificial formation, of a machine that «only wants its own» and, like money, grows without measure, sucking up every other energy, in Simmel the dominant Stimmung of the life of the metropolis and of the atmosphere that surrounds it is the *Nervenleben*: «the intensification of the nervous life» (Simmel [1995]: 116 [this and other translations by Simmel are by the author]) determined by the inexhaustible alternation of external and internal impressions.

To the falsehood of the experience of the city of which Rilke speaks, to its frightening shrinking and impoverishing, corresponds for Simmel the fading of the diaphragm that separates the external convulsion and the intimacy of the interior. By virtue of this loss of the protective threshold between inside and outside, due to the intensification and expansion of a pure *Nervenleben*, the metropolitan psychic life – observes Simmel – withdraws into the intellect, as more adaptable to upheavals than pure sentiment. would not be able to bear. Only pure intellect, in the secession from traditional identity anchors and more generally from the constraints of feeling, can correspond to the dominance of the money-form, as an empty symbol that has sucked up every other symbolic form, emptying it from the inside. In both cases: in pure intellectualism and in the empty and powerful symbolism of money (pure functional relationship elected as absolute)<sup>2</sup> one is perfectly indifferent to what is rooted in life with the stamp of individual quality. Logic of quantity, one in which intellect and money substantially converge, celebrating the power of hyper-functionalism and the resolution of any value to pure exchange value.

As constituted in the abstract circle between production and consumption, the modern city

<sup>2</sup> On the crucial theme for Simmel of money as a pure symbol (as a relationship of relationships) and its ontological value, see Desideri [2020].



identifies its space-time and its own image in the market as the soul of the very social life of individuals whose subject is the commodity-form and its purest and most effective symbol: money as a relationship of relationships. To the extent that the secessionist functionalism of the intellect is not only congenial with this symbolic form but coevolves with it. Thus, we celebrate a fundamental and constitutive aspect of the modern general intellect that reduces everything to calculation, transposing every qualitative value into measurable and negotiable quantitative value. Of this spirit the metropolis is cause and effect at the same time. Common to both is a superindividual structure of time that sucks into itself every inner rhythm of the individuum. Hence, Simmel explains, the hate of Ruskin and Nietzsche for the metropolis. In harmony with this time of the calculating impersonal (in the homology between the abstraction of the intellect and the money-form), only the *blasé* can be the one who has metabolized the thickening in rapid succession of the nervous stimulations to which every inhabitant of the metropolis is subjected. To the point of developing an extreme indifference of feeling or, at least, the ability to muffle the sensitivity for the differences. Everything for the *blasé* becomes colorless, gray – money as a terrible leveler «empties without escape the core of things, their particularity, their individual value, their incomparability» (Simmel [1995]: 122). The inner side of this condition of feeling is, on the level of human relations, the sense of a «tacit aversion», of a «mutual extraneousness» (Ivi: 123): that of which Rilke speaks in poetic consonance with the Simmelian theses.

The concluding words of Simmel's essay concern the shape of the modern metropolis as a "functional quantity that transcends its physical frontiers" (Ivi: 127). Before considering the relationship between this image of the market-city governed by the calculating abstraction of the general intellect with the hyperreal city constituted by the digital network with its taking root in physical points of access and connection, we must ask ourselves whether it is possible or not, within these

physical as well as metaphysical frontiers, to experience another image of the modern city. In summary, an image of it different from the undialectical and all-encompassing one described so far.

The positive answer to this question depends on the fact that an experience of the modern metropolis as a labyrinth is still possible. An experience, that is, where wandering is not absolute up to the indifference of the steps one takes but is still a search. In light of the contemporary metamorphosis of our metropolises, captured on the one hand by the pure formless (by an accumulating excess) and on the other exhibited and experienced in mass tourism as a carnivalesque and often sinister parody of their original idea, Benjamin's thought, especially in the complex of writings belonging to the *Passagenwerk*, confirms his prophetic farsightedness: his *telescoping* into the future, beyond the catastrophes and the cloud of blood of historical destruction.

2. When Benjamin speaks of the labyrinth character of the modern metropolis, he does not think only of the *flâneur* as a border figure of 19th century Paris, even though the fate of the *flâneur* is entirely intrinsic to this image, delivering himself to the past at the very moment in which his idle wandering crosses the threshold of the market. In any case, the Paris of the passages does not immediately offer itself as a labyrinth on the horizontal plane of its streets and boulevards. It offers itself as a labyrinth, rather, through the complex weaving of references and intersections between the underground network of the Metro and the linguistic facies with which the city presents itself. In short: only through the filter of language can the experience of the modern metropolis become the experience of a labyrinth. The reason for this – as shown by Benjamin's brief but decisive notes on the subject – lies in the historical and conceptual connection that is determined between two equally distinctive ideas of the human: that of architecture and that of consciousness. Only in this welding – observes Benjamin – the city becomes "the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth" (Benjamin [2002a]: 429).

The labyrinth of urban dwellings – observes Benjamin in another passage – “by day [...] resembles consciousness” (Benjamin [2002a]: 875) and the passages in this context represent the openings that lead into the past existence of the city (“in ihr vergangenes Dasein”). While during the day “the arcades [...] issue unremarked into the street” is “at night, however, under the tenebrous mass of the houses” that “their denser darkness protrudes like a threat” (*Ibidem*). Only by venturing into the nocturnal side of those that in the sunlight seem nothing more than passages, places of transit, does the city give back the experience of a labyrinth: an experience that as such has the connotations of risk and threat. Those same connotations that – unraveling the thread of a necessary metaphorization – the experience of consciousness assumes when thought ventures into the stratified darkness of its past, exploring its endless entanglements. In summary: there is experience as much of the labyrinth of the modern metropolis as of that of consciousness, provided that the chthonic side is considered in both cases, not as an accessory and contingent characteristic, but constitutive. Thus, the consciousness, in addition to that of a labyrinthine depth, will be able to incorporate the image of the threshold.

Only on this condition, “in the labyrinth of the city” does the experience of consciousness discover “the newest and most inscrutable Labyrinth” (Benjamin [2002a]: 446): that of the mass, as the trait of an indistinct plurality that constitutes the reverse of individual identity. In fact, it is through the mass that “previously unknown chthonic traits are imprinted on the image of the city” (*Ibidem*) – and through this image they can reflect themselves in consciousness itself, as a dark background of its knowledge and its knowing itself. The mass, in fact, as a veil that stands in the way of the return to itself in that constant hesitation that marks the wandering of the flâneur and is assumed as a “drug for the solitary” precisely because it cancels in itself “all traces of individual” (*Ibidem*).

Between the hesitant strangeness of the single individual, exemplified by the flâneur, and the undifferentiating character of the mass, those extremes that we had encountered in a virtual

comparison between the poetic word of Rilke and the philosophical one of Simmel seem to recur. Between these extremes, however, in Benjamin’s analysis there is an immaterial and concrete bridge at the same time: that of language.

“What the big city of modern times has made of the ancient conception of the Labyrinth?” (Benjamin [2002a]: 839) – is the question Benjamin answers by identifying in language the medium of the modern transformation of an archaic image for human consciousness, an image that borders on the dream: «It [the big city of modern times] has raised it [the ancient conception of the labyrinth], through the names of streets, into the sphere of language, raised it from out the network of streets» which by virtue of their names assume a linguistic existence.

Only through the filter of language as a network and the names that make up its nodes does it still become possible, in the tension between the residual power of the archaic and forms of modern existence, to experience the city as a labyrinth. By signaling with their red lights the entrance to the labyrinthine underground network of the Métro, the names of the streets seem to regain something of their original symbolic power. Street names, in the city-language, become literally expressive again, manifesting a silent and evocative dialectic between exterior and interior.

Through the filter of the names considered in the naked and alienated existence that they assume in the undergrounds of the Métro, once freed from the “the collision, the intersection, of names-that which aboveground forms the linguistic network of the city” (Benjamin [2002a]: 84), the experience of the labyrinth finds its fulfillment, the realization of an idea or an ancient dream where the steps taken, each path and the pure and simple walking is not separate from wandering. Wandering, getting lost in knowing it, requires experience and foresight, as Benjamin does not fail to observe in a famous passage from *Berliner Kindheit*:

*Not to find one’s way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one’s way in a city, as one loses*

*one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks. (Benjamin [2002b]: 352)*

Getting lost in a city like in a forest is an art, because it presupposes that one's wandering, one's own progress with interruptions and as if left to chance, follows a thread, follows it while weaving it. For this reason, wandering in the paths of a labyrinth is never an absolute getting lost, to the same extent that in this same space the way cannot be direct. Hence the similarity between the mythical figure of the labyrinth and the one of consciousness. And experience of consciousness, up to the ability to self-reflect in knowledge, as Hegel<sup>3</sup> teaches, can only be given in the medium of language (even if it is not resolved in this medium).

On the other hand, only through this passage it is possible to give experience "in the strict sense" that is as an authentic *Erfahren* in the interpenetration of exterior and interior, of the dimension of the street and of the *intérieur*, of contents of the individual past with contents of the collective one. Experienced as a labyrinth, by virtue, so to speak, of the metabolization of its scheme, the modern city acquires historical depth, by resurfacing the strata of the past that overlap in it. As a dialectical image, the labyrinth therefore joins not only the archaic and recent history (*die Moderne*) but helps to re-tie the strings between aspects and dimensions of the past with critical protrusions of the present. Thus, as a continuous excursus between different temporal planes, labyrinthine becomes not only the space of the city, but also time. However, it would be a mistake to resolve the two dimensions into pure dispersion and loss of orientation. Essential to the figure

of the labyrinth is neither the possession of the center nor its absence, but rather the need to look for it. Through the filter of language as a medium of experience in the strict sense, this research becomes a question. Here the *Passagenwerk* connects to the book on the *Trauerspiel*, attesting an extraordinary continuity in Benjamin's philosophy. In fact, names are questioned and listened to as a filter that has retained the essence of what is no more. And the first name to question is precisely that of the passages:

*The inner radiance of the arcades faded with the blaze of electric lights and withdrew into their names. But their name was now like a filter which let through only the most intimate, the bitter essence of what had been. (Benjamin [2002a]: 834)*

If this passage is already illuminating in itself for a consideration of the labyrinth as a dialectical image of the modern city, the gloss that Benjamin adds in parentheses is even more so:

*This strange capacity for distilling the present, as inmost essence of what has been, is, for true travelers, what gives to the name its exciting and mysterious potency. (Ibidem)*

The nature of the "true traveler" is not alien to that of those who venture into the city by getting lost, but as if he were moving in a labyrinth. The center or the goal, albeit with the shape of a ghost, are nevertheless present in this wandering, in this alienation, where the conscience is confronted with the otherness: with something other than itself. They are perhaps so as a negative condition, an impossible possibility by virtue of which those who err can be reunited with themselves, even if only in the form of a *conscientia*, of a knowledge that has the flavor of awakening.

This is the moment of awakening which coincides with grasping the dialectical images as a historically authentic synthesis between past and present, between memory and oblivion: a synthesis whose essence is hidden in the names as a latent life that waits to unfold for an intelligent listening capable of questioning them. In this dialectic

<sup>3</sup> On Benjamin's relationship with Hegel in relation to the *Passagenwerk* see my recent essay, *Dialektik im Stillstand. Prolegomeni ad un confronto tra Benjamin e Hegel* (Desideri [2021]).

figure, the “awakening” constitutes the synthesis between “dream consciousness” and “waking consciousness” (Benjamin [2002a]:858): unstable threshold, intermittent passage between the two dimensions.

To the same extent that awakening is a dialectical synthesis, so is that dimension of the labyrinth that is elevated to the sphere of language. In fact, in the image of labyrinth are merged both the mythological nature of the “way”, which implies “the terrors of wandering, some reverberation of which must have struck the leaders of nomadic tribes” (*Ivi*: 519), and that of the “street”. Whoever ventures into a way in solitude still has the feeling, in its «incalculable turnings and resolutions», of the power of “ancient directives over wandering hordes” (*Ibidem*). Who travels a street, on the other hand, does not need a guide, but simply submits to “the monotonous, fascinating, constantly unrolling band of asphalt” (*Ibidem*). As a synthesis of both experiences, that of street and way, condensed of two forms of terror (one for the unexpected and one for monotony), the labyrinth as a dialectical image experienced in language becomes the expression of a “monotonous wandering” (*Ibidem*). In its unstable ambivalence, this expression of the experience of the metropolitan labyrinth is destined to transform itself in divergent directions or in other images of an experience of the modern and post-modern city.

3. Perhaps only from a splitting to the extreme of the possibilities and destinies it implies, the form of a “monotonous wandering” as the very limit of the idea of a labyrinth, can we learn not only something about the present of our living, but also the destiny that it reserves us. For all of us there was the experience of a compulsion to stay inside one’s own home, just at the moment when dwelling itself was deemed impossible, based on the lucid and disenchanting observations contained in the aphorism n.18 of the *Minima moralia* of Adorno. That experience that all of us, in varying degrees and forms, have had at the time of the lockdown of a physical constraint to stay at home precisely in the era in which dwelling’s idea

seemed to have become impossible or obsolete has imprinted – in my opinion – an acceleration to that idea of a generic city that Rem Koolhaas has conjugated with the term *Junkspace* (cfr. Koolhaas [2006]). All this with an ontological difference compared to that end of the century in which Koolhaas himself celebrated the generic city as a new beginning.

The generic city now no longer identifies itself only with some examples of megacities and with that tendency to demolish the boundaries of traditional cities with the affirmation in their place of ever-expanding metropolitan areas. Today, especially after what the pandemic meant for the overturning and reconfiguration of individual and collective habits, the relationship between the Junkspace of the physical, accumulative, and centerless metropolis and its virtual projection has been overturned. Hyperjunkspace where the network of urban relationships made of roads, paths, means of transport, chaotic traffic is nothing more than an epiphenomenon of another equally chaotic network, that of increasingly fragmented and multiple digital connections that substitute the internal space of everyone’s life. Life hypermediated by electronic devices, life in front of a pure succession of screens: from the iPhone to the tablet, to the PC, to the TV and back, it realizes not in the sky but in the ethereal underground of telematic connections the idea of a generic city as “City freed from the slavery of the center, from the straitjacket of identity” (*Ivi*: 31). Relationships without quality, made mostly of ephemeral and tattered experiences that are condensed into emoticons and likes, contribute to realizing the idea of a city without history, “superficial” no longer “like the fence of a Hollywood film studio”, but rather like a reality show that produces artificial identities with every television shoot. This phenomenon had been widely predicted by Koolhaas, insisting that now “vast sections of urban life are intertwined in cyberspace” (*Ivi*: 32). What changes now is that the front of this plot has directly become the cyberspace, while the so-called real life of the city, especially in the deserted and ghostly form experienced by each of us, is its

reverse. Thus, if Koolhaas speaks of a “hallucination of normality” (*Ivi*: 33), now we must speak of a normality of hallucination: of a hallucinated and hallucinatory reality in which an evacuation of the public sphere is included, substituting it with neo-tribal collectives guided by uncontrolled emotional impulses. If 51% of the volume of the generic city is made up of atriums, like an eternal recurrence of an empty space, an even larger percentage of the virtual generic city is made up of access forms, empty to be filled in order to be admitted to forums, transversal associations, discussion groups, spaces reserved for transgression and the like. The form to be filled, basically identical, is the antechamber, the waiting room for some promise of surrogate humanity.

In the end, we can agree with Koolhaas’ thesis that the generic city bends into reality, it no longer represents the future, but reality itself. What Koolhaas forgets to mention is the saturated, non-porous character of this reality. No instance of liberation or emancipation in the proliferation of differences that attest to a logic of repetition in the Deleuzian sense: a logic of pure differences without identity, such as to ultimately precipitate into the monotony of the identical. Under this profile of its non-porous character where the virtual is the spectrum of the real, the generic city still describes the current time as the time of hell: a time that does not know or does not want to know the end. As Benjamin observes, completely organic at this time is “the acceleration of traffic and the speed of transmission of news» (Benjamin [2002a]: 66): the effort of a time directed to eliminate “all discontinuities and sudden ends” (*ibidem*), including death as a clean cut.

One might even wonder if it is still possible the experience of dying in an era in which the space of the generic city is only the reverse of the hyperphysics of the virtual Junkspace. Today, to die has become impossible: impossible, precisely by virtue of the spectrality of existence.

It could be argued at this point that to the extent that the hyperspace of the virtual generic city has assumed the infernal connotations of intrascendibility, a critical conception of Moder-

nity capable of keeping alive the memory of the fractures that mark its origin as an epoch seems to have been defeated. I believe that recognizing this defeat is the only condition to take our reflection on the images of the contemporary city to the extreme, to the extreme of an idea that concerns the origin and the ontology of the city itself and, perhaps, ontology in general. To grasp this idea or image of the city as the possibly true, in the sense of a porous possibility that weaves the texture of reality with the force of an *exigentia existendi*, one must take a paradoxical gaze outside the city, the gaze of the stranger who approaches it after a long wandering, from the outside: from an outside that is intimate to it.

It is a question, as you will have understood, of assuming a Leibnizian gaze (of Benjamin’s Leibniz and not of Deleuze): a gaze that captures and considers the city as a Monad, a gaze that represents a chance for thought and experience. From every perspective from which it is considered, the city as an exemplum of the monad confirms its identity and, at the same time, contains the differences captured in the different gazes who address it from different points. Moreover, it is Leibniz himself, in *Monadology*, who describes the representative activity of each monad and of the monads among themselves as a harmonization of identity and differences, in analogy to the image of the city that is constituted in the dialectic between its ontological identity and the differences perspectives it offers to individuals. In the diabolical time of the generic city, where the subject survives only as a virtual secession, the city-monad offers a space where each point constitutes a center: a polycentric space in the dialectical tension between identity and differences. That dialectic that, following the *Sophist’s* Plato, is made possible only in language by crossing the threshold of otherness. By virtue of this dialectic, the image of the city as a Monad retains, not only as an archaic residue, the very experience of the labyrinth, with the promise that it contains happy passages within it: the continuity of a process in the heart of the tangle and in the intermittent nature of getting lost. Moreover, Leibniz himself speaks about the

labyrinth of continuum. The omni-falsehood of the generic city whose time is the pure dispersion of the Junk-hyperspace is opposed by the omni truth of the city-monad as something of almost inconceivable for the present time. Yet something of which fragments are experienced and sparks are caught, sparks of thought and experience in a close interpenetration of interior and exterior spaces. Inasmuch as it is possible to grasp it with a paradoxically both external and internal gaze, this city-monad has the truth within it. Thus, for this dialectical image of city, the true has no windows as one of the most esoteric passages of the *Passagenwerk* states:

*The true has no windows. Nowhere does the true look out to the universe. And the interest of the panorama is in seeing the true city. "The city in the bottle" – the city indoors. What is found within the windowless house is the true. One such windowless house is the theater; hence the eternal pleasure it affords. Hence, also, the pleasure taken in those windowless rotundas, the panoramas. (Benjamin [2002a]: 840)*

Listening to this passage carefully, the dialectical image of the city as a monad becomes theatrum veritatis, where the conscience after its Hamletic wandering still Hamletically<sup>4</sup> finds itself, in that knowing which has the Wittgensteinian characteristics of an *übersichtliche Darstelllung*, which Alexandra Dias Fortes has rightly proposed to translate as a “panoramic presentation” (cfr. Dias Fortes [2021]). And here the circle can perhaps be closed.

#### REFERENCES

- Benjamin, W., 2002a: *The Arcades Project*, transl. by H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England.
- Benjamin, W., 2002b: *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, in Id., *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, 1935-1938, edited by H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England.
- Desideri, F., 2019: *Hamlet or Europe and the end of modern Trauerspiel. On some shakespearean motifs in Walter Benjamin*, “Aisthesis” 12, pp. 117-126.
- Desideri, F., 2020: *Grenzwesen: espace, frontière, symbole chez Georg Simmel*, in: Borsari, A., Antonioli, M. (eds), *Georg Simmel et le champ architectural. Sociabilité urbaine, paysage et esthétisation du monde*, Éditions Mimésis, Fano, pp. 155-168
- Desideri, F., 2021: *Dialektik im Stillstand. Prolegomeni ad un confronto tra Benjamin e Hegel*, in Amato, P., Biuso, A.G., Bochicchio, V., Catena, M.T., Masi, F., Pinto, V., Russo, N., Venezia, S. (eds), *Metafisica dell'immanenza. Scritti per Eugenio Mazzarella*, Vol. I, *Ontologia e storia*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, pp. 47-59.
- Dias Fortes, A., 2021: *Panoramic Presentation. Conceptual and Methodological Aspects*, in Conceição, N., Ferraro, G., Fonseca, N., Dias Fortes, A., Molder, M.F. (eds), *Conceptual Figures of Fragmentation and Reconfiguration*, Universidade Nova de Lisboa Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas Instituto de Filosofia de NOVA, pp. 237-233
- Koolhaas, R., 2006: *Junkspace*, ed. by G. Mastrigli, Quodlibet, Macerata [This Italian edition brings together three distinct essays by Koolhaas: *Bigness or the problem of Large* (1995), *The Generic City* (1995) and *Junkspace* (2001). For convenience we refer to this edition.]
- Rilke, R. M., 1994: *Poesie*, ed. by G. Baioni, 2 Voll., Einaudi-Gallimard, Torino.
- Simmel, G., 1995: *Die Großstädte und das geistige Leben*, in G. Simmel, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by von O. Rammstedt, Bd. 7, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, Bd. 1, pp. 116-131 [Simmel's essay originally appeared in “Jahrbuch der Gehestiftung”, 1903, IX]

<sup>4</sup> About this reference to the figure of Hamlet see Desideri [2019].





**Citation:** F. Perotto (2021) *Filter Bubbles*. Arte e mondi digitali. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 111-121. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12474

**Copyright:** © 2021 F. Perotto. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## *Filter Bubbles*. Arte e mondi digitali<sup>1</sup>

### *Filter Bubbles*. Art and digital worlds

FRANCESCA PEROTTO

FINO, Northwestern Italian Philosophy Consortium  
[francesca.perotto@unito.it](mailto:francesca.perotto@unito.it)

**Abstract.** Our experience is marked by the constant, and often imperceptible, presence of technological actors that, with their operational mechanisms, greatly influence the processes of construction of the worlds – both physical and imaginary – in which we live and, consequently, of ourselves. In the last decade, internet-based media have introduced a further level of mediation, constituted by the activity of profiling and the construction of filter bubbles, whose power reverberates offline. The context of the pandemic contagion we are experiencing has drastically expanded the space for these actors, whose filtering mechanisms are often as pervasive as they are opaque. To overcome this problem, artistic practices and aesthetics can play a fundamental role. In this text we aim to see how, thanks to the works of some Italian artists who have built their careers by reflecting on the aesthetic aspects of the information society.

**Keywords:** Filter bubbles, Peter Sloterdijk, Paolo Cirio, New Media Art, Aesthetics of the invisible.

---

Nel corso del Novecento, nello studiare i processi di individuazione biologica e tecnica, autori appartenenti ad ambiti differenti hanno sottolineato come l'unità minima dell'evoluzione non sia l'individuo, ma la coppia individuo-ambiente. L'individuo non è quindi pensabile come assoluto, bensì coinvolto in un divenire durante il quale si coproduce con il proprio ambiente, attraverso un meccanismo selettivo che introduce un principio d'ordine a partire da una situazione potenzialmente caotica. Riprendendo le intuizioni del biologo Von Uexküll, si potrebbe sostenere che a ciascun individuo corrisponda un ambiente proprio (Von Uexküll [1920]) o, per utilizzare una terminologia simondoniana, un *ambiente associato* (Simondon [1964]). Ciò è valido innanzitutto da un punto di vista strettamente biologico ed etologico, nella misura in cui ogni entità organica si relaziona con l'esterno interagendo con certe caratteristiche ambien-

---

<sup>1</sup> Si ringraziano i professori Danilo Eccher e Federico Vercellone



tali rispetto ad altre. Con la percezione o – per evitare la connotazione antropomorfo-cognitiva del termine – con la *prensione* (Whitehead [1929]) comincia questo meccanismo di filtraggio ed organizzazione che permette di isolare, all'interno dell'immensa mole di informazioni a cui si è esposti, quelle che risultano significative per l'esperienza individuale.

Gli ambienti non si caratterizzano solamente da un insieme di vincoli fisici e chimici, ma si articolano su livelli di complessità differente. Così, per l'uomo, la dinamica relazionale con il proprio ambiente associato è giocata, in larga parte, sul piano tecnico e simbolico – culturale.

Un autore che ha dedicato i suoi studi all'analisi storica dei modi in cui l'uomo ha costruito e abitato mondi di volta in volta differenti è il filosofo Peter Sloterdijk, con la sua monumentale trilogia chiamata, significativamente, *Sfere* (1998, 1999, 2004). Il filo conduttore di quest'opera, che la lega a *Regole per il parco umano* (1999) da una parte e a *Che cosa è successo nel XX secolo?* (2016) dall'altra, è l'intuizione secondo cui «la cultura funziona nel suo insieme come un'avvolgente incubatrice che si dispone attorno ai suoi membri» (Sloterdijk [2017]: 42).

Per l'animale umano costruire sfere abitabili sarebbe strettamente legato al carattere culturale e tecnico del suo agire, tanto che Sloterdijk parla della dimensione simbolica della cultura umana come di una terza immunologia. Questa si aggiungerebbe a quella primaria, legata al sistema immunitario, e a quella secondaria, che coinvolge gli aspetti politico-militari delle pratiche di difesa sociali, secondo la stratificazione chiamata precedentemente in causa. La cultura, nei suoi aspetti simbolici e tecnici, permetterebbe infatti di proteggere l'uomo creando degli ambienti adatti alla vita, delle sfere di senso.

La consapevolezza che le pratiche culturali e tecniche influenzano i modi di abitare il mondo e la sua costituzione è fondamentale nell'epoca dell'antropocene, in cui l'azione dell'uomo, che diventa forza geologica, non è trascurabile e deve essere problematizzata, ma ancora di più nel contesto pandemico che stiamo vivendo, in

cui larga parte dell'esperienza è stata traslata online e lo spazio che i nuovi media occupano nella costruzione di mondi e immaginari è sempre più ampio. Per utilizzare le parole di Sloterdijk, «è solo un passo riconoscere che la prassi umana, a ogni livello della tecnica e dell'uso dei simboli, presenta sempre anche implicazioni ecosistemiche ed immunosistemiche che in futuro andranno non soltanto prese in considerazione, ma anche gestite e configurate» (Sloterdijk [2017]: 156).

## 1. RETROAZIONE

Se l'unità minima dell'evoluzione è la coppia individuo-ambiente, bisogna sforzarsi di pensare questi due elementi come poli di un unico processo. Al movimento che va dal soggetto verso il mondo deve quindi corrispondere un movimento parallelo e sincrono che proceda nella direzione opposta: dal mondo verso il soggetto.

Il processo di consolidamento dell'individuazione opera infatti secondo una serie di meccanismi che potremmo definire retroattivi, per cui lo sviluppo dei due poli si influenza reciprocamente: al variare dei mondi che si abitano, siano essi descritti dalle loro caratteristiche fisiche e chimiche o da quelle tecniche ed immaginarie, varierà la soggettività che ne emerge.

A questa direzione del movimento di individuazione, dall'esterno verso l'interno, va dedicata particolare attenzione nell'ambito degli studi sulle tecnologie digitali e i nuovi media. È in questo senso che deve intendersi la celebre affermazione attribuita a Marshall McLuhan secondo cui «We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us» (Culkin [1967]: 70). Come ha sottolineato Mauro Carbone (2016), la definizione stessa di uno degli elementi principali dell'interazione tra uomo e tecnologie digitali, lo *schermo*, porta infatti con sé l'idea di un'operazione di selezione che ci espone, in quanto soggetti, ad alcune caratteristiche del mondo esterno, mentre ne cela delle altre.

Se questa sorta di *prospettivismo* mediatico e tecnologico era più facilmente intuibile nello studio dei media tradizionali, la questione è più com-

plexa quando si parla di internet e di social network. L'operazione di filtraggio delle informazioni operata dalle *internet corporation* si gioca infatti su di un livello ulteriore, nonché più opaco. Per i media tradizionali, come la televisione o i giornali, le informazioni selezionate sono le stesse per ogni utente. Per *Google*, dal 4 dicembre 2009, questo non è più vero: «Google's announcement marked the turning point of an important but nearly invisible revolution in how we consume information. You could say that on December 4, 2009, the era of personalization began» (Pariser [2011]:7).

La personalizzazione – o *profiling* – si serve delle interazioni online per ricavare dati sulle abitudini ed i gusti personali degli utenti che risultano utili in svariate attività: il marketing mirato è solo la punta dell'iceberg. «It would be one thing if all this customization was just about targeted advertising. But personalization isn't just shaping what we buy. For a quickly rising percentage of us, personalized news feeds like Facebook are becoming a primary news source – 36 percent of Americans under thirty get their news through social media networking sites» (Pariser [2011]:10). Il termine *filter bubble* è stato coniato proprio per descrivere le sfere altamente personalizzate che abitiamo durante la nostra esperienza online e che contribuiscono significativamente al modo in cui percepiamo e costruiamo il mondo e, di conseguenza, noi stessi.

Questi meccanismi retroattivi su cui si basa il funzionamento delle tecnologie digitali sono particolarmente problematici per la loro opacità: le società di internet sono tenute solo in parte a spiegare i meccanismi su cui si basa il funzionamento delle cosiddette *filter bubbles* e, non sapendo quali contenuti vengono selezionati e per quali ragioni, è difficile maturare un atteggiamento critico.

## 2. UNA QUESTIONE ESTETICA

In questa dinamica processuale in cui attori organici ed inorganici si relazionano, la dimensione estetica è fondamentale e, in un certo senso, precede quella epistemologica. Abitare le sfere è

innanzitutto una questione di sensibilità: la relazione con i mondi in cui viviamo è un'affezione che coinvolge i corpi prima del pensiero, potenziandoli, indebolendoli, stimolandoli o inibendoli. Per questo, nella comprensione degli effetti delle tecnologie digitali e dei nuovi media e per sperimentare modi di convivenza con essi, l'arte e la riflessione estetica hanno un ruolo centrale. La pratica artistica ha infatti la possibilità di operare contemporaneamente su un doppio fronte: inserendosi all'interno della dinamica delle *filter bubbles* per renderla visibile e riflettendo sulla percezione umana per sperimentare nuove forme di sensibilità.

Le due questioni sono intrinsecamente legate: il sentire umano, nella sua storicizzazione, ha privilegiato alcune caratteristiche estetiche rispetto ad altre. Tuttavia, è proprio su alcuni di questi elementi trascurati che si basa grossa parte del funzionamento delle tecnologie digitali. Se la tradizione occidentale del pensiero, da Cartesio in poi, ha preferito un'estetica del «chiaro e distinto» (Shaviro [2009]: 10), nell'interazione con le tecnologie digitali è fondamentale considerare l'azione di alcuni elementi non visibili o che agiscono al di fuori del campo della percezione umana. D'altra parte, «contemporary perception is machinic to large degree. The spectrum of human vision only covers a tiny part of it» (Steyerl [2017]: 161).

Il meccanismo di funzionamento stesso dei nuovi media è strutturato secondo una stratificazione che, fungendo da filtro, mette in luce alcune cose per oscurarne altre: i media digitali sono infatti organizzati secondo una parte visibile, detta *front end* – solitamente un'interfaccia utente, e una parte di codice, *back end*, che è di natura linguistica e resta per lo più nascosta ed inaccessibile agli utenti medi. Vi sono dunque due livelli a cui avviene l'operazione di mediazione: quella primaria dell'interfaccia utente, che propone ad ognuno la sua *filter bubble*, e quella dell'organizzazione stessa delle tecnologie digitali secondo *front* e *back end*.

L'arte può intervenire sull'opacità di questi meccanismi, rendendoli visibili e, allo stesso tempo, insistendo sulla creazione di un'estetica ed un immaginario più sensibili ai processi impercettibili

che operano nella creazione di mondi, scalzando il primato della visione e della sensibilità antropocentrica. La pratica artistica, inserendosi all'interno della dialettica visibile-invisibile, ha infatti il potere di proporre nuove configurazioni, di sperimentare nuove atmosfere abitabili e di svelare le dinamiche di potere che i meccanismi di filtraggio inevitabilmente veicolano. È in questo senso che deve intendersi l'affermazione dell'artista e hacktivist Paolo Cirio, secondo cui «art is often in this model-revealing/model-breaking business. It can be a way of materialising and confronting our own high-level assumptions, about self, word and other, but doing so in a framework that steps back from daily concerns [...] and hence is not usually experienced as genuinely threatening, even if it is subversive» (Cirio [2019]).

### 3. ARTE E NUOVI MEDIA

Sebbene l'arte e la riflessione estetica possano contribuire significativamente alla comprensione del ruolo delle tecnologie digitali nel contemporaneo, le arti e i nuovi media non hanno avuto sin dall'inizio un rapporto lineare. In parte, come abbiamo già accennato, ciò è dovuto al difficile accesso alla loro dimensione linguistica: «After all, photography and film were embraced rapidly and wholeheartedly in the 1920s, as was the video in the late 60s and 70s. These formats, however, were image-based, and their relevance and challenge to visual art were self-evident. The digital, by contrast, is code, inherently alien to human perception» (Bishop [2012]: 10).

La natura linguistica dei nuovi media ha reso più complicato il loro inserimento all'interno dell'immaginario artistico contemporaneo, sollevando un problema che potremmo definire di competenza: come vedremo, le prime forme di quella che venne chiamata *New Media Art* furono create all'interno dei laboratori di ricerca delle università. Ciò ha fatto sì che una delle caratteristiche essenziali di questa forma d'arte sia la multidisciplinarietà e la dimensione collaborativa, complicando il processo di istituzionalizzazione e

storicizzazione, «con l'ulteriore difficoltà di esporre, presentare e interpretare opere d'arte sempre più effimere» (Mancuso [2018]). Nel tempo, il termine *New Media Art* ha raccolto una serie di esperienze eterogenee, per lo più performative e dinamiche, che trovano un comune denominatore nell'essere computazionali e basate su algoritmi di cui problematizzano il funzionamento (Quaranta [2013]: 25).

Per comprendere meglio le ragioni e i caratteri di questo tipo di ricerca è necessario ritornare brevemente agli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, momento in cui il progresso tecnologico e gli sviluppi artistici crearono un fertile terreno di confronto per scienza, arte e tecnologia. Le Avanguardie del Novecento avevano già cominciato a scalfire l'idea di originalità ed oggettualità del prodotto artistico, ma è con le Neoavanguardie che «il pubblico entra direttamente nel processo di creazione dell'opera con l'happening in cui tutti, almeno idealmente, sono produttori e fruitori dell'informazione» (Bazzichelli [2006]: 20). Uno dei precursori fondamentali per la *New Media Art* è in particolare l'esperienza di *Fluxus* che, con i suoi eventi partecipativi ed eliminando la distanza tra lo spettatore e il prodotto artistico, permise di riflettere sulla collettività del fare artistico e sull'idea di intermedia.

Come si anticipava, le pratiche che nel tempo sono ricadute sotto l'etichetta di *New Media Art* hanno una filiazione ibrida: negli anni Settanta, con l'apertura, ad esempio, del Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC) all'Università di Stanford è la Xerox Corporation a spingere la sperimentazione visuale verso applicazioni grafiche. Dagli anni Ottanta, l'evento centrale per le ricerche su arte e nuovi media diventa l'Ars Electronica Festival di Linz, un festival che, rispecchiando l'eterogeneità di queste pratiche, comprende ad oggi anche un momento di simposio accademico. Infine, è con l'invenzione del World Wide Web e con la distribuzione di massa dei *personal computer* (1995) che la *New Media Art* inizia a riflettere sulle tematiche che abbiamo introdotto nel secondo paragrafo, lavorando con gli algoritmi delle intelligenze artificiali per indagarne i meccanismi di funzionamento.

Il termine *New Media Art* descrive quindi un territorio vastissimo, che non ci è possibile esplorare se non abbozzandone le direttive principali. Per questo, ci limiteremo ad isolarne alcuni elementi che si concentrano sui meccanismi attraverso cui, con l'operazione di personalizzazione, i nuovi media influenzano la percezione e la costruzione del contemporaneo. In particolare, rifacendoci ad alcuni lavori di artisti italiani che condividono, in maniere specifiche che approfondiremo, l'appartenenza alla cultura hacker. Sarà in particolare l'opera di Paolo Cirio ad assumere una posizione esemplare nella riflessione sull'opacità dei meccanismi di filtraggio delle informazioni e sulle maniere possibili di pensarne un'etica-estetica.

#### 4. PAOLO CIRIO

Paolo Cirio, artista concettuale piemontese classe 1979, ha dedicato la sua carriera alla riflessione sul modo in cui i nuovi media veicolano e oscurano l'informazione, influenzando i comportamenti sociali a diversi livelli. Per lo sviluppo di una coscienza critica rispetto all'uso della tecnologia, la sua ricerca si inserisce all'interno delle tradizioni *hacker* e *tactical media* (Bazzichelli [2006]: 21), tradizioni intrise di un attivismo politico che opera mediante una strategia che rivolge i meccanismi tecnologici contro se stessi (Paul [2015]: 588).

Uno dei cicli di opere più noti di Paolo Cirio, creato in collaborazione con Alessandro Ludovico e (parzialmente) con Ubermorgen, è *Hacking*

*Monopolism Trilogy*, che si articola nei seguenti progetti: *Google Will Eat Itself* (2005), *Amazon Noir* (2006) e *Face to Facebook* (2011). Ciascun'opera sfrutta alcune vulnerabilità tecniche ed economiche di una grande *internet corporation* per metterne in luce i meccanismi di funzionamento, in particolare riguardo all'utilizzo dei dati degli utenti e delle loro interazioni, sollevando questioni concernenti monopolio, *privacy* e *copyright* – oggi al centro del dibattito sul digitale.

In *Google Will Eat Itself* l'artista creò alcuni bot che, interagendo con il servizio di *banner* pubblicitari di Google *AdSense*, producevano un guadagno che venne poi redistribuito collettivamente, creando una sorta di economia circolare e rendendo Google momentaneamente pubblico. In *Amazon Noir*, vincitrice del secondo premio al Transmediale Festival di Berlino, ad essere colpito fu il monopolio di Amazon sui diritti d'autore dei libri commercializzati: *hackerando* il servizio di «Search inside», Cirio e i suoi collaboratori riuscirono ad ottenere copie integrali di molti dei volumi digitali posseduti da Amazon, mostrando le falle del sistema in un momento in cui gli editori venivano incoraggiati a cedere alla compagnia le copie digitalizzate dei propri volumi. Infine, in *Face to Facebook*, vincitrice del premio per le arti interattive dell'Ars Electronica Festival di Linz, gli artisti si impossessarono di un milione di profili Facebook e, filtrandoli grazie ad un software per il riconoscimento facciale, li misero online su un sito di incontri costruito *ad hoc*, organizzando-

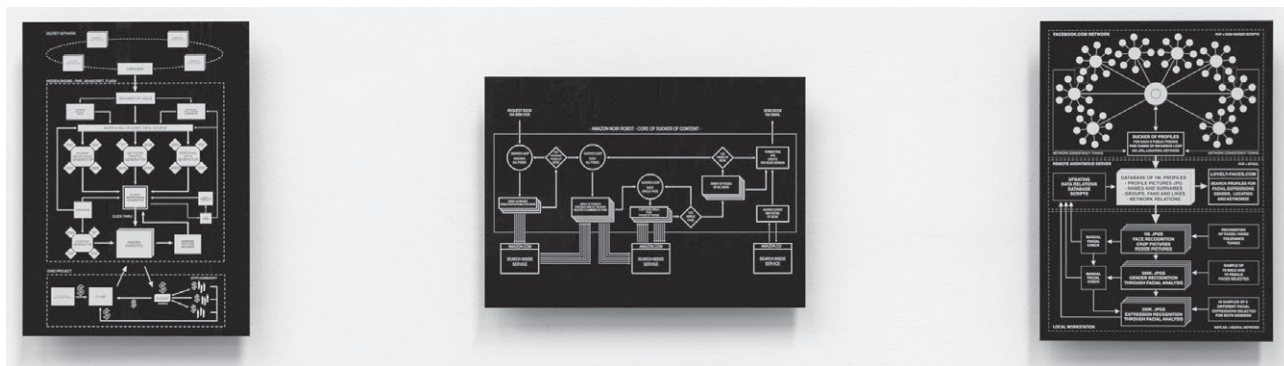


Figura 1. Paolo Cirio, *Hacking Monopolism Trilogy* 2005-2011. Stampa digitale su plexiglass, 54 x 39 cm cad. Photo Nicola Morittu, Courtesy Galleria Giorgio Persano.

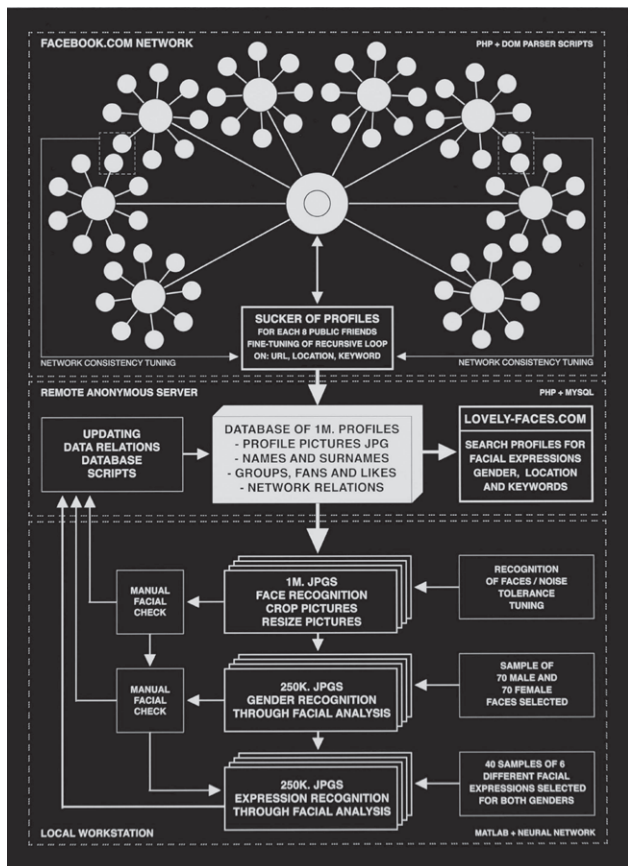


Figura 2. Paolo Cirio, *Hacking Monopolism Trilogy* (dettaglio), 2005-2011. Stampa digitale su plexiglass, 54 x 39 cm. Photo Nicola Morittu, Courtesy Galleria Giorgio Persano.

li secondo le caratteristiche delle loro espressioni. L'opera sollevava tematiche riguardanti l'utilizzo e la vendita dei dati degli utenti da parte di Facebook, così come la profilazione operata dal *social network*.

La trilogia *Hacking Monopolism* è interamente basata sulla dialettica visibile-invisibile che abbiamo chiamato in causa, mettendo in luce alcuni aspetti di internet «al tempo stesso non visibili e non nascosti» (Catricalà [2020]) che contribuiscono alla creazione dei mondi che oggi abitiamo. «Per dirla con Foucault, Cirio non è interessato all'attacco del fenomeno in sé, ma allo svelamento delle condizioni di possibilità che rendono concreto tale fenomeno» (Catricalà [2020]). L'analisi delle condizioni di possibilità trova certamente importanti antecedenti nella filosofia antica e moderna occidentale, è sufficiente citare il caso emble-

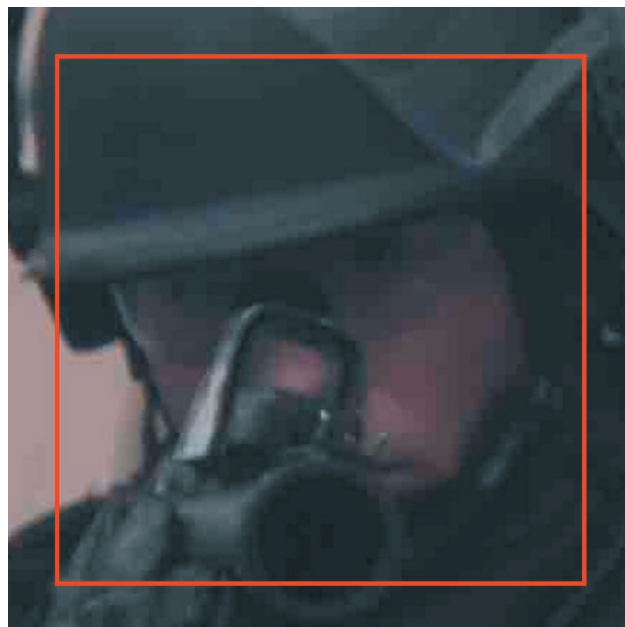


Figura 3. Paolo Cirio. *Capture*, 2020. Stampa a getto d'inchiostro d'archivio su carta fotografica, 110 x 110 cm. Courtesy Galleria Giorgio Persano.

matico del criticismo kantiano. Ma la scelta di un parallelismo tra il lavoro di Cirio e il metodo archeologico di Foucault vuole porsi a lato della distinzione kantiana tra fenomeno e condizioni di possibilità nel senso di un empirismo trascendentale di stampo deleuziano in cui, alle condizioni solamente possibili del manifestarsi di un fenomeno, vengano a sostituirsi le condizioni reali e singolari della sua genesi. L'obiettivo di Cirio è dunque quello di dare forma ai nostri rapporti con i nuovi media, rendendone percepibili gli effetti e cogliendone le dinamiche veicolate. È in questo senso che deve intendersi l'ultima provocatoria performance dell'artista: *Capture* (2020). Ancora una volta, l'opera consiste nel rivolgere il funzionamento di certe tecnologie contro chi ne detiene il monopolio – in questo caso gli algoritmi per il riconoscimento facciale. Cirio li ha infatti utilizzati per identificare i volti di mille agenti della polizia francese, ricavati da quattromila fotografie di manifestazioni, e stampati e affissi per le strade di Parigi, per ribaltare l'asimmetria di potere su cui si basa l'uso di questa tecnologia e chiedendo leggi a tutela della privacy.

A rimarcare l'importanza e la sensibilità dei temi sollevati dalla pratica artistica di Paolo Cirio sono le lettere che i legali di Google, Amazon e Facebook hanno inviato agli avvocati di Cirio (consultabili online ai siti <https://www.face-to-facebook.net/legal.php> e [https://paolocirio.net/work/gwei/GWEI-Google\\_DE-VS-Cirio.pdf](https://paolocirio.net/work/gwei/GWEI-Google_DE-VS-Cirio.pdf)) e la copertura mediatica dei suoi lavori.

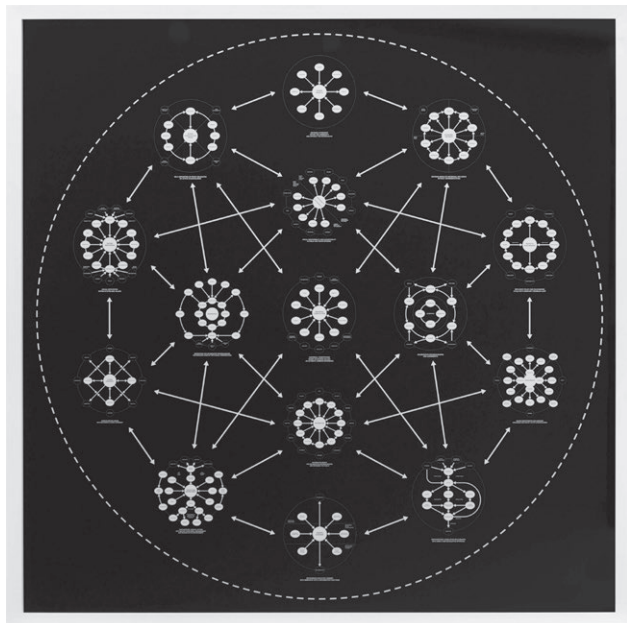
## 5. MATERIALITÀ

La pratica artistica di Paolo Cirio ha una forte componente performativa: i suoi lavori consistono in un'operazione, principalmente di *hacking*, che ha una durata specifica e limitata. Quest'azione è ciò che dà vita all'opera, ma non la conclude. Ad essa segue un momento collaborativo in cui i fruitori hanno occasione di intervenire direttamente all'interno della pratica artistica, in maniere di volta in volta differenti, rendendo partecipativo il rapporto tra l'artista e il pubblico e, conseguentemente, togliendo significato a questa distinzione. Infine, parte dell'opera sono anche le installazioni allestite negli spazi espositivi o i siti web creati ad hoc per la *performance*. Nel caso di *Face to Facebook*, ad esempio, il lavoro di Cirio non è limitato all'azione mediante la quale l'artista si è impossessato di alcuni profili Facebook per aggiungerli al suo sito di incontri: «The Face to Facebook installation includes prints of the stolen faces, a local version of the “Lovely Faces” dating website, media coverage of the project, as well as exchanges between Facebook’s and the artists’ lawyers, and reactions from the public» (Paul [2015]: 715).

La *New Media Art* solleva dunque un problema fondamentale per la tradizione artistica occidentale, che da secoli innerva la riflessione estetica: quello della materialità dell'opera. Se la questione era più volte emersa in passato, in particolare con gli *happenings* (limitandoci al panorama dell'arte contemporanea), nell'interazione con i nuovi media la materialità è uno dei punti cardine dell'operazione artistica, perché subisce due pressioni apparentemente contraddittorie. Da una parte, infatti, coerentemente all'eredità di *Fluxus*

e dell'arte concettuale, la *New Media Art* va verso una smaterializzazione dell'opera, che diventa evento. L'oggetto artistico, cioè, *svapora* completamente nel gesto, senza lasciar alcun residuo materiale che ne garantisca la consistenza. Dall'altra, tuttavia, proprio per la dialettica visibile-invisibile su cui gioca l'operazione di filtraggio dei nuovi media, la *New Media Art* ha la necessità di rendere percepibili, attraverso la materialità, alcuni elementi altrimenti «volatili». Come dichiara in un'intervista lo stesso Cirio, «c'è anche una questione che potremmo definire estetica: come riuscire a traslare un materiale così effimero e virtuale – quello della comunicazione digitale – come tradurlo in una materialità che altrimenti non si riuscirebbe a percepire» (Tinterri [2020]).

Per rispondere a questa esigenza, nella sua ricerca artistica Paolo Cirio si è servito soprattutto della forma del *diagramma di flusso*, un meta-medium che permette di rendere percepibili i flussi di dati e informazioni che costituiscono i mondi digitali. «The flowchart is a conceptual image as well as an image itself with its own form. Visually, the flowchart circumnavigates the pictorial image, becoming the relevant iconographic imagery of the information age. As a genre of visual language, the flowchart enters into the rubric of artistic strategies and mediums, furthering the development of art-making» (Cirio [2019]). Il diagramma di flusso, strumento privilegiato dall'artista per la materializzazione della sua opera, agisce rallentando i processi che accadono in internet e permette quindi di soffermarvicisi, tracciandone i principali svincoli e disegnandone una carta delle zone di operatività. Tuttavia, il diagramma di flusso non è rappresentativo in un senso classico: attraverso le sue linee e le sue divisioni permette di agire criticamente all'interno della comprensione del digitale per contribuire, collettivamente, a plasmarlo. Ancora una volta, in questa scelta stilistica risuona un'eredità riconducibile a *Fluxus*: anche George Maciunas, che nel 1961 coniò proprio il termine «fluxus», scelse di utilizzare le mappe concettuali e i diagrammi di flusso come *medium* privilegiato per veicolare la propria concezione artistica (Bazichelli [2006]: 31).



**Figura 4.** Esempio di diagramma di flusso: Paolo Cirio, *Global direct*, 2014. Photo Nicola Morittu. Courtesy Galleria Giorgio Persano.

## 6. LA CURA (*ART IS OPEN SOURCE*)

Il diagramma di flusso, così come le altre strategie formali adottate dagli artisti della *New Media Art*, deve quindi riportare in scena la complessità e gli aspetti nascosti del digitale per organizzarli secondo nuovi nessi, nuove narrazioni che mettano i fruitori nelle condizioni di un uso più consapevole e creativo dei nuovi media e delle loro funzioni di personalizzazione.

Si noti che l'operazione artistica non ha tanto la pretesa di arrivare ad una sorta di immediatezza – mettendoci in contatto con i dati *reali* di cui si servono le *filter bubbles*, quanto quella di rendere accessibili i meccanismi genetici attraverso cui una certa mediazione si produce rispetto ad un'altra. Porre il problema in termini di «immediatezza» ci ricondurrebbe infatti all'interno di un'opposizione tra una presunta oggettività del reale e le sue interpretazioni, senza tenere in considerazione il fatto che qualsiasi dinamica percettiva comporta una mediazione – ed è proprio questo elemento ciò che si vuole portare in superficie, mostrandone di volta in volta le specificità. La posta in gio-



**Figura 5.** Paolo Cirio. Installation view, 2019. Photo Nicola Morittu. Courtesy Galleria Giorgio Persano.

co dell'artista non rientra quindi nel dominio del vero e del falso per cui, ad un filtro erroneo e fuorviante, se ne sostituisce uno veritiero, prima celato. Così facendo, si rimarrebbe all'interno di una logica disvelante, mentre queste pratiche artistiche aspirano a fornire una meta riflessione sui meccanismi di personalizzazione.

Questa scelta è particolarmente azzeccata rispetto ai nuovi media perché, nel caso di questi mezzi di comunicazione, il problema dell'accesso all'informazione non è per lo più legato alla segretezza. Per utilizzare ancora una volta le parole di Cirio, «c'è un eccesso di informazione: non viviamo certo nella censura, ma ciò che era oscurato tramite la mancanza ora è confuso con una strutturazione dell'informazione pilotata» (Bazzichelli [2011]). Con i nuovi media, il problema dell'accesso all'informazione è legato ad un fenomeno recente e che ha un nome specifico: *information overload* – in italiano *eccesso di informazione*. La nostra esperienza online è pervasa di dati e ciò che rende estremamente difficile isolare quelli importanti non è solo l'enorme mole di informazioni o il suo nascondimento, ma spesso anche la sua scarsa qualità. Per questo l'*information overload* è stato descritto come «una degradazione dell'informazione che avviene quando quest'ultima inizia a somigliare al rumore, irrilevante e capace di interferire con la ricezione dei segnali desiderati, o quando è ridondante, banale, non interessante» (Iaconesi, Persico [2016]: 208).

È questa la ragione per cui la pratica artistica non può limitarsi a riportare sulla scena le informazioni oscurate, ma è necessario che fornisca uno strumento interpretativo, una riflessione sulla selezione necessaria, come direbbe Sloterdijk, tra ciò che va ricordato e ciò che può essere dimenticato nella costruzione di un ambiente abitabile (Sloterdijk [2017]).

Un esempio di pratica artistica che si è occupata di questo tema è la performance *La cura* del collettivo romano *Art is Open Source*, formato da Salvatore Iaconesi e Oriana Persico. Con *La cura*, da cui è stato tratto anche un omonimo libro, Salvatore Iaconesi ha fatto della sua diagnosi di cancro al cervello un'occasione per discutere, tra le altre cose, di accesso all'informazione e di partecipazione nelle pratiche di cura – in senso ampio. Iaconesi condivide con Cirio l'appartenenza alla cultura hacker e, come si evince dal nome del collettivo: *Art is Open Source*, uno degli elementi fondamentali di questa eredità è il tema dell'*open source*. Vale a dire, l'idea secondo la quale i meccanismi e i contenuti che formano la nostra esperienza online – ma, analogicamente, anche offline – dovrebbero essere accessibili e modificabili collettivamente.

All'inizio della performance *La cura*, Iaconesi vuole mettere online, rendendo accessibili a tutti, i dati della sua cartella clinica. Ancora una volta, non si tratta di dati censurati: dopo alcune peripezie, Iaconesi entra in possesso della sua cartella in formato digitale. Tuttavia, è la specificità del formato di questi documenti medici che rende di fatto inaccessibile l'informazione. Questo e altri momenti diventano l'occasione per una riflessione artistica sull'idea di *cura* in senso ampio, come pratica di attenzione per gli aspetti, per lo più tecnologici e digitali, che contribuiscono alla creazione degli ambienti che abitiamo. Ancora una volta un tentativo, attraverso l'arte e la riflessione estetica, di plasmare nuovi immaginari per gli attori tecnologici con cui conviviamo, riflettendo sui significati e gli effetti che i filtri digitali hanno nella costruzione dell'esperienza, tenendo a mente che, anche con i nuovi media, «The question of separating signal and noise has fundamental political dimension. Pattern recognition resonates

with the wider question of political recognition» (Steyerl [2017]: 170).

## CONCLUSIONI

Le pratiche artistiche che abbiamo chiamato in causa, soffermandoci in particolare sui lavori di Paolo Cirio e sulla performance *La cura* di Salvatore Iaconesi e Oriana Persico, hanno mostrato la capacità dell'arte di dare forma ai nostri immaginari, offrendoci delle occasioni per riflettere su quelli che abitiamo e costruirne di differenti.

In questo momento storico, in cui viviamo a stretto contatto con nuovi attori digitali che influenzano enormemente la nostra esperienza – non soltanto a livello di massa, ma con meccanismi individuali di personalizzazione – questo tipo di occasione risulta urgente e fondamentale. Le *filter bubbles* agiscono infatti secondo meccanismi opachi e con linguaggi, come il codice, che non sono quelli divenuti abitudinari per la percezione umana nella sua storicizzazione. Il modo in cui i nuovi media influenzano la nostra esperienza e la nostra costruzione di mondi passa quindi per lo più inosservata, proponendoci sfere sempre più personalizzate e frammentate, in un momento storico in cui l'impatto dell'uomo sull'ambiente è tutt'altro che trascurabile. Il problema, come abbiamo visto, non è soltanto quello di avere accesso alle informazioni, ma di comprendere le dinamiche che veicolano per potervi interagire: «Even if all data in the internet is globally accessible, in practice the internet leads not to the emergence of a universal public space but to a tribalization of the public. (...) The user finds on the internet only what he or she wants to find» (Quaranta [2019]). La stessa *New Media Art* ha dovuto, ai suoi esordi, affrontare queste difficoltà, rischiando di rimanere intrappolata all'interno dei confini di discipline differenti. Solo recentemente le pratiche artistiche volte ad indagare i nuovi media hanno potuto affermarsi con più stabilità all'interno degli ambienti istituzionalizzati.

L'esperienza della *New Media Art* – intendendo, con questa etichetta, quelle ricerche artistiche



che si sono interrogate sul ruolo dei nuovi media nella costruzione di ambienti abitabili – ci permette non soltanto di comprendere la necessità di un approccio collaborativo ed interdisciplinare al digitale, insistendo sull'importanza dell'accessibilità ai dati e su un consumo consapevole dell'informazione. Al di là del rendere visibili i meccanismi di funzionamento dei nuovi media, con le loro attività di personalizzazione ed estrazione dati, opere come quelle di Paolo Cirio ci ricordano che, nel processo continuo che è la soggettivazione, è necessario pensare un'estetica dell'invisibile, che scaldi il primato del visibile e del cogito, per renderci sensibili alle forze non umane con cui coabitiamo. Per dirla con Rahel Jaeggi, bisogna tenere a mente che ogni modo di concepire il mondo, nelle sue pratiche più o meno intenzionali e nelle istituzioni in cui queste si coagulano, stabilisce «quali siano in generale le opzioni dell'agire possibile» (Jaeggi [2016]: 77). Nel tentativo di andare al di là dell'antropocentrismo è quindi necessario produrre nuove cosmologie, nuove narrazioni che valorizzino gli aspetti e gli effetti dell'abitare sui corpi e lo psichico nella loro interezza ed inseparabilità. Mettendo in luce gli aspetti invisibili del nostro abitare, l'arte, intesa come pratica critica immanente, ha infatti la possibilità di trasformare i mondi estremamente personalizzati della nostra esperienza online con un'operazione di ricosmizzazione, in cui vengano introdotti nuovi modi di connessione tra le esperienze individuali, riflettendo sulle direzioni che ciascuna *filter bubble* ci schiude e indagando le necessità a cui questo immaginario risponde. È in questo senso che, durante l'edizione online di Biennale Tecnologia 2020, Salvatore Iaconesi ha insistito sulla *data meditation* e sugli *slow data* in contrapposizione ai ritmi frenetici dell'industria estrattiva di dati, mostrando la necessità, alla stregua del lavoro di Paolo Cirio, di rallentare i flussi di dati che costruiscono i nostri mondi digitali per comprenderne gli andamenti e migliorarne la qualità, analizzando gli effetti sulla soggettivazione. Per utilizzare ancora una volta le parole di Peter Sloterdijk, «Chi diffonde le notizie deve essere consapevole di contribuire in questo modo a determinare il

clima umano. I nostri stati d'animo vengono prodotti dalle catapulte dell'informazione» (Sloterdijk [2017]: 164).

#### BIBLIOGRAFIA

- Bazzichelli, T., 2006: *Networking. La rete come arte*, Costa & Nolan, Milano.
- Bazzichelli, T., 2011: *Paolo Cirio. Quando il future diventa arte*, "Digimag" 63.
- Bishop, C., 2012: *Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media*, "Artforum International Magazine" 51 (1), pp. 434-441.
- Bridle, J., 2019: *Nuova Era Oscura*, Nero Editions, Roma.
- Carbone, M., 2016: *Filosofia-schermi. Dal cinema alla rivoluzione digitale*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
- Catricalà, V., 2020: *Oltre il senso, verso il senso*, in Guida, M. (a cura di), *L'arte di Paolo Cirio. Information Critique*, Paolo Cirio Studio, New York, pp. 18-25.
- Cirio, P., 2019: *Flowcharts*, Paolo Cirio Studio, New York.
- Cirio, P., 2020: *L'arte di Paolo Cirio. Information Critique*, Polo Cirio Studio, New York.
- Culkin, J., 1967: *A schoolman's guide to Marshall McLuhan*, "Saturday Review" (18 marzo), pp. 51-53 e 70-72.
- Deleuze, G., 2008: *Francis Bacon. Logica della sensazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata.
- Iaconesi, S., Persico, O., 2016: *La cura*, Codice, Torino.
- Jaeggi, R., 2016: *Forme di vita e capitalismo*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino.
- Krauss, R., 2000: *A Voyage in the North Sea. Art in the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London.
- Mancuso, M., 2018: *Arte, tecnologia e scienza*, Mimesis, Milano.
- Pariser, E., 2011: *The Filter Bubble. What the Internet is Hiding from You*, The Penguin Press, New York.
- Paul, C., 2015: *Digital Art*, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London.

- Poli, F., Bernardelli, F., 2016: *Mettere in scena l'arte contemporanea*, Johan & Levi, Monza.
- Quaranta, D., 2013: *Beyond New Media Art*, LINK, Brescia.
- Shanken, E.A., 2002: *Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art*, "Leonardo" 35 (4), pp. 433-438.
- Shaviro, S., 2009: *Without Criteria. Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze and the Aesthetics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Simondon, G., 1964: *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, PUF, Paris.
- Sloterdijk, P., 2017: *Che cosa è successo nel XX secolo?*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- Sterling, B., 2012: *Close-up: Data Mine*, "Artforum International Magazine" 51 (1), New York.
- Steyerl, H., 2017: *Duty Free Art. Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, Verso, London.
- Tinterri, A., 2020: *Loophole for All. Intervista a Paolo Cirio*, in *L'arte di Paolo Cirio. Information Critique*, Paolo Cirio Studio, New York.
- Von Uexküll, J., 1920: *Biologia teoretica*, a cura di L. Guidetti, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2015.
- Whitehead, A.N., 1929: *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, The Free Press, New York, 1978.

#### SITOGRAFIA

<https://paolocirio.net/>  
<http://la-cura.it/>  
<https://www.he-r.it/>





**Citation:** C. Z. Laskaris (2021) L'esperienza estetica come inquadratura del reale: l'impatto dei media digitali nella percezione visiva, tra contesto pandemico e approccio museale. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 123-133. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12404

**Copyright:** © 2021 C. Z. Laskaris. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## L'esperienza estetica come inquadratura del reale: l'impatto dei media digitali nella percezione visiva, tra contesto pandemico e approccio museale

### Aesthetic experience as a framing of reality: the impact of digital media on visual perception, between pandemic context and museum approach

CATERINA ZAIRA LASKARIS

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano  
caterinazaira.laskar@unicatt.it

**Abstract.** The situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic has not qualitatively changed our aesthetic experience, but rather intensified certain perceptual habits that had already been in place for quite a long time, highlighting their characteristics. In particular, the relationship between movement and framing and our close familiarity with digital media in the visual aesthetic experience. This aspect has been acknowledged in the museum context, but we are still at the beginning of a path leading to a more conscious implementation of the potential and creative value of an approach to art not only «in presence», but also «at a distance» through electronic devices. The pandemic has shown how radical and unavoidable is the need for beauty and the multiplicity of possible ways to respond to it.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Digital images, Electronic media, Museum environment, Framing.

---

La pandemia ha cambiato la nostra relazione di soggetti con gli oggetti e il contesto, nell'esperienza estetica di carattere visivo? Questa situazione di emergenza tanto inedita ed eccezionale quanto prolungata può dirci qualcosa sulle caratteristiche dell'esperienza estetica nel nostro tempo? A più di un anno di distanza dall'inizio della pandemia provocata dal virus Sars-Cov 2 affronto queste due domande dalla prospettiva generale dei ricettori di arte, basandomi su un *background* culturale ed esperienziale di storico dell'arte e docente di storia delle tecniche artistiche. Alla prima domanda ritengo si possa rispondere «no», alla seconda «sì». La situazione

pandemica non ha infatti, almeno per ora, trasformato in modo radicale pratiche e abitudini visive, già ampiamente in atto, ma le ha, piuttosto, intensificate, contribuendo a evidenziarne le caratteristiche.

#### MOVIMENTO E INCORNICIATURA NELL'ESPERIENZA ESTETICA CONTEMPORANEA

L'esperienza estetica, che si attiva tra un soggetto e un oggetto (non solamente artistico) in un contesto, ha il *movimento* alla propria radice e al proprio centro, sin dal desiderio e nel piacere stesso della percezione visiva:

*Il nostro piacere consiste nel godere di questa scossa attraverso cui il fondo sorge e si perde in forme e zone. [...] Ciò che viene chiamato con il termine molto vago di «arte» non è che questa risonanza delle risonanze, questa rifrazione delle rifrazioni tra zone di emozione. [...] divento io stesso un momento del movimento generale del mondo, io stesso un momento del commercio generale di sensi, dei sentimenti, delle significazioni. Questo commercio, questa comunicazione, questa condivisione è ciò che fa l'immagine. È ciò che mi conduce in essa proprio mentre essa penetra in me. (Nancy [2005]: 20, 22)*

Il movimento si declina per il soggetto tanto nel suo corporeo «andare verso» l'oggetto (per esempio quando decide di visitare un museo, ma anche quando procede casualmente per strada), quanto nella sua ricezione dell'oggetto attraverso l'atto percettivo, e si traduce nel superamento della soglia tra soggetto e oggetto (estetico):

*Nel passaggio estetico, sigillato dal piacere, si stabilisce un circolo virtuoso tra la nostra attenzione e le proprietà aspettuali di quel qualcosa d'altro, di quell'alterità che ci viene incontro. L'esperienza estetica si presenta, dunque, come l'esperienza di un passaggio. (Desideri [2004]: 29)*

L'azione del guardare è di per sé dinamica: lo prova la fisiologia dell'occhio, il suo funzionamento in relazione agli stimoli esterni, il continuo ri-

mettere a fuoco la realtà. Recenti ricerche neurologiche hanno inoltre rilevato a livello cerebrale «reazioni empatiche automatiche» di carattere motorio in risposta alla percezione di immagini e opere d'arte; queste reazioni sarebbero attivate non solo di fronte a rappresentazioni mimetiche di gesti e movimenti, ma anche dall'osservazione di un segno grafico o materico che «evoca una simulazione motoria del gesto necessario a produrlo», una traccia che rimanda ai gesti compiuti dall'artista nell'atto produttivo (Freedberg, Gallese [2009]: 346). Ciò significa che mentre guardiamo un disegno su carta o un dipinto a olio o una scultura in pietra i segni lasciati dal movimento dello strumento grafico impugnato dalla mano, l'evidenza delle pennellate di colore o dei colpi di scalpello ci riconduce in modo «empatico» e istintivo alla condizione dell'artefice, di chi ha elaborato manualmente quei materiali: il fattore dinamico diventa l'elemento di connessione tra l'esperienza diretta del fare creativo e quella della sua percezione.

Per altro verso, il concetto stesso di movimento identifica la condizione specifica dell'esperienza estetica, che è sempre uno scarto, anche minimo, rispetto alla «normalità» funzionale delle azioni e reazioni fisiche e mentali. L'incontro tra soggetto e oggetto si attua, infatti, come una sorta di ritaglio spazio-temporale in un contesto condiviso («rapporto con un ritaglio di mondo»; Desideri [2004]: 44): possiamo figurarcelo come un'intensificazione del movimento – percettivo, intuitivo, emotivo, immaginifico –, una forma di accelerazione e concentrazione, che sfocia in un istante di sospensione, di stasi, in cui si ha la condensazione epifanica dell'oggetto estetico (qualcosa *di più*, di diverso e di più ricco rispetto all'oggetto «in sé»). È la «sospensiva» di cui parla Cesare Brandi:

*Per assicurare a codesta «epifania» la indispensabile sospensione dal tempo e il suo manifestarsi in un eterno presente, si avverte allora la necessità di disciplinare questa interazione creando un raccordo, un trapasso, una sospensiva. L'invenzione della cornice è uno dei modi per risolvere tale bisogno di raccordo e di sospensiva. (Brandi [2000]: 124)*

L'esperienza estetica è, dunque, anche un'*incorniciatura*, generata grazie al movimento corporeo-percettivo-intuitivo-emotivo. L'evento percettivo estetico consiste in un *surplus* qualitativo rispetto al movimento fisico, tanto del corpo attraverso lo spazio quanto dell'occhio nella sua incessante esplorazione; è un sovrabbondare dell'esperienza del guardare, che però non si disperde, ma resta a disposizione, registrata nella memoria, «incorniciata», per essere conservata con una *qualità* speciale.

Questo evento, il superamento di una soglia che si rivela nello stupore e nel piacere scaturiti in chi percepisce, trova espressione in letteratura, come in questo esempio tra i tanti:

*[Martin] Attraversò la strada e si fermò, con le spalle rivolte a una vetrina, a contemplare la grande cupola. L'intero equilibrio del suo corpo parve mutarsi. Provava la strana sensazione di qualcosa che si muovesse dentro di lui mettendosi in armonia con l'edificio [...] Era eccitante, questo mutamento di proporzioni. (Woolf [2005]: 233; cfr. anche Laskaris [2017]: 71 e il capitolo Utilità della cornice e sguardo estetico, 87-93)*

Il *movimento*, d'altro canto, non è esclusivo del soggetto, ma coinvolge anche gli oggetti della visione, in particolare le immagini, che sono espressione della relazione dinamica tra soggetto che percepisce e oggetti percepiti. Più specificamente ancora, quello che potremmo chiamare «movimento incorniciato» è – per dirla, forzando un po' la mano, con Focillon (2002; cfr. anche Mazzocut-Mis [1998]) – la *forma* più propria dell'arte visiva a partire dalla fine dell'Ottocento, dalla nascita del cinema.

Se consideriamo l'arte visiva tecnologicamente tradizionale, nelle varie forme di pittura, scultura, architettura ecc., il movimento è prevalentemente confinato all'esterno dell'oggetto artistico (sebbene questo possa presentare funzionalità dinamiche interne, come accade, per esempio, nelle sculture lignee con arti snodabili utilizzate per determinate azioni liturgiche nei secoli medievali): da un lato, nella sfera d'azione dell'artefice e di altri soggetti coinvolti nelle fasi di ideazione, produzione, collocazione, gestione, circolazione, conservazione, valorizzazione delle opere; dall'altro, in quella dei

riguardanti, del pubblico, dei destinatari. Questi oggetti artistici si presentano *immobili*: davanti a un dipinto perfettamente statico la mobilità massima è quella dello sguardo che lo esplora.

La situazione comincia a cambiare con la diffusione di strumenti ottici basati su tecniche di proiezione di immagini (cfr. ex. Brunetta [2009]) e soprattutto con l'avvento della fotografia, che tende a condensare, a sincronizzare sul confine materico individuato sia nello strumento tecnico (la macchina fotografica), sia nell'oggetto risultante dalle varie fasi del processo esecutivo (la fotografia) due movimenti: quello del mondo circostante, del contesto reale, che si vuole ritrarre, e quello (insieme percettivo e gestuale) dell'operatore, del fotografo, di colui che attraverso la macchina prende la mira e cattura (sulle metafore linguistiche applicate alla fotografia cfr. Ceserani [2011]) un frammento del fluido orizzonte spazio-temporale, per offrirlo stabile e materialmente circoscritto alla percezione di uno sguardo altro. Il fine è congelare la visione in un fermo immagine, cogliere l'impalpabile movimento e ingabbiarlo in un oggetto palpabile. La fotografia divide il tempo in segmenti sempre più piccoli traducendoli in immagini fisiche fisse, rincorrendo e infine raggiungendo tecnologicamente l'istantaneità.

Il cinema, le sequenze di fotogrammi, i video compiono il passo ulteriore, la creazione/costruzione di un movimento *nuovo*, ottenuto intrecciando linee temporali distinte, frammentate e ricomposte: quella dell'allestimento scenico e della recitazione, quella delle riprese video effettuate dagli operatori, quella della postproduzione e del montaggio. Il movimento viene così (ri)creato artificialmente e consegnato a uno sguardo il cui compito non è più quello di inferirlo (come accade di fronte a una fotografia), colmando il *gap* tra percezione e immaginazione, ma di assorbirlo, assumerlo, riceverlo: lo spettatore seduto nella sala cinematografica guarda scorrere davanti a sé il tempo ricreato tecnologicamente e artisticamente, il tempo come artificio, (ri)prodotto e riproducibile tecnicamente.

L'evoluzione storica della tecnica produttiva e comunicativa delle immagini, che ho qui neces-

sariamente liofilizzato (cfr. ex. Pinotti, Somaini [2016]: in particolare capitoli II e VI) e che giunge fino alla nostra consuetudine odierna con i dispositivi elettronici portatili, è la manifestazione formale del movimento quale elemento caratterizzante della società moderna: movimento intensivo e generale di corpi, cose, occhi e immagini.

#### ESPERIENZA ESTETICA IN TEMPO PANDEMICO

Le misure più severe di contrasto all'emergenza pandemica – confinamento domestico, coprifuoco, allontanamento dai luoghi di lavoro, svago, commercio, istruzione, cultura, culto, dai mezzi di trasporto, dalle vie di comunicazione e dagli spazi di interazione fisica – hanno introdotto una frattura nella quotidianità, uno sfasamento rispetto al *continuum* di esperienze in cui eravamo fino a quel momento coinvolti. Questa crisi ha interessato ogni ambito dell'esperienza individuale e collettiva, ha condizionato il modo di percepire ed esperire il mondo anche sul piano estetico.

La (auto)reclusione in un contesto domestico fisso, dato, stabile per un tempo imprevedibilmente prolungato e l'azzeramento pressoché totale di ogni spostamento, vincolato a percorsi circoscritti e strettamente dipendenti da esigenze basilari (lavoro, salute, acquisto di beni primari), hanno determinato il drastico ridimensionamento delle potenziali occasioni di attivazione dell'esperienza estetica. La chiusura fisica dell'orizzonte, la sua contrazione a una ristretta gamma di elementi noti e invariabili (*quelle* pareti, *quegli* arredi, *quei* corpi, volti e gesti) ha limitato quantitativamente le possibilità di incontro con la bellezza, con la sua casualità e gratuità epifanica.

La risposta spontanea degli operatori culturali e istituzionali (deputati a favorire l'esperienza estetica) di fronte al congelamento delle attività in presenza è stata la moltiplicazione delle iniziative a distanza su piattaforme digitali e l'implementazione dei contenuti multimediali. Si è tentato, cioè, di bilanciare almeno in parte l'immobilità forzata del soggetto con la movimentazione alternativa,

non fisica ma iconica, degli oggetti potenzialmente estetici: vedute spettacolari, riproduzioni ad alta definizione di opere d'arte, visite virtuali a musei e monumenti hanno aumentato in modo esponenziale la loro circolazione e penetrazione nello spazio-tempo domestico di milioni di persone attraverso canali web e televisivi, talora con effetti di caotica sollecitazione e sovraesposizione visiva.

Questa, però, non è una condizione inedita. Il nostro sguardo è da tempo abituato a concepire i dispositivi elettronici (fissi e portatili) come estensioni dell'atto stesso di guardare, e, sempre più, a recepire la realtà attraverso immagini digitali di essa, che non solo *qualcun altro* fa, seleziona, mette in circolazione, ma che ciascuno di noi può produrre, immagazzinare, condividere. Le immagini digitali si muovono verso di noi e a partire da noi in un circuito continuo grazie ai dispositivi elettronici che maneggiamo, guardiamo e azioniamo senza sosta (cfr. Pinotti, Somaini [2016]: 137-192 capitolo IV: *Supporti, media, dispositivi*, 229-231, 265-266; Laskaris [2018]: 145-164). La condizione di confinamento e immobilità imposta dalla pandemia, unita al potenziamento quantitativo della messa a disposizione di contenuti visivi digitali, ha di fatto incoraggiato, nutrito ed enfatizzato il movimento oculare rispetto a quello dell'intero corpo nella ricerca della bellezza.

Secondo Hans Belting, anche il nostro corpo è un medium, non solo i dispositivi (visivi) che utilizziamo:

*C'è bisogno del nostro corpo per fornire alle immagini esperienza e significato personali [...] Immagine e medium sono entrambi legati al corpo, che deve essere considerato come un vero e proprio terzo parametro [...] Il corpo, come proprietario e destinatario delle immagini gestisce i media come estensioni delle proprie funzioni visive. I corpi ricevono le immagini grazie alla percezione, mentre i media le trasmettono ai corpi. (Belting [2009]: 79, 85, 92)*

Il nostro corpo (dunque i nostri occhi e il nostro cervello) non è, però, un medium neutro, ma sperimenta un rapporto di reciproca interazione con le immagini che riceve attraverso gli altri media. In sostanza, ciò che noi percepiamo e cre-

iamo visivamente è il risultato di ciò che siamo, ma ciò che siamo è *anche* il prodotto di ciò che percepiamo, che vediamo attraverso i vari media. La percezione è, allora, dinamica anche in senso storico, è storicizzabile, come già riteneva Benjamin (cfr. Pinotti, Somaini [2016]: 86, 89 segg.), come hanno rilevato studi antropologici (Geertz [1988]: capitolo V: *L'arte come sistema culturale*) e approcci alla storia dell'arte e delle immagini in relazione con la storia della cultura e della società (Baxandall [2001]: in particolare capitolo II: *L'occhio del Quattrocento*; cfr. anche Frigo [2010]). La nostra relazione con le immagini, ricorda Belting, precede i media che noi mettiamo a punto, ma il nostro modo di elaborare (perceettivamente e mentalmente) le immagini dipende dai media stessi attraverso i quali le riceviamo: in particolare oggi «la tecnologia digitale persegue l'imitazione della nostra immaginazione. Le immagini digitali ispirano quelle mentali, tanto quanto esse stesse traggono ispirazione dalle immagini mentali e dal loro libero flusso» (Belting [2009]: 84). Si produce così una continua circuitazione percettiva-creativa, all'interno della quale si colloca anche l'attivazione dell'esperienza estetica.

A questo contesto visivo e tecnologico, dominato dalla componente delle immagini digitali e dei dispositivi elettronici che le veicolano e producono, appartiene anche l'attuale momento pandemico.

#### ESEMPI DI OGGETTI ESTETICI, TRA «ANALOGICO» E «DIGITALE»

Per ricostruire una situazione-tipo coerente con le condizioni di limitazione del movimento imposte dall'emergenza pandemica, prendiamo le mosse da un esempio adottato da Desideri (2004) per illustrare l'esperienza estetica. Si è all'interno di una stanza, si sta facendo qualcosa alla scrivania e può capitare di veder scivolare fuori da un libro un paio di cartoline che riproducono due diverse opere d'arte, o di accorgersi della presenza dell'arcobaleno fuori dalla finestra. La bellezza, artistica o naturale, fa la sua apparizione sulla scena domestica, innescata dalla reazione del sogget-

to a un atto percettivo che cessa in quel momento di essere neutro o meramente funzionale per diventare estetico.

Introduciamo in questo contesto alcuni elementi tecnologici familiari nel nostro orizzonte quotidiano: un televisore che, in tempo pandemico, mostra riprese a volo d'uccello di città svuotate o un'opera lirica inscenata in un teatro senza pubblico, oppure un film in hd; lo schermo di un computer aperto sul sito web di un museo con immagini ad alta risoluzione delle collezioni d'arte; il display di uno smartphone su cui scorrono fotografie attraenti suggerite dai social.

Analizziamo questo contesto. Tanto l'esempio di partenza quanto gli elementi aggiuntivi sono vie attraverso le quali il soggetto può entrare in contatto con la bellezza. Lo guardo, fino a quel momento distratto o impegnato in altre attività, può sperimentare lo scarto, il superamento della soglia cui accennavamo all'inizio, e accendersi con stupore, piacere e riconoscimento del bello per una o tutte queste 'cose'. Si tratta, anzi, in prevalenza, di immagini di cose (fotografie su vario supporto, riprese video). Il margine di casualità nell'incontro con la bellezza è variabile: il soggetto non è andato intenzionalmente incontro all'arcobaleno o alle cartoline cadute dal libro; ha, invece, verosimilmente selezionato il sito web museale, il profilo social e il canale televisivo. Il suo movimento fisico è comunque ridotto a gesti minimi: volgere la testa verso la finestra, afferrare il libro, digitare sul telecomando, sulla tastiera o sul touchscreen.

Gli oggetti visivi attraverso i quali si attiva l'esperienza estetica del soggetto presentano caratteristiche differenti. Le cartoline scivolte fuori dal libro sono riproduzioni fotografiche di dipinti, ma sono *anche* oggetti concreti. Qualsiasi immagine stampata è anche un oggetto, che porta su di sé quell'immagine senza coincidere del tutto con essa, e che presenta determinate caratteristiche materiali e proprietà fisiche esperibili anche con gli altri sensi: formato, dimensioni, peso, spessore, flessibilità, consistenza al tatto, temperatura, qualità cromatica, persino odore, sapore, capacità di produrre suoni. Le due immagini di dipinti conservati in un museo sono dunque anche oggetti – prima ancora



che oggetti estetici – nati con una certa funzione e inseriti in una determinata categoria merceologica: sono cartoline, vendute in un bookshop museale o in un negozio di souvenirs, fatte per essere spedite o per essere conservate come memoria o ornamento, usate come segnalibri, infilate tra tante altre nel mucchio di residui dei viaggi, incollate su un muro o sulla porta del frigorifero, perfino messe in cornice. In queste cartoline di dipinti è implicita una stratificazione di realtà: quella delle cartoline come oggetti, quella delle opere d'arte come oggetti d'arte collocati altrove e dalle caratteristiche proprie, quella delle fotografie in quanto immagini delle opere d'arte. L'evento estetico che prende origine dalle due cartoline non si esaurisce nel loro essere riproduzioni di opere d'arte, né prescinde dal loro essere oggetti fatti in un dato modo e appartenenti a un dato luogo (quel libro in quella stanza) e tempo fisico, che non è quello del dipinto che illustrano e dello scatto fotografico, né è solo quello della loro stampa e fabbricazione, ma anche quello che si definisce nella loro relazione in quanto oggetti con chi li possiede o li maneggia. Le loro caratteristiche materiali e il loro rapporto materiale con il contesto fisico in cui sono collocate fanno dunque parte del loro divenire oggetti estetici tanto quanto l'immagine artistica che esse recano su di sé: lo stupore, il piacere, il riconoscimento del bello nascono dall'incontro del soggetto con *queste* immagini (di dipinti) *in quanto* facenti corpo con *questi* oggetti (cartoline).

Nell'esperienza di visione dell'arcobaleno, lo sguardo coglie, attraverso la cornice della finestra, una presenza/rivelazione, che è *anche* immagine, segno visivo, carico di implicazioni culturali, simboliche, estetiche, ma è innanzi tutto una manifestazione fisica della realtà naturale consegnata al nostro senso della vista. Il soggetto che guarda l'arcobaleno sente di assistere a un evento di cui condivide l'esistenza fisica in quel medesimo spazio-tempo e riconosce in esso un accento, un indice, una intensificazione visiva che la realtà naturale pone su se stessa.

Prendendo in considerazione gli altri oggetti visivi dell'esempio che andiamo facendo, ne riconosciamo la peculiarità in quanto immagini. Bel-

ting afferma (2009: 78) che «un medium è una forma», perciò il cambio di medium determina un cambio formale nell'immagine che esso trasmette. In questo senso, possiamo adattare all'ambito percettivo ciò che Henri Focillon (2002: 56) scriveva nel 1934 a proposito delle «materie dell'arte», che «non sono intercambiabili, vale a dire che la forma, passando da una data materia ad un'altra subisce una metamorfosi», o quanto sottolineava Giulio Carlo Argan (1967: 120) riguardo alla creazione artistica: «posto che l'arte, come ogni azione umana, è un modo di relazione con la realtà, ne discende che il primo dato di realtà che si pone all'artista è la materia o l'insieme di materie, sulle quali egli opera». In modo analogo, la reazione percettiva ed estetica del soggetto a un'immagine dipende dal medium attraverso il quale la riceve.

Le immagini veicolate dal televisore, dal computer, dallo smartphone sono in effetti *diverse* da quelle che possiamo vedere stampate sulle cartoline o scorgere attraverso la finestra.

Un primo dato delle immagini digitali è una certa *ambiguità*: non sono manifestazioni dirette di una realtà (qual è l'arcobaleno), né sono oggetti fisici che portano su di sé un'immagine (come le cartoline), ma si presentano a noi come immagini incorporee veicolate da un medium fisico. In comune con le cartoline hanno il fatto di essere l'esito di un processo composito di creazione, immagazzinamento, distribuzione, selezione, però con un'importante differenza: il loro supporto coincide con il dispositivo tecnologico che le porge al nostro sguardo, ma tale supporto non è esclusivo di ciascuna di esse, come invece accade negli oggetti-cartoline, ciascuno dei quali coincide con *quel* particolare riquadro di cartoncino stampato. Le immagini digitali sono insieme dipendenti e indipendenti dalla materialità del medium elettronico: dipendono dal suo funzionamento per essere percepite – banalmente non esistono per lo sguardo potenziale del soggetto se il dispositivo è spento –, ma non fanno corpo con esso, piuttosto lo abitano, e solo temporaneamente.

L'oggetto estetico, allora, sarà l'immagine *in sé*, astratta dal suo supporto (ex. la veduta intera della *Primavera* di Botticelli, il dettaglio di un acquerel-

lo di Fang Zhaoling o la ripresa video dell'*Ofelia* di Arturo Martini), o, piuttosto, una commistione, ibridazione, compenetrazione e dissolvenza percettiva tra l'immagine e il dispositivo tecnologico che ce la propone, dal quale il nostro occhio la assume e la astrae? Le immagini (ri)prodotte materialmente (come nel caso di un vero e proprio quadro o delle cartoline che lo ritraggono) si identificano almeno parzialmente con il supporto che le reca su di sé, e l'esperienza estetica unisce entrambi gli elementi (oggetto fisico e immagine) come sfaccettature di un unico fenomeno. Nel caso delle immagini veicolate tecnologicamente accade la stessa cosa? Qual è il *corpo estetico* che esperiamo con esse?

Un secondo aspetto caratterizzante è il rapporto multiforme delle immagini digitali con il *movimento*. La loro natura è dinamica non statica: si muovono all'interno del dispositivo che le rende disponibili per la percezione del soggetto, vi scorrono, cambiano in continuazione, non si fermano necessariamente. In quanto non-oggetti materiali, esse conservano una sorta di esistenza autonoma, irriducibile al medium e non interamente possedibile, sebbene infinitamente manipolabile, perciò fluida. Il loro dinamismo può essere indotto dall'esterno – chi le guarda può anche agire su di esse con vari gradi di interazione a seconda del dispositivo, quindi accenderle, spegnerle, bloccarle, sfogliarle, selezionarle, scaricarle, ingrandirle, ritagliarle, trasformarle, deformarle, inviarle, archivarle ecc. –, ma esse possono muoversi sullo schermo anche indipendentemente dall'intenzione del soggetto ricevente (pensiamo per esempio alle foto in scorrimento automatico sulle pagine web o nei manifesti elettronici a rotazione).

Il movimento è incluso costitutivamente nelle immagini digitali anche perché è proprio del mezzo, televisivo o informatico, che non è mai statico e che prevede di norma l'azione, il gesto del soggetto: accendere e spegnere il dispositivo, attivare lo schermo fanno parte di un dinamismo di fondo che coincide con la funzionalità dell'oggetto-supporto (televisore, schermo, display).

L'estrema mobilità, manipolabilità e riproducibilità delle immagini digitali, che possono

migrare all'infinito da un dispositivo a un altro, mutando forma e caratteristiche visive sia a monte (in fase di produzione e condivisione) sia a valle (in fase di ricezione e utilizzo), comporta anche una trasformazione rispetto alla nozione di tempo: il legame tra immagine e sua durata è elastico e metamorfico, fino a ridursi a una dimensione puntuale di 'consumo' dell'immagine stessa. La relazione con i supporti elettronici e con l'archiviazione in depositi invisibili e intangibili (server, cloud, memorie informatiche), la non trasformazione in oggetti materiali (ex. attraverso la stampa dell'immagine) abbinano all'oggetto digitale gli attributi di transitorietà, volatilità, effimero, bilanciati, però, dall'idea in sottofondo che proprio la iper-moltiplicazione, la non unicità, la diffusione virale e spesso incontrollabile delle immagini digitali conducano a una forma di memorizzazione collettiva e condivisa (che ricorda il modello di trasmissione orale dei testi) e possano perciò garantirne un' indefinita persistenza.

Altra caratteristica delle immagini digitali è quella che potremmo chiamare la *dinamica dell'inquadratura*, ossia l'interazione dinamica tra la loro flessibilità dimensionale e la rigidità dimensionale del dispositivo dotato di schermo che le presenta alla nostra vista. Esse hanno portato a compimento la sovrapposizione (percettiva e formale) del concetto di inquadratura a quello di incorniciatura, già presente nella fotografia e nel cinema. Cornice non è più prevalentemente un elemento aggiuntivo, un oggetto altro che agisce *intorno a* un'immagine, identificandola, indicandola, sottolineandola come tale – «La cornice separa l'immagine da tutto ciò che è non-immagine», come afferma Stoichita (1998: 41) – e conferendole dall'esterno un connotato estetico (cfr. per esempio Ortega y Gasset [1997]; cfr. anche Ferrari, Pinotti [2018]); potremmo invece pensarla, in relazione alle immagini digitali, come un ritaglio del campo visivo che fa corpo con l'immagine stessa, non è indipendente da essa, non è un accessorio, ma è un'azione 'chirurgica' operata dallo/per lo sguardo. Ciò che resta immutato è il suo ruolo valorizzante rispetto all'immagine. Si potrebbe applicare a questa situazione anche ciò

che Cesare Brandi (2001: 124) scriveva a proposito della cornice, che funge da «raccordo spaziale» per risolvere il «duplice trapasso [...] fra lo spazio fisico dell'ambiente in cui è immerso lo spettatore e la spazialità del dipinto [...] [e] fra questa spazialità e la spazialità propria della parete su cui il dipinto è collocato». Oggi, quella «cornice» è il profilo di un display, la «parete» è la superficie dello schermo su cui l'immagine appare.

Mi pare che negli ultimi anni sia esperienza piuttosto comune o tendenza diffusa quella di percepire esteticamente le cose quasi solo attraverso il filtro selettivo di un'inquadratura, specialmente quella della fotocamera/schermo dello smartphone che ci si porta appresso (un unico mezzo finalizzato tanto alla produzione quanto alla ricezione, percezione e trasmissione delle immagini). Il senso di libertà di scelta che l'atto di inquadrare comporta sta nell'intuizione che non saranno altri a determinare quell'incorniciatura ma sarò io/soggetto, che inquadro, vedo ciò che è nello schermo e scatto la foto, il tutto spesso in modo pressoché simultaneo. Non importa se quello scorcio di paesaggio, quel fiore o quell'opera d'arte sono stati, sono e saranno fotografati nello stesso modo da milioni di altri soggetti, ciò che conta è il gesto che io compio e che avvalora la mia percezione e la mia selezione visiva *come* estetica, è la firma che io metto su quel gesto, ripetuto, eppure sempre nuovo nella ripetizione. L'autorevolezza dell'immagine sta nel mio governarne l'inquadratura: non sono puro spettatore della realtà esterna e della sua bellezza, ma incido sulla percezione visiva fermandola e creando, plasmando, caricando di un passaggio ulteriore l'evento estetico che si sta compiendo, l'incontro con l'oggetto estetico. Con quel movimento di inquadratura, scatto e verifica visiva sullo schermo (molto frequentemente seguito dall'invio ad altri o dalla pubblicazione in rete dell'immagine), creo un 'doppio' visivo, o meglio una figura di ciò che vedo. Sottolineo così il mio atto percettivo come evento estetico, manifestandone la valenza non solo ricettiva ma creativa.

L'esperienza estetica visiva, che scaturisce sempre non tanto dalla visione di qualcosa quanto dal *come* si attua questa visione, si intreccia sem-

pre più spesso nel mondo attuale con il tempo aggiuntivo dello scatto fotografico digitale, con la registrazione visiva di questa esperienza. Questa abitudine all'inquadratura visiva, sempre più radicata nel nostro quotidiano e che il nostro occhio acquisisce grazie all'uso precoce e continuo dei dispositivi elettronici, può arrivare a plasmare in termini di inquadratura il nostro approccio visivo, e dunque la potenziale esperienza estetica, anche quando non stiamo utilizzando il dispositivo elettronico (cfr. Laskaris [2018]).

#### IL CONTESTO DIGITALE COME NUOVO SPAZIO DI AZIONE MUSEALE

Uno dei tanti lasciti della condizione indotta dalla pandemia è l'aver ricordato quanto il fare esperienza della bellezza sia un bisogno fondamentale, radicato e ineludibile sia per gli individui sia per le comunità; e quanto, pertanto, sia necessaria una risposta consapevole a questo bisogno. La pandemia ha inoltre sottolineato una condizione già nota e quasi data per scontata nell'orizzonte italiano: il fatto di vivere in un «museo diffuso». Ha però mostrato in aggiunta come questa nozione di «museo diffuso» si dilati ben oltre il paesaggio fisico che abitiamo e percorriamo e possa essere applicata all'iconosfera stessa nella quale siamo immersi e con la quale ci rapportiamo attraverso i media elettronici.

Come ben sa chi si occupa di allestimenti museali, il contesto nel quale si ricevono le sollecitazioni percettive è un elemento fondamentale e per nulla neutro nell'incontro tra soggetto e oggetto estetico, è parte integrante dell'esperienza estetica. Un contesto dato è sempre personalizzato dal soggetto, che ne fa esperienza attraverso la relazione con esso del suo stesso corpo/medium. Il nostro approccio attuale alla realtà è concretamente multimediale e questo crea abitudini e aspettative nel nostro modo di vedere, di guardare, di rispondere alle sollecitazioni visive, alle variazioni di luminosità, colore e forma, al loro movimento ecc., anche in termini di piacere estetico. La nozione di contesto si è arricchita di

nuove declinazioni formali. Nella nostra relazione multimediale con oggetti estetici anche digitali, il contesto non è tanto il non-luogo delle immagini digitali stesse, quella matrice in cui esse navigano prima di incagliarsi con un processo fluido e flessibile nella rigida incorniciatura di uno schermo elettronico, ma qualsiasi luogo fisico in cui si attuano tanto la ricezione quanto la produzione e la trasmissione di oggetti visivi in formato digitale. Contesto è la stanza in cui siedo o la strada in cui cammino, in entrambi i casi con uno smartphone in mano; contesto è anche il nesso sempre mobile tra il mio corpo (occhi, mano), lo smartphone dotato di una sua forma, che tengo nella mano e sul quale vedo comparire delle immagini di vario genere mescolate ad altri dati visivi, e lo sfondo ambientale sul quale percepisco la mia mano, lo smartphone e le immagini in esso. Contesto è anche l'insieme di elementi, di oggetti visivi (immagini, loghi, icone, parole, testi, titoli, numeri, indicatori ecc.) che trovo disposti, organizzati, accumulati sulle pagine web, nelle interfacce degli applicativi digitali, sul desktop del computer.

In tempo di pandemia si è posto un problema dalla soluzione non facile: come intendere e come gestire e organizzare il contesto museale *in absentia*? Come rivolgersi a visitatori trasformati in spettatori, i cui corpi sono sottintesi e distanti, invisibili e impalpabili? Come proporre loro opere d'arte de-fisicizzate, metamorfosate in immagini? Al contatto visivo «analogico» con un'opera d'arte esposta in una sala di museo, nella vetrina di una galleria antiquaria o sull'altare di una chiesa si è infatti sostituita una relazione smaterializzata del nostro corpo, ridotto a occhio, con immagini di opere e di luoghi artistici veicolate attraverso i media visivi. Questa «sostituzione» è chiaramente solo fittizia, ma apre la strada a nuove e ben più estese possibilità.

La crescita esponenziale della comunicazione digitale al servizio della valorizzazione e fruizione culturale ha messo in evidenza che, almeno in Italia, si è ancora in una fase iniziale di reale comprensione delle specificità linguistiche del mezzo di comunicazione digitale (cfr. Colombo [2020a]; Colombo [2020b]) e, punto cruciale, delle sue

potenzialità formali come *mezzo estetico*. Lo sforzo delle istituzioni culturali e museali in tempo di contagio di colmare il vuoto generato dall'impossibilità di movimento e accesso dei visitatori alle strutture e collezioni traslando l'esperienza diretta dal piano fisico a quello virtuale, ha rivelato, da un lato, limiti e lacune nell'utilizzo del mezzo tecnologico, del suo linguaggio specifico, dall'altro, l'opportunità di esplorare in modo più organico, consapevole e coraggioso un territorio dalle potenzialità espressive e formali ricchissime. Opportunità di affinare competenze, tecniche e strategie di progettazione, comunicazione e auto-rappresentazione istituzionale, messe in campo *per* (e non solo attraverso) il medium digitale, ma soprattutto di creare proposte visive specificamente pensate in termini artistici per *quel contesto* mediale. In sostanza, la sfida (appassionante) che si pone è quella di intendere la forma-museo digitale come un organismo con una dignità propria, non solo come l'ologramma evanescente e accessorio dell'esistente fisico.

Ritengo che questa sia una prospettiva interessante e feconda. Una realtà museale può attrezzarsi cogliendo e favorendo le possibilità dell'esperienza estetica tanto in presenza quanto in remoto, intese come modalità di fruizione non solo tra loro parzialmente alternative e reciprocamente integrative, ma ciascuna dotata di una *qualità estetica* intrinseca e autonoma.

Il fine di un museo è promuovere l'attivarsi di esperienze di godimento estetico valorizzando l'interrelazione percettiva tra oggetti (contenuto materiale), contesto (contenitore, percorso e allestimento museale) e soggetto (visitatore). Questo scopo può e deve essere perseguito in modo altrettanto accurato e complesso anche nella dimensione digitale, con la piena consapevolezza della specificità formale di questo contesto, dei suoi linguaggi espressivi, delle diverse condizioni percettive che può offrire al soggetto. Sono auspicabili a questo fine: la formazione e l'adozione di figure professionali dedicate a questo ambito, come accade per gli allestimenti museali fisici e per la conservazione e gestione degli oggetti materiali; la ricerca di qualità visiva digitale analoga a quella

riservata, per esempio, al versante editoriale, fatto di cataloghi, locandine, cartoline, poster di opere d'arte; il coinvolgimento di artisti e la commissione di opere d'arte visiva specificamente create per *quell'ambiente digitale museale* (potremmo parlare di arte *web site specific*).

Il museo non avrà allora solamente un'interfaccia grafica o fotografica digitale, una sorta di surrogato più o meno sofisticato di ciò che può offrire al visitatore in presenza, ma, accanto al settore indispensabile dell'informazione e della documentazione delle collezioni e delle attività, potrà ospitare e sviluppare arte propriamente digitale, cioè creata per la veicolazione, percezione e fruizione digitali. Il fine sarà sempre lo stesso: favorire, tanto attraverso la mediazione di un dispositivo elettronico quanto in presenza in una sala del museo, l'attivazione dell'esperienza estetica, cogliendo e rispettando anche la diversa condizione del 'visitatore digitale', senza presupporre o imporre (pur suggerendola e incentivandola) la sua trasformazione obbligata in visitatore fisico.

#### IL MUSEO COME CORNICE

Ciò che si è vissuto nei mesi (estate 2021) di ritorno alla fruizione culturale in presenza è stato l'esplicitazione spontanea di un bisogno reale e profondo, che contraddice quella logica appiattente dell'«estetizzazione generale» della società moderna, che, secondo Jean Baudrillard, avrebbe condotto alla progressiva indifferenza proprio sul piano estetico e artistico: «noi oggi non crediamo più nell'arte ma nella sola idea di arte» (Baudrillard [2012]: 46, 57).

La riapertura di musei e siti monumentali e archeologici, con tutte le misure cautelative ancora indispensabili per la pericolosità della pandemia in corso, ha introdotto una variabile inedita nel rapporto tra utente e struttura museale: quella della *sicurezza sanitaria*. Il filtro del controllo del Green Pass sanitario (spesso accompagnato per molti musei dall'obbligo di prenotazione della visita e dalla limitazione degli ingressi) ha un risvolto concettuale interessante: trasforma quella soglia

ideale, da superare perché si avveri l'aspettativa di esperienza estetica del soggetto/visitatore, in un ulteriore segno di «distanziamento sociale», tra chi può approcciarsi all'arte in termini materiali, approssimando il proprio corpo nella sua totalità sensoriale alla consistenza fisica delle opere esposte, e chi non può farlo. Quella che fino a un paio di anni fa era una soglia aperta, attraversata da flussi continui di corpi e di occhi, diventa oggi la cornice chiusa di uno spazio protettivo e selettivo, che promette a chi vi entra non solo un'esperienza estetica di qualità, ma anche un'esperienza «salutare», sanificata, depurata dalle scorie della prossimità disordinata e dai pericoli e turbamenti del contatto indifferenziato. Come la cornice «definisce quanto da essa inquadrato come mondo significante, rispetto al fuori-cornice, che è il mondo del semplice vissuto» (Stoichita [1998]: 41), così la visita al museo è assimilabile a una pausa di ordine interno nel caos esterno, al ritaglio di una parentesi spazio-temporale, ancora più nitida perché dialettica rispetto alla densità emotiva del contesto pandemico. Soprattutto, quell'ingresso nella cornice-museo è l'affermazione e la traduzione plastica del desiderio imperioso di bellezza *anche* nella chiusura, di godimento estetico *anche* nella separazione, anzi *attraverso* di essi.

L'ambiente museale ritrovato fisicamente sottolinea la dimensione corporea del rapporto tra soggetto e oggetti: il soggetto torna a muoversi verso l'arte e coglie la necessità non solo di questo movimento verso gli oggetti ma anche dello spazio/cornice in cui compierlo, dentro un contesto che si pone al servizio del suo corpo intero, non ridotto alla sola funzione di occhio spettatore. Sottilmente, si vive la visita museale – la quale, peraltro, non è più sentita come un privilegio ma come un diritto condiviso – con un approccio più consapevole innanzi tutto verso l'esperienza in sé.

Tornare a muoversi, spostarsi, visitare luoghi è stato un ridare valore a spazi e soglie, a ciò che contengono, a ciò che offrono. A non darli per scontati. Nell'ambito museale questa consapevolezza è evidente per l'esperienza in presenza, tuttavia non va dimenticato che anche l'esperienza attuata «in remoto» tramite dispositivi elettronici

ci e media digitali coinvolge in modo altrettanto denso e articolato corpi, sensi, percezioni, emozioni e il loro rapporto con materiali, supporti, contesti, incorniciature e spazi visivi, nei quali e grazie ai quali immagini e creazioni artistiche acquistano senso e sostanza per chi le vede. Per chi le scopre e per chi sceglie di vederle. L'esperienza estetica è sempre autentica, a prescindere dalla mediazione. Questo tempo pandemico ha contribuito a sottolinearlo.

## BIBLIOGRAFIA

- Argan, G.C., 1967: *Esempi di critica sulle tecniche artistiche*, a cura di M. Fagiolo Dell'Arco, Bulzoni, Roma.
- Baudrillard, J., 2012: *La sparizione dell'arte*, a cura di E. Grazioli, Abscondita, Milano.
- Baxandall, M., 2001: *Pittura ed esperienze sociali nell'Italia del Quattrocento*, Einaudi, Torino.
- Belting, H., 2009: *Immagine, medium, corpo. Un nuovo approccio all'iconologia*, in Pinotti, A., Somaini, A. (a cura di), *Teorie dell'immagine. Il dibattito contemporaneo*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, pp. 73-98.
- Brandi, C., 2000: *Togliere o conservare le cornici come problema di restauro*, in *Teoria del restauro*, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 123-130.
- Brunetta, G.P., 2009: *Il viaggio dell'icononauta: dalla camera oscura di Leonardo alla luce dei Lumièrè*, Marsilio, Venezia.
- Ceserani, R., *L'occhio della Medusa. Fotografia e letteratura*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- Colombo, M.E., 2020a: *Musei e cultura digitale. Fra narrativa, pratiche e testimonianze*, Editrice Bibliografica, Milano.
- Colombo, M.E., 2020b: *I musei e la dimensione digitale in Italia al tempo del Coronavirus*, "Artribune", 26 marzo 2020.
- Desideri, F., 2004: *Forme dell'estetica. Dall'esperienza del bello al problema dell'arte*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Ferrari, D., Pinotti, A. (a cura di), 2018: *La cornice. Storie, teorie, testi*, Johan & Levi Editore, Monza.
- Focillon, H., 2002: *Vita delle forme* seguito da *Elogio della mano*, trad. it. di S. Bettini, Einaudi, Torino.
- Freedberg, D., Gallese, V., 2009: *Movimento emozione ed empatia nell'esperienza estetica*, in Pinotti, A., Somaini, A. (a cura di) *Teorie dell'immagine. Il dibattito contemporaneo*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano, pp. 331-351.
- Frigo, A., 2010: *Estetica della ricezione e storia dell'arte: H.R. Jauss, F. Haskell e un preteso Vermeer*, "Intersezioni" 30 (2), pp. 307-323.
- Geertz, C., 1988: *Antropologia interpretativa*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Laskaris, C.Z., 2017: *Grammatiche della percezione*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine.
- Laskaris, C.Z., 2018: *L'esperienza per immagini: condizionamento e possibilità dello sguardo fotografico nella percezione dell'arte*, "Aisthesis" 11 (2), pp. 145-164.
- Nancy, J.-L., 2005: *L'immagine: mimesis e metemesis*, in *Ai limiti dell'immagine*, a cura di C.-C. Härle, Quodlibet, Macerata, pp. 13-28.
- Ortega y Gasset, J., 1997: *Meditazione sulla cornice*, in Mazzocut-Mis, M. (a cura di), *I percorsi e le forme. I testi e le teorie*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, pp. 218-228.
- Pinotti, A., Somaini, A., 2016: *Cultura visuale. Immagini sguardi media dispositivi*, Einaudi, Torino.
- Stoichita, V.I., 1998: *L'invenzione del quadro. Arte, artefici e artifici nella pittura europea*, trad. it. di B. Sforza, il Saggiatore, Milano.
- Wolf, V., 2005: *Gli anni*, trad. it. di G. de Angelis, Mondadori, Milano.





**Citation:** R. Ibarlucia (2021) The Bride Machine: Duchamp's Theory of Art Revisited. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 135-145. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13216

**Copyright:** © 2021 R. Ibarlucia. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## The Bride Machine: Duchamp's Theory of Art Revisited

RICARDO IBARLUCIA

CONICET- Centro de Investigaciones Filosóficas and Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina)  
[ribarlucia@conicet.gov.ar](mailto:ribarlucia@conicet.gov.ar)

**Abstract.** It is a commonplace in certain areas of art theory and contemporary art practices to consider Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades as ordinary objects, which have an artistic value that depends more on a theoretical or institutional framework than on an aesthetic experience. The aim of this paper is, on the one hand, to show the historical emergence of these artifacts on the light of the impact of the industrial production in avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. Discussing Walter Benjamin's and Jean Brun's, it argues that Duchamp's practice has an explanatory principle, both in the mechanical reproduction of the work of art and in the aestheticization of the machine. On the other hand, it brings forward some observations regarding Duchamp's insight on the "total lack of good or bad taste" and the perceptual dimension of a sculptural object as the *Large Glass*, coming back to Arthur Danto's interpretation of ready-mades and to the notion of "implementation" introduced by Nelson Goodman to define "the process of bringing about the aesthetic functioning that provides the basis for the notion of a work of art".

**Keywords:** Ready-made, *Large Glass*, Technological Reproducibility, Aesthetic properties, Implementation.

---

### INTRODUCTION

There is a photo of the First International Dada Fair in 1920 which shows Raoul Hausmann and John Heartfield holding a banner with an inscription in German: «Art is Dead. Long Live Tatlin's New Machine Art!» (Hausmann [1972]: 44, 120)<sup>1</sup>. With this phrase, Dadaists from Berlin not only expressed their commitment to the Russian Revolution in paying tribute to Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, but they also proclaimed an idea that summarised a common aspiration for avant-garde artists. Some of them pondered the aesthetic value of machines regardless of their utilitarian value; others, the function that form of art could assume

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations quoted in this article are my own.



in the construction of socialism: all of them were conscious of the profound changes artistic forms were experiencing as an effect of the deployment of the techniques of production and reproduction in the modern industrial society.

On the pages that follow, I intend to examine Marcel Duchamp's seminal developments in the field of plastic arts against the backdrop of such machine art. My approach is both theoretical and historical. In its general outline, it differs from the contemporary outlook on the works produced by Duchamp during his Dadaist and Surrealist period as precursors of conceptual art. At the same time, it turns away from the reductive interpretation of Duchamp's ready-mades as ordinary manufactured objects, whose artistic status is decidable in the context of a given theory of art or institutional system, with independence from their perceptual and formal properties. The thesis I defend is that Duchamp's idea of artwork can be explained by two converging effects the developments of industrial production had over artistic practices, both of which have been pointed out by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* (1935-1936): the birth of new artistic forms – such as photography and film – and their repercussion on «art in its traditional form» (Benjamin [2012]: 55, 98, 164, 210).

I argue that an sculptural object like the *Large Glass* (1915-1923), which exemplifies Benjamin's notion of the «assembled artwork» (*montierbar Kunstwerk*) from the industrial age in the field of plastic arts (Benjamin [2012]: 32, 66, 111-112, 176), can be considered as an expression of the «aestheticization of the machine» that Jean Brun has studied with regard to Italian Futurism and other artistic movements from the beginning of the xx<sup>th</sup> century (Brun [1992]: 258-274). To show this, my reasoning will unfold in three steps. First, I will give a historical account of the avant-garde fascination with the aesthetic potential of the machines. Then, I will focus on Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp to show how their works extol to the point of erotization the perceptual and formal properties of mechanisms, devices and products manufactured for massive use and con-

sumption. Finally, I will advance some ideas on what could be seen as a pragmatics of the aesthetic object, recovering what Nelson Goodman called «implementation» in order to define «the process of bringing about the aesthetic functioning that provides the basis for the notion of a work of art» (Goodman [1982]: 282, [1984]: 145).

## FUTURE BEAUTY

A good starting point for what I aim to prove here is no doubt the eulogy Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in his famous *Manifesto* of 1909, dedicates to the «beauty of speed» as a new aesthetic quality: «A race car with a hood adorned with great pipes resembling serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*» (Marinetti *et al.* [1914]: 6).

The artistic revolution promoted by Italian futurism – as Brun observes – takes part in the faith on technical progress and endows the machine with «the ontological status of a true living creation which dispenses new orgasms, born from the coupling of man with a manufactured Galatea» (Brun [1992]: 261). Stripped of «all utilitarian and social aspects», the machine is seen not only as «a fine work of art» but also as a young vestal, «a seductive beauty that has reached puberty and has finally gotten to be nubile» (Brun [1992]: 261-262). This awakening to «beauty and femininity of the loved machine as the Virgin to be taken», Brun continues, «reinforces or gives birth to a double current of ideas which has capital repercussions»: one is developed in Russia; the other one, in Western societies, «where the machine is not glorified as Generatrix but as Mesalina» (Brun [1992]: 266).

Let me revise this thesis in the light of the effects that, according to Benjamin, industrial production has over the concept of art, shattering what he calls «the Hydra of aesthetic scholasticism with its seven heads: creativity, empathy (*Einfühlung*), timelessness, recreation, compassion, illusion, and artistic enjoyment» (Benjamin [2011]: 1, 308). In 1912, Vladimir Maiakovski declares him-

self a futurist and endorses the famous manifesto of the Cubo-Futurist Hylaea group *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, in which «the New Coming Beauty of the Self-sufficient (self-centered) Word» is exalted (Burlinuk *et al.* [1988]: 52). Two years later, after Marinetti's tour to Saint Petersburg and Moscow, Russian avant-garde magazines with typographical games multiply, spelling and punctuation rules are suppressed, and a new language with its own phonetics, morphology, and syntax – called *zaum* – is proposed.

During the first years after the Russian Revolution, the Futurist aesthetic converges with the construction of socialism. Not even Marinetti's affiliation to the Italian Fascist Party, in 1919, proves to be an impediment for Soviet leftist artists to make their own, both his charge against bourgeois art and his praise of the machine; such is the case as much for UNOVIS (New Art Vindications) Suprematists and the Constructivists, as it is for the Productivists from the Vkhutemas (Higher Art and Technical Studios), who openly declare: «Down with art, long live technical science!» (Benton *et al.* [1975]: 91-92).

In the liberal democracies of Western Europe, Futurist ideas have at least three main derivations. Guillaume Apollinaire writes his manifesto *Futurist Anti-Tradition*, dated – parodying Friedrich Nietzsche – in «Paris, July 30<sup>th</sup>, Grand Prix Day, 65 meters above Saint-Germain Blvd» (Apollinaire [1913]: 3)<sup>2</sup>. This «Manifesto-Synthesis» conceives of Futurism as the «the motor for all tendencies: Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Pathetism, Dramatism, Orphism, Paroxysm» (Apollinaire [1913]: 1). In the first section, entitled *Destruction*, he calls for the suppression of «poetic sorrow, snob exoticisms, copying in art, [...] the sublime in art» (Apollinaire [1913]: 1). The second section, *Construction*, has two parts:

<sup>2</sup> The sentence refers to a passage from *Ecce Homo*, published posthumously in 1908, where the German philosopher says he first registered «the thought of eternal return», the fundamental notion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), in a piece of paper, at the bottom of which he wrote: «6000 feet above man and time» (Nietzsche [1967-1982] 5: 333).

*Techniques Continually Renewed* («words in freedom», «onomatopoeic descriptions», «art of noises», «machinism», «art of journeys») and *Intuition, Speed, Ubiquity* («wireless imagination», «physical transcendentalism», «analogies and puns») (Apollinaire [1913]: 2).

In London, the first exposition of Futurist painters takes place in 1912. The works of Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini Carlo Carrà and Luigi Russolo have an impact on Christopher Nevinson, coauthor with Marinetti of *Vital English Art* (1914). In this manifesto, they defend a «strong, virile, anti-sentimental» art against «the cult of tradition and academic conservatism», «commercial conformism», «the purely ornamental», «corniness», «the old and grotesque idea of genius» and «the mania of immortality» (Rainey *et al.* [2009]: 196-198). In contrast to Nevinson's enthusiasm, Wyndham Lewis, founder of *BLAST*, the literary magazine of the Vorticist movement in Britain, does not conceal his disdain for the «Melodrama of Modernity», imported by some «fanciful but rather conventional Italians», enthroning an «Impressionism up-to-date», to which Marinetti has added «his Automobilmism and Nietzsche stunt» (Lewis [1914]:143-144).

In Weimar's Germany, one can recognize two converging tendencies. One of them is represented by the Bauhaus founded by Walter Gropius, who defended the idea of «a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist» (Gropius [1919]: 3). The program of this avant-garde school for artists and industrial designers promoted the building of the future society through «a resolute acceptance of the living environment of machines and vehicles» and «the organic creation of objects following their own present-day laws, without embellishments or romantic adornment» (Gropius [1925]: 6). The other tendency shows a programmatic convergence between Berlin Dadaism and El Lissitzky Productivism. The so-called «G-Group» opposed the experimental notion of *Gestaltung* (design, form-creation) to that of style, relied on «predetermined formal motives», and sought «to discover and forge a natural language

that would be objective, scientific, collective, universal, and comprehensible to all» (Mertins and Jennings [2010]: 6).

Werner Gräff, co-founder of the magazine *G-Materialien für Elementaren Gestaltung*, in which Benjamin would later contribute<sup>3</sup>, attempts to redefine the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the terms of a «partnership between architecture, sculpture and painting (together with) industry and technology» (Gräff [1922]: 74). In turn, László Moholy-Nagy argues for the need to spread the use of technical appliances, regularly employed with reproductive aims, for «productive purposes» (Moholy-Nagy [1922]: 236). The means he intends to research »under the conditions of a lab-experimental study» are the gramophone, photography, and cinema (Moholy-Nagy [1922]: 237).

According to Moholy-Nagy, the extended use of the gramophone, employed only to reproduce already existing acoustic phenomena, could contribute to a renewal of musical composition, to the invention of new instruments and to the «development of inexistent sounds and inexistent tonal relations» (Moholy-Nagy [1922]: 237). The photo camera, solely used to «capture (reproduce) individual objects, as reflected or absorbed light», could be used «along with a mirror – or an optical device, etc.» to record different light phenomena, «the same way telescopes do with stars or X-ray images». As for the «cinematic practice», which is mostly limited to reproducing dramatic actions or to record movements (animal, human and mechanical) in the case of scientific films, could now be oriented to the formation of a «game of creation of its own», as in Hans Richter's or Viking Eggeling's short abstract animation films (Moholy-Nagy [1922]: 237).

#### THE EROTIZATION OF THE MACHINE

According to Brun's approach, the second strand of aesthetic ideas fuelled by Italian Futur-

ism moves between Paris and New York and leads from Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp to the threshold of Surrealism: «the aestheticization of the machine», transformed into the «object of all oneiric crystallizations», results in its «erotization», replacing the model who posed naked in the painter's atelier (Brun [1992]: 266).

The futurists' condemnation of the static nude in painting – «as sickening and depressing as adultery in literature» – and their celebration of «dynamic sensations» of movement and light (Boccioni *et al.* [1910]) speak eloquently of the repercussion of machinism on artistic forms pointed out by Benjamin. Those paintings of the dawn of the twentieth century that seek to represent the dynamism of a cyclist, a football player, a motorcycle or a car – such as the Étienne Jules Marey's chronophotographs – show the way in which Italian Futurism – even before Dadaism – already strives to «*produce with the means of painting (or relatedly literature) the effects*» what cinema will be able to produce naturally (Benjamin [2012]: 85, 134, 192, emphasis in the original).

In the case of Francis Picabia, the erotization of the machine is born when he discovers New York City in 1913, «the only Cubist city in the world [...] the futurist city» (Picabia, [2005]: 49, 53). Already familiarised with Giorgio de Chirico's mannequins, Fernand Léger's robotic figures and Alexandr Archipenko's sculpture-paintings, his contact with avant-garde artists from Manhattan – Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Marius de Zayas, Paul Haviland – is the starting point for his first «mechanical paintings»: *Catch as Catch Can*, *Negro Song*, *Ballerina on an Ocean Liner*, *New York*, *Edtaonisl (Ecclesiastic)* and *Undina*, among others (see Sanouillet [1964]: 24; Camfield [1966]).

In 1915 Picabia joins the journal *291*, which is conceived as «a lab, a place for experiments» oriented to forge a new visual language (Stieglitz [1915-1916]: 1, 4). There, he publishes a series of «object-portraits», inspired in popular mechanics handbooks: Stieglitz as a photographic camera (*Here, Here is Stieglitz, Faith and Love*), himself as a strange dysfunctional mechanism (*Canter*), a

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin translated into German *La photographie à l'envers*, the preface by Tristan Tzara to Man Ray's album of rayographs *Les champs délicieux* (1922). See Benjamin [1972-1999] Supl. I: 9-10).

naked young woman as a spark plug (*Portrait of an American Girl in a State of Nudity*), Marius De Zayas as a sewing machine (*De Zayas! De Zayas!*), Haviland as an electric lamp (*Voilà Haviland*) (Stieglitz [1915-1916]: 5-6, 1-3). In explaining the new orientation of his work, Picabia declares:

*I have been profoundly impressed by the vast mechanical development in America. The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of human life. It is really a part of human life –perhaps the very soul. In seeking forms through which to interpret ideas or by which to explore human characteristics I have come at length upon the form which appears most brilliantly plastic and fraught with symbolism. I have enlisted the machinery of the modern world and introduced it into my studio. (Macmonnies [1915]: 2).*

As regards Duchamp specifically, I argue that the process of erotization of the machine is inseparable from his gradual abandonment of painting. According to him, eroticism could replace what in the history of art is called Symbolism or Romanticism: «[...] if eroticism is used as a principal basis, a principal end, then it takes the form of an 'ism', in the sense of a school» (Cabanne [1967]: 167).

Retrospectively, Duchamp's plastic experimentation seems to cover four stages guided by the same conscious pursuit of producing works increasingly emancipated from pictorial depiction. The first phase can be taken to begin with *Coffee Mill* (1911), a painting that opens «a window to something else», according to his own words (Cabanne [1967]: 43), given the fact that it deviates from the Post-Impressionism that was characteristic of his previous works: the representation of that domestic tool is not in conformity with the imitative principle anymore, but instead its mechanical possibilities – the moments of the handle's turning – are indicated with an arrow.

The second stage could be illustrated by the two successive versions of *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1911-1912), in which there is a convergence of interests that go beyond Futurism and Cubism, «among them the cinema, still in its early days, and the separation of the static positions in Marey's chronophotographs in France and in

[Thomas] Eakins and [Eadweard] Muybridge in America» (Duchamp [1994]: 246). According to Duchamp, this painting aspired to a decomposition of forms more radical than the one operated by Cubism and, in spirit, it was closer to the common studies of moving horses and of fencers in different positions than to the dynamism of Futurist plastics or Robert Delaunay's Simultaneism, both approaches in which he saw «an Impressionism of the mechanical world», situated on the opposite side of his desire to «get away from the physical aspect of painting» and to put it once again «at the service of the mind» (Sweeney [1946]: 20).

Now, and this is meant to support the interpretation proposed at the beginning of this essay, the invention of the ready-made can be considered to give rise to the third stage of the process I have been describing: «An ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of the artist», according to Duchamp's quotation collected in the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism* (Breton & Éluard [1938]: 23). His purpose with *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Bottle Rack* (1914), *Fountain* (1917), and another dozen of «assisted» or «reciprocal» ready-mades (Duchamp [1994]: 209-210) was to start getting rid of the «retinal inheritance» of a plastic art based on optic impressions and on the object's sensual qualities, and propose, instead, one based on the «grey matter», in the same way that paintings from the Italian Renaissance, where «the idea was to glorify a religion, the Catholic religion, the Catholic God or other, in short, but the painting side itself, the retinal side of the painting was very secondary ... more than secondary (Duchamp [2002])<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> In an interview conducted in 1963 and published after his death, Duchamp suggested the following relationship between ready-mades and the industrial products the painter usually manipulates: «A ready-made is a work of art without an artist to make it, if I may simplify the definition. A tube of paint that an artist uses is not made by the artist; it is made by the manufacturer that makes paints. So the painter really is making a ready-made when he paints with a manufactured object that is called paints. So that is the explanation, but when I did it, it was

The historical reference to Renaissance art is particularly significant. Duchamp is not rejecting painting tout court, but distancing himself from Romanticism, Gustave Courbet's realism, and certain pictorial currents of the late 19th century – Impressionism, Divisionism (or Chromoluminarism), Pointillism – which were intended to be based on advances in optics and the scientific theories about colour. Both Cubism and Parisian Dada played a decisive role for the constitution of his own view of modern art. For Duchamp, the latter was «an extreme protest against the physical side of painting» and its «metaphysical attitude» was «a sort of nihilism» that served as a salutary and purgative *tabula rasa* (Sweeney [1946]: 20).

Finally, in the *Large Glass* (1915-1923), Duchamp's interest on manufactured objects meets two mechanist reveries of *fin-de-siècle* Symbolism (see Carrouges [1954]: 27-59). One of them is the novel *The Supermale*, by Alfred Jarry, in which there is a description of a «Love-Inspiring-Machine», an electromagnetic device conceived of to satisfy a male's sexual appetites and to contribute to «the biggest safeguarding of bourgeois science, medicine and humanity» (Jarry [1902]: 236-237). The other one is the scenic version of Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*, which Duchamp saw in the Théâtre Antoine in 1912. More than thirty years later, Duchamp would confess:

*It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. From his Impressions d'Afrique I got the general approach. This play of his, which I saw with Apollinaire, helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way. (Sweeney [1946]: 21)*

We cannot know which specific elements of Roussel's performance had an influence on the

---

not at all intended to have an explanation. The iconoclastic part of it was much more important» (Duchamp [1968]: 47). For a discussion of this answer, see Duve [1996]: 159-166.

*Large Glass*. In an interview Duchamp only said: «It was something formidable. There was a snake on stage and a mannequin that slightly moved, it was a totally extraordinary mad thing. I cannot remember much of the text» (Cabanne [1967]: 5-6). Critics have argued that he was inspired by the character of Louise Montanesco, who invented a painting machine which «aimed to obtain, by means of a purely photographic procedure, a driving force accurate enough to guide with precision a pencil or a brush» (Roussel [1910]: 402; see Allington [2002]).

Other commenters have suggested a third equally plausible source: the short story *In an Automobile* by Maurice Maeterlinck, collected in 1904 in *The Double Garden* (see Clair [1987]: 77-79). There are certainly some significant resemblances between Maeterlinck's metaphorical depiction of the car's physiology and the «nickel and platinum» machine of Duchamp's journey through the Jura-Paris route that would have inspired *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*:

*Its soul is the electric spark, which, seven or eight hundred times to the minute, sends fiery breath through the veins. And the terrible, complex heart is composed, first of all, of the carburetter, with its strange double face: the carburetter, which prepares, proportions and volatilizes the petrol-subtle fairy that has slumbered ever since the world began, and is now recalled to power, and united to the air that has torn her from sleep. (Maeterlinck [1904a]: 54, [1904b]: 174; see Duchamp [1994]: 46-47)*

#### LEONARDO AND THE READY-MADES

In the *Green Box* (1934), Duchamp focuses on the structure of the «celibate-machine» and its operating mode. The description he gives of the *Large Glass* seems to combine the attributes of Maeterlinck's car's engine with Jarry's «Love-Inspiring machine» and Roussel's picto-photographic machine:

*The Bride is first basically a motor. But a motor that transmits its timid power – she is this very timid*

power. This timid power is a sort of automobiline, an essence of love, which once distributed through the engine of soft cylinders, when it makes contact the sparkles of its common constant and equal life, it serves to the blossoming of this virgin who has reached the goal of her desire. (Duchamp [1994]: 67, crossed out and underlined in original).

The «cinematic blossoming», «fulfilment» or «culmination» [*épanouissement*], the apotheosis of the Bride's orgasm is the «m[ost] important part of the painting», according to Duchamp: «It is, in general, the halo of the Bride [...], the whole of her splendid vibrations» (Duchamp [1994]: 68). In graphic terms, Duchamp does not aim to «symbolize with an exalted painting this happy ending», but to make «an inventory of the elements of this wholeness, elements of the sex life imagined by the desiring bride» (Duchamp [1994]: 68) using the photos of draught pistons that crown the upper part of the *Large Glass*.

*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even...* would represent the coronation – and even the systematization – of Duchamp's research on the machine. The criticism of retinal art is consummated in the suppression of the qualities traditionally attributed to the work of art, that is, through the bracketing not of every perceptual quality of the object, as commonly stated, but of those qualities prescribing its exclusive optic reception. Duchamp has given us two well-known descriptions of this operational technique. In one of them, he argues: «You have to achieve something so indifferent that you have no aesthetic emotion. The choice of ready-mades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total lack of good or bad taste» (Cabanne [1967]: 83-84). In the other one, he states more precisely:

*A point that I want to establish very clearly is that the choice of these ready-mades was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference combined at the same time with a total absence of good or bad taste . . . in fact a complete anaesthesia. (Duchamp [1994]: 209, emphasis in the original).*

Arthur Danto is absolutely correct when he states that the «overcoming of taste was the achievement of Duchamp's ready-mades»; he is not, however, when he deduces from it «the most radical dissociation of aesthetics from art» (Danto [2000]). A restriction must be imposed: Duchamp's conception of art has certainly detached from the traditional aesthetics grounded on the notion of beauty as pure form, namely, the aesthetic theory from Kant to Clement Greenberg, according to Danto himself (see Danto [2007]: 123-127). Historically, Duchamp's anti-aesthetic rebellion has displayed the enfranchisement of modern art from the ideal of beauty and has legitimated the exploitation of a plurality of aesthetic qualities within the field of artistic practices. But one further specific remark needs to be made regarding Duchamp's quote: the indistinction between conventional and unconventional materials – what he calls «a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anaesthesia»<sup>5</sup> – refers explicitly here to the process of gestation and creation of the artwork, not to its reception.

In the words of Nelson Goodman, one might say that the «execution» of a work of art should not be confused with its «implementation» or «activation», which consists in making «the work works» (Goodman, [1982]: 281, [1984]: 141-143)<sup>6</sup>. This discrimination is important to understand the operational technique of the ready-made, given the fact that the neutralization of visual stimuli pointed out by Duchamp – the highlighted «visual indifference» – is relevant to the making of an object or the choice of an object, which could be anything. From the artistic point of view, what Duchamp seems to seek is the replacement of the spectator's passive attitude with a way of reception that restores an active role to her/him. To support this hypothesis, we could quote what Duchamp himself writes in the *Green Box* about such an interplay:

<sup>5</sup> On the «anaesthetics of the ready-made», see Oyarzún [2000]: 42-122.

<sup>6</sup> For the application of the last notion to the «indirect activation» of technical the reproduction of artworks, see Goodman (1992). A seminal discussion of his whole argument can be found in Cometti [2000].

*After all, the artist is not the only one accomplishing the act of creation, because the spectator establishes the work's contact with the outside world by deciphering and interpreting its underlying qualification and thus [he/she] makes his/her own contribution to the creative process. (Duchamp [1994]: 207)*

To put it in Benjamin's words, by displacing «optic reception», ready-mades promote a «tactile reception», which is shaped more by use than by attention (Benjamin [2012]: 33, 88-89, 138-139, 195-196, 246-247). Far from neutralizing the spectator's sensory stimuli, they multiply and expand them cinematically, like the Bride's orgasm does in the *Large Glass*. The aesthetic over-excitation counterbalances the anaesthetizing process that perception is subjected to in the mechanized world, that is, «the crisis in cognitive experience caused by the alienation of the senses», as characterized by Susan Buck-Morss in her reading of Benjamin's essay on the artwork (Buck-Morss [1992]: 37). Seen from this angle, the ready-made would be a sort of mechanism that, when activated, releases a «play space [*Spielraum*]», a ludic dimension which restores perception, giving way to imagination and interplay, as well as to the physical experience the spectator has with the object (Benjamin [2012]: 151, 155-156, 174).

Among his notes for *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, Benjamin makes a clever remark on the content of the *Green Box*, stressing «the competition between photography (film) and painting as the explanatory principle» of Duchamp's plastic experimentation, «one of the most interesting phenomena of the French avant-garde» (Benjamin [2012]: 275). Although his production is extremely limited and he cannot be pigeonholed in a school, his influence is not at all small, says Benjamin, especially among Surrealists:

*His theory of art's value, which he has recently exemplified (not explained) in a box of documents, La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, looks something like this: from the moment I gaze upon an object as an artwork, it ceases completely to function as such. Today's man can experience much better the*

*specific effect of a work of art in fortuitous configurations in ~~residues or debris~~ in things objects extricated objects (namely, objects that have been removed from their functional context: a piano keyboard with an indoor plant placed above it, a top hat with multiple perforations) than in works of art certified as such. (Benjamin [2012]: 275-276, crossed out in original)*

Because of Duchamp's authority, Benjamin adds, the making of this kind of objects has become a «passionate activity» among Surrealists, in which, through chance, oxidation and discarding, «a great play space» is opened (Benjamin [2012]: 276). There will be those who qualify these practices as decadent; however, they possess a «diagnostic value» (Benjamin [2012]: 276). In his plastic exploration, Duchamp seems to have followed the advice Da Vinci used to give to his disciples, often «lost in the search for models», when he suggested exercising their imagination in front of a wall covered with moisture (Benjamin [2012]: 276). Benjamin refers to one of the famous precepts of Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, where he states:

*Look at walls splashed with several stains, or stones of various mixed colours. If you must invent some scene, you can see there are resemblances to several landscapes, adorned with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, great plains, valleys, and hills, in various ways. Also, you can see various battles, and lively postures of strange figures, expressions on faces, costumes, and an infinite number of things, which you can reduce to good integrated form. This happens on such walls and varicoloured stones, (which act) like the sound of bells, in whose pealing you can find every name and word that you can imagine. (Fumagalli [1953]: 250; Da Vinci [2008]:173)<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph from the *Treatise on Painting* is often quoted by Surrealist – among others, André Breton [1933]: 161-162 and Max Ernst [1948]: 3. Remembering the psychologists of art have always been fascinated by this precept, Ernst H. Gombrich suggests that DaVinci «could deliberately induce in himself a state of dreamlike loosening of controls in which the imagination began to play with blots and irregular shapes», helping him in turn to enter in «the kind of trance in which his inner visions

From age to age, argued Leonardo, painting declined «because everyone imitated the pictures that were already done» (Fumagalli [1953]: 251; Da Vinci [2008]: 214). Hence the «new device for study», the speculative method he recommends to his disciples, aims to revert this tendency; as «trivial and almost ludicrous» it may seem, it is «extremely useful in arousing the mind to various inventions» and for creating original works of art (Fumagalli [1953]: 250; Da Vinci [2008]:173). According to Da Vinci, artists should not take as standard anything other than nature – «the mistress of all masters» (Fumagalli [1953]: 250; Da Vinci [2008]: 214). Nature should be their true teacher and guide. Likewise, in its vivid and spontaneous forms, I would dare say, Duchamp took the second nature of the machine as the model for his ready-mades.

### CONCLUSIONS

Duchamp's contribution to contemporary art does not lie in turning the work of art into an ontologically neutral object, as it seems to be quite accepted in some circles of art criticism and art practices. His ready-mades are not merely ordinary objects, in the sense of a theory according to which the artistic status of an object is independent from its perceptual and formal qualities and definable only by virtue of its social or institutional context. Such arguments, I would like to underline, apply even further hardly to an allegorical installation or sculptural artifact as the *Large Glass*, whose artistic properties are both perceptible and imperceptible, a part of the physical object and a part of the «embodied meaning», to borrow Danto's famous expression (see Danto [1994]; [2007]: 125; [2013]: 37, 39-40).

The so-called «artworld» – even in the initial interpretation of Danto as «an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art» (Danto [1964]: 580) – does not pre-exist artworks and artistic practices as an ensemble of codi-

would be projected on to external objects» (Gombrich [1966]: 61).

fied rules that externally provide the criteria for their identification, interpretation, or evaluation. It is not a receptacle containing the conventional definitions of art, but a pragmatic framework for activating artworks, which may be in opposition to the standardized conception of art in a specific historical period and modulate the aesthetic qualities considered to be non-artistic.

This would be my first corollary. The second one is related to the «theory of art's value» Benjamin finds in the *Green Box*: «from the moment I gaze upon an object as an artwork, it ceases completely to function as such» (Benjamin [2012]: 275-276). In Goodman's terms, the problem has to do with «the process of bringing about the aesthetic functioning that provides the basis for the notion of a work of art» (Goodman [1982]: 282; [1984]: 145). The pragmatics of the ready-made, as I hope I have demonstrated, shows that «implementation» allows not only a work of art to function as such, but also any other object to do so, from a urinal or a bicycle wheel to the cracks and moisture stains on a wall.

In short, the concept of artwork Duchamp seems to have forged from his research on machines does not depend upon a definition of art but upon a reflection on the object's aesthetic functioning. Looking ahead, I wonder whether what we now call «artworld» – with its high degree of institutionalization, its criticism, and its increasingly professionalized audiences – favours this functioning, or if art rather takes place outside of this circle, as Duchamp and many of his contemporaries thought.

### REFERENCES

- Allington, E., 2002: *Dream Machines*, "Frieze" 66, pp. 58-93.
- Apollinaire, G., 1913: *L'Antitradition futuriste. Manifeste-Synthèse*, Direction du Mouvement Futuriste, Milano.
- Benjamin, W., 2012: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, ed. by B. Lindner, S. Broll, J. Nitsche, Suhrkamp, Berlin.



- Benjamin, W., 2011: *Kritiken und Rezensionen*, ed. by H. Kaulen, 2 vols., Suhrkamp, Berlin.
- Benjamin, W., 1972-1999: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, in collaboration with T.W. Adorno and G. Scholem, 7 vols. (14 parts) and 3 supplements, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M.
- Benton, T., Benton, C., Sharp, D. (eds.), 1975: *Form and Function. A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, Crosby Lockwood Staples, London.
- Boccioni, U., Carrà, C.D., Russolo, L., Balla, G., Severini, G., 1910: *La pittura futurista. Manifesto tecnico*, Uffici di Poesia, Milano.
- Breton, A., Éluard, P., 1938: *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, José Corti, Paris, 1991.
- Breton, A., 1933: *Le message automatique*, in *Point du Jour*, nouvelle édition revue et corrigée, Gallimard, Paris, 1992, pp. 159-182.
- Brun, J., 1992: *Le rêve et la machine: technique et existence*, Paris, La Table Ronde.
- Buck-Morss, S., 1992: *Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered*, "October" 62, pp. 3-41.
- Burliuk, D., Kruchenykh, A., Mayakovsky, V., Khlebnikov, V., 1988: *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, in Lawton, A., Eagle, H. (eds), *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, pp. 51-52.
- Cabanne, P., 1967 : *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp*, Belfond, Paris.
- Camfield, W. A., 1966: *The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia*, "The Art Bulletin" 3-4, pp. 309-322.
- Carrouges, M., 1954: *Les machines célibataires*, Éditions des Arcanes, Paris.
- Clair, J., 1987: *De quelques métaphores automobiles*, "Revue de l'Art" 77, pp. 77-79.
- Cometti, J.-P., 2000: *Activating Art*, "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 58, pp. 237-243.
- Danto, A.C., 1964: *The Artworld*, "The Journal of Philosophy" 61 (19), pp.: 571-584.
- Danto, A. C., 1994: *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York.
- Danto, A. C., 2000: *Marcel Duchamp and the End of Taste. A Defense of Contemporary Art*, "Tout-Fait.com: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal" 1 (3), [https://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue\\_3/News/Danto/danto.html](https://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/News/Danto/danto.html)
- Danto, A. C., 2007: *Embodied Meanings, Isotypes, and Aesthetical Ideas*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 65 (1-Special Issue), pp. 121-129.
- Danto, A. C., 2013: *What Art is?*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London.
- Da Vinci, L., 2011: *Notebooks*, ed. by I. A. Richter, T. Wells, pref. by M. Kemp, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Duchamp, M., 1994: *Duchamp du signe*, ed. by M. Sanouillet, P. Matisse, P. Flammarion, Paris.
- Duchamp, M. 1968: *I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics*, "ARTnews" 67, pp. 46-47.
- Duchamp, M., 2002: *Changer de Nom, simplement (Interview de Marcel Duchamp à la Radio Télévision canadienne, le 17 juillet 1960)*, "Tout-Fait.com: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal" 2 (4): [https://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue\\_4/interviews/interviews.html](https://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/interviews/interviews.html).
- Ernst, M., 1948: *Beyond Painting*, in Ernst, M., (ed.), *Beyond Painting and Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends*, transl. by D. Tanning, pref. by R. Motherwell, Wittenborn, Schulz, New York, pp. 3-19.
- Fumagalli, G., 1953: *Leonardo, omo senza lettere*, Sansoni, Firenze.
- Goodman, N., 1984: *Of Mind and Other Matters*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Goodman, N., 1982: *Implementation of the Arts*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 40 (3), pp. 281-283.
- Goodman, N., 1992: *L'Art en action*, in Cometti, J.-P, Morizot, J., Pouivet, R. (eds.), *Esthétique contemporaine: Art, représentation et fiction*, transl. by J.-P. Cometti, Librairie Philosophique, Paris, 2005, pp. 143-157.
- Gombrich, E. H., 1966: *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, Phaidon, London.
- Gräff, W., 1922: *Für das Neue*, "De Stijl" 5, pp. 74-75.
- Gropius, W., 1925: *Grundsätze der Bauhausproduktion*, in *Neue Arbeiten der Bauhauswerkstätten (Bauhaus Bücher 7)*, Albert Langen, München, pp. 5-8.

- Gropius, W., 1919: *Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar*, in *Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses von Walter Gropius und dessen Versendung*. Landesarchiv Thüringen-Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar.
- Hausmann, R., 1972: *Am Anfang war Dada*, ed. by K. Riha, G. Kämpf, Steinbach-Giesen, Anabas.
- Jarry, A., 1902: *Le Surmâle. Roman moderne*, Paris, Revue Blanche.
- Lewis, W., 1914: *The Melodrama of Modernity*, "Blast. Review of the Great English Vortex" 1, pp. 143-144.
- Macmonnies, F., 1915: *French Artist Spur on American Art*, "New York Tribune", October 24, [section 4], pp. 2- 3.
- Maeterlinck, M., 1904a: *Le Double jardin*, Paris, Eugène Fasquele.
- Maeterlinck, M., 1904b: *In an Automobile*, in Maeterlinck, M., *The Double Garden*, ed. by A. Teixeira de Mattos, transl. by A. Sutro, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, pp. 171-186.
- Marinetti, F.T. (ed.), 1914: *I Manifesti del futurismo*, Movimento Futurista, Milano.
- Mertins, D., Jennings, M. (eds.), 2010: *G. An Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- Moholy-Nagy, L., 1922: *Produktion-Reproduktion*, "De Stijl" 7, pp. 235-237.
- Nietzsche, F., 1967-1982: *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, 15 vols, ed. by G. Colli, M. Montinari, Walter de Gruyter, Frankfurt a.M.
- Oyarzún, P., 2000: *Anestética del ready-made*, pref. by S. Rojas Contreras, Arcis lom, Santiago de Chile.
- Picabia, F., 2005: *Écrits critiques*, ed. by C. Boulbès, pref. by B. Noël, Mémoire du Livre, Paris.
- Rainey, L., Poggi, C., Wittman, L. (eds.), 2009: *Futurism: An Anthology*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Roussel, R., 1910: *Impressions d'Afrique*, Lemerre, Paris.
- Sanouillet, M., 1964: *Picabia*, Éditions du Temps, Paris.
- Stieglitz, A., 1915-1916: 291, pp. 1-12.
- Sweeney, J.J., 1946: *Eleven Europeans in America*, "Museum of Modern Art Bulletin", pp. 4-5.





**Citation:** M. Veleva (2021) Robert Smithson's aesthetics and the future of Earth Art. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 147-158. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12477

**Copyright:** © 2021 M. Veleva. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Robert Smithson's aesthetics and the future of Earth Art

MARIYA VELEVA

Departamento de Alemán, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Santiago de Chile  
[mariya.veleva@umce.cl](mailto:mariya.veleva@umce.cl)

**Abstract.** Environmental pollution is a global problem today, and together with urbanization closely intertwined with the current pandemic and the challenges facing humanity. This text, based on Robert Smithson's aesthetic theory and production, intends to show that Earth Art could provide a critical comprehension of industrial culture, could oppose its *Gestell* (the city may also be seen as *Gestell*), and sensitize society to the current environmental problems. I also discuss Smithson's multi-stratified art works, his preference for processes over objects and his critical reflection on museums and galleries as closed and traditional spaces. I suggest that Earth Art has the potential to redefine the relationship between outside and inside, *optic* and *haptic*, as well between a «distal, disembodied approach» on one hand and «immediate body experience» on the other. It could be developed more intensively in the future, inasmuch it attracts public to open spaces, thus avoiding possible contagion.

**Keywords:** Environmental consciousness, Land art, Robert Smithson, Pollution, Postindustrial landscape, Aesthetic reclamation and recreation.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Industrialization, dense urbanization and environmental pollution are part of human civilization and directly related to the current pandemic. We can take this crisis as an opportunity to rethink and redefine our relation to the environment and industry, as well to industrial culture (in terms of Adorno); art may help us in this intention.

The statement that art could mediate between industry, ecology and society was developed by Robert Smithson during the 1970s. This text, since it is based on Smithson's aesthetic theory, will follow the evolution of his particular artistic attitude concerning environment, industry and industrial culture. The emphasis is put on his aesthetic sensitization to altered environments through special body experience. I will try to show that this complex body experience was the necessary condition for his *ecological turn* in his later Earth

Art projects. Smithson's critical thinking on society and technology as well his interest in entropy, together with this complex body experience of the sites, defined important aspects of his oeuvre and aesthetic theory. I will also stress some of these genuinely realistic, anti-idealistic, anti-romantic, anti-utopian aspects in Smithson's work and thinking, intending to demonstrate how art could help society to recover from its current disease.

## 2. SMITHSON'S ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO AN ALTERED ENVIRONMENT

### 2.1 Sensitization through aesthetic experience

Smithson's artistic fondness was evident from the beginning of his career – starting from his first expedition to the industrial zone of Passaic, New Jersey, which gave birth to the work *Monument Passaic, New Jersey* – not for unadulterated nature, but for postindustrial landscapes. This led to Smithson's many expeditions during the 1960s. Most of these expeditions resulted in his *non-sites* that were exhibited in the Dwan Gallery, which means that his aesthetic approach in this stage was still bound to the *traditional* form of exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he insisted on the wholeness of his aesthetic experience, defining the categories of outside-inside in their dialectical relation:

*I never thought of isolating my objects in any particular way. Gradually, more and more, I have come to see their relationship to the outside world, and finally when I started making the Nonsites, the dialectic became very strong. These Nonsites became maps that pointed to sites in the world outside the gallery, and a dialectical view began to subsume a purist, abstract tendency. (Smithson [1973]: 311)*

During these expeditions Smithson developed an aesthetic taste for the rudimentary quality of stones and ores, for processes and process-based phenomena, but most importantly for the boundlessness of nature; in his exhibitions he tried to

redefine the relation between limits and limitlessness:

*The brittleness of the site seemed to swarm around one, causing a sense of displacement. I collected a canvas bag full of slate chips for a small Non-Site. Yet, if art is art it must have limits. How can one contain this «oceanic» site? I have developed the Non-Site, which in a physical way contains the disruption of the site. The container is in a sense a fragment itself, something that could be called a three-dimensional map. [...] [I]t actually exists as a fragment of a greater fragmentation. It is a three-dimensional perspective that has broken away from the whole [...]. There are no mysteries in these vestiges, no traces of an end or a beginning. (Smithson [1968]: 110 -111, emphases mine)*

It is interesting that during this time Smithson defined an artist as a *site-seer* (Smithson [1966-67]: 340). «The eye is the greatest artist» (Emerson [1981]: 42). The artist suggested «we should begin to develop an art education based on relationship to *specific sites*. How we *see* things and places is not a secondary concern, but primary» (Smithson [1979]: 380). *Site selection* is also a priority: «“Site Selection Study” in terms of art is just beginning. [...] One does not *impose*, but rather *exposes* the site – be it interior or exterior» (Smithson [1968]: 96).

According to Nietzsche, we impose a certain value just by pointing at something or just by casting a glance at something. Duchamp redefined what art is, in this context. In *Objet trouvé* and *Readymade* the objects in themselves bear aesthetic values. The artist no longer needs to create new objects, now the selection of an object is the creative act itself. In this sense every object is potentially an art object. Though, Smithson is not interested in objects, but in processes: «When *thing* is seen through the consciousness of temporality, it is changed into something that is nothing» (Smithson [1968]: 112).

This is also a radical change in art. The site, the processes, the limitless nature are aesthetically relevant for him. And he as an artist can discover them – with his whole body – and *expose* them.

<sup>1</sup> Here I am avoiding the opposition between an *old* and *new*, which will be explained later.

It is interesting in this context that Vattimo translates Heidegger's concept *Ge-stell* as «imposition» (Vattimo [1987]: 11). Nevertheless, we could translate it from the German verb *stellen*, i.e. «to position» as (something) *imposed*, a substantive derived from the past perfect, as «ge-» actually suggests. This aspect of object-hood in *Gestell* is, in my view, particularly important (Heidegger [1953]: 20-21). When «imposed» is used in this text, it is to be understood also in the sense of *Gestell*, most broadly as a product of the «technified» or industrialized culture.

Smithson's non-interest in the product/object and the «imposed» but rather in the processes behind is closely related to his aesthetic interpretation of entropy. As we shall see, for him entropy and not *poiesis* is universal principle for art and nature. This radical aesthetic position questions the tradition, which for millennia has accepted *poiesis*, or creation, as the fundamental aesthetic law: «Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. [...] *Poetry being forever lost must submit to its vacuity*; it is somehow a product of exhaustion rather than creation. *Poetry is always a dying language but never a dead language*» (Smithson [1968]: 107, emphasis mine).

Poetry or even art in general, is, just as nature, a «dying language», because their universal principle is entropy and not *poiesis*. Smithson was convinced of the Earth's inevitable entropic end. He sees proof of this in geological processes. He assumes that entropy is unavoidable and that our civilization and industry are only temporary phenomena, both under the sign of this universal power. In his opinion Land Art manipulations should follow or undergo the universal entropic processes: «The *process behind* the making of a storage facility may be viewed in stages, thus constituting a whole «series» of art from the ground up. Land surveying and preliminary building, if isolated into discrete stages, may be viewed as an array of art works that *vanish* as they develop» (Smithson [1968]: 95, emphasis mine).

Land Art should facilitate the awakening of the aesthetic perception of such *natural processes*

as corrosion, demolition, erosion and crystallization; even more, Land Art should contribute not only to a sober and realistic attitude towards *industrial processes* such as mining, polluting, drilling, excavating and the consequent landscape transformation, but should also allow their aesthetic appreciation:

*Boring, if seen as a discrete step in the development of an entire site, has an esthetic value. [...] The boring, like other works, is becoming more and more important to artists. Pavements, holes, trenches, mounds, heaps, paths, ditches, roads, terraces, etc., all have an esthetic potential. [...] Instead of using a paintbrush to make his art, Robert Morris would like to use a bulldozer. (Smithson [1968]: 95)*

All details of the altered landscape, all elements of these industrial ruins have had an aesthetic value for Smithson's artistic eye. However, he experienced the altered landscape aesthetically, with his whole body and not only through his eyes; through his body he perceived nature's immensity and power. In consequence, Smithson developed a peculiar artistic vocabulary, which was expressed later in his *sites*.

## 2.2 *The human body in Earth Art experience and Smithson's «ecological turn»*

The artistic experience is an intense and complex experience of reality where sense perception, reflection, imagination and emotional responsiveness are decisive for the comprehension of its different aspects, including nature's ecological aspects. The body experience is particularly important for grasping ecological values. During his expeditions, Smithson not only perceived the aesthetic qualities of the landscapes with his senses but his whole body was exposed to the influences of the landscape. Peligre Dam in Haiti impacted him because of its scale, measured by his body experience:

*The making of artificial lakes with the help of dams, brings into view a vast «garden». For instance, the Peligre Dam in the Republic of Haiti consists of 250-*

*foot high concrete buttresses. This massive structure with its artificial cascades and symmetrical layout stands as an immobile facade. It conveys an immense scale and power. By investigating the physical forms of such projects we may gain unexpected esthetic information. I am not concerned here with the original «functions» of such massive projects, but with what they suggest or evoke. (Smithson [1968]: 95-96)*

By exploring the landscape aesthetically, the artist was exposed to an integral body experience involving visual perception, olfaction, hearing, thermoception, proprioception (sense of self-movement and body position), equilibrioception (sense of balance and spatial perception), and thus allowed him to capture wider axiological aspects of the landscape.

Drawing on Merleau Ponty's phenomenological theory of body and perception, White developed the idea that our body experiences guide us to ecological values. The author argues that our comprehension of ecological values is not primarily driven by our rationality but by our body experience:

*It is my conviction that ecological values are not cognized first and foremost in «object» cognition but are given originally in terms of lived body experience. Human beings are «rational animals», and it is precisely in the experience of our animality, i.e. of our vital and bodily being, that we attain our first access to understanding ecological values. (White [2007]: 177, emphasis mine)*

It must be mentioned here that although Smithson was sensitive to ecological aspects of reality, there was something more – a real and axiological conflict – that awakened his ecological consciousness and attitude. In Smithson's first *Sites*, contamination was viewed as an aesthetically relevant process. In the *Pours* from 1969 – *Asphalt Rundown*, *Glue Pour*, and *Concrete Pour* – entropic forces, artistic processes, as well industrial practices, substances and pollution are combined into one. The *Pours* can be regarded as evidence that Smithson had no ecological concerns at this time, but his aggressive approach to the landscape

would later become the reason for his reorientation and his search for specific artistic balance between industrial damage, art, and social environmental consciousness.

After producing *Glue Pour* in Vancouver in 1969, Smithson found a possible location near it for his project on a series of hypothetical continents associated with broken glass. The authorities initially approved the project and submitted the prospective location, Miami Islet, as a gift. However, public opinion shifted; some environmentally active circles vehemently opposed the execution of the project on the island and the permission for its use was withdrawn. Smithson was involved in real social and political conflict.

Consequently, the artist comprehended the axiological conflict, which emerged in this *Broken Glasses* project: aesthetic values conflicted with ecological values. This caused him not only to rethink the relationship between these aspects of reality, with which he was always in touch, but provoked an immediate attitude change regarding the environment:

*Smithson concurred that despite the low risk of harm, the glass project should not be done as proposed. In its stead, he subsequently submitted the Miami Islet project as a broken de-architectural concrete earthwork – concrete habitats so as «to encourage wildlife to visit and use the island as a nesting and breeding ground», adding «especially cormorants that need to rest on a dry level». The project was now to be considered «a monument to ecology». (Graziani [2004]: 108)*

In this new proposal we can see Smithson's philosophical «retorsion», in the sense of *Verwindung* (or postmodern brake), i.e., convalescence and recovery from the illness of the modern industrial culture. Smithson's artistic position regarding ecological aspects of the environment is clearly defined in his next projects, *Spiral Jetty* and *Broken Circle / Spiral Hill*. He later used these earth sculptures as an example for many subsequent proposals. They became crucial for his portfolio, particularly in relation to his ecological appeal. However, some authors like Hobbs

could not recognize Smithson's ecological concern behind his postmodern break to art as *land reclamation*:

*This interest in post-industrial Sites as a form of Nonsite led Smithson in the early seventies to conceive of land reclamation as a new art form. His concern was never ecological; Smithson was an artist fascinated with the look of pollution. [...] Feeling that polluted and strip-mined areas were eminently picturesque, he proposed art projects to such corporations as Hanna Coal in Ohio and Kennecott Copper in Utah, with the hope of gaining access to the giant earth-moving equipment owned by these companies. (Hobbs [1982]: 17, emphasis mine)*

Although Smithson was impressed by contamination in a particular aesthetic way, after the dialectical «retorsion» in Vancouver he was exclusively concerned with the opportunity to raise awareness for the damaged landscapes – namely through aesthetically *recycling* them – both in industrial companies and the greater public: «Across the country there are many mining areas, disused quarries, and polluted lakes and rivers. One practical solution for the utilization of such devastated places would be land and water recycling in terms of “earth art”» (Smithson [1979]: 376). And further: «Such devastated places as strip mines could be recycled in terms of earth art» (Smithson [1979]: 379).

He also understood art's didactical function to mediate between industry and society: «Art can become a resource, that mediates between ecologist and industrialist. Ecology and industry are not one-way streets, rather they should be crossroads. Art can help to provide the needed dialectic between them» (Smithson [1979]: 376).

Smithson's art also has the function to *expose* «the process behind» (Smithson [1968]: 95), the «blind progress» (Smithson [1979]: 380) at the back of «the imposed»: «The world needs coal and highways, but we do not need the results of strip-mining or highway trusts. *Economics, when abstracted from the world, is blind to natural processes*» (Smithson [1979]: 376, emphasis mine). And further:

*Art on this scale should be supported directly by industry, not only private art sponsorships. Art would then become a necessary resource, and not an isolated luxury. The artist must overcome the inequities that come in a wake of blind progress [emphasis mine]. Those in economic power should not thwart such necessary enterprises. [...] Artists should not be cheated out of doing their work, or forced to exist in the isolation of «art worlds». There should be artist-consultant in every major industry in America. (Smithson [1979]: 380)*

Unfortunately, Smithson's increasing sensitivity to ecological problems and his ideas about dialectical transformation of industry-affected sites through art could not find the expected support, and most of his proposals were not executed. Smithson died in an accident at age 35.

### 2.3 *The ideology and aesthetic of «the imposed»*

White suggests that «[...] if one lives in a civilization where body experiences and body practices are not conducive to the experience of one's own vital values, one will quite likely fail to recognize and appreciate the values of the environment» (White [2007]: 179-180).

Indeed, it seems that big cities, small square apartments and mass culture made us insensitive to nature. We have developed a certain «value blindness» or «axiological blindness» (Von Hildebrand [1922]: 44) towards ecological values, by limiting our taste more and more clearly to values *imposed* by the «industrial culture».

Smithson was critical of the industrial culture, the ideology of consumerism, the ideals of technology and the values and practices in art based on them. He reproached that Pop Art and Minimal Art are bound by the ideology of technology and industry, to the ideals of the timeless and the unchangeable. What is imposed on us in this predominantly visual culture is the static and polished face, or the last pronounced symbol of industry, mostly presented as its final product, as an «ideal» object; but behind it there is its invisible, destructive body, with its processes and



rejects. Smithson criticized the «illusory» aesthetics and ethics of «the imposed», of *Gestell*:

*Only commodities can afford such illusionist values; for instance, soap is 99/100% pure, beer has more spirit in it, and dog food is ideal; all and all this means such values are worthless. As the cloying effect of such «values» wears off, one perceives the «facts» of the outer edge, the flat surface, the banal, the empty, the cool, blank after blank; in other words, that infinitesimal condition known as entropy. (Smithson [1966]: 13)*

Regarding this entropy of information, or entropy of truth, history, and memory, Baudrillard speaks in his book *The illusion of the end* (1992). The ideology and aesthetics of *technology* and *industry*, which we know from advertising and which has also penetrated the arts, turns out to be a simulacrum. For the artist, technological values such as durability or eternity are utopian. There is nothing timeless in nature; *entropy*, *destruction*, *corrosion* and *weathering* are, by contrast, typical natural processes. «Nature is never finished» (Smithson [1972]: 155), it is continuously in progress, it is open and has no limits. Earth Art works as vanishing objects, as genuinely open artworks, (in terms of Umberto Eco) oppose the *Gestell*.

Land Art works are not objects in the same sense as objects of art which are exposed in art galleries or museums. Smithson's criticism of museums as a traditional exhibition center should be understood in this context. Museums are also an ideal, isolated, arranged space, something that contradicts reality; indeed, something alien and hostile to art, which should be realistic, authentic and open to society. Smithson called museums cultural prisons where art is locked up:

*Museums, like asylums and jails, have wards and cells – in other words, neutral rooms called «galleries». A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral. Works of art seen in such spaces seem to be going through a*

*kind of esthetic convalescence. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable. (Smithson [1972]: 154)*

Smithson propagated an expansion of art from beyond the borders of the city, of the studio, by saying: «Even the most advanced tools and machines are made of the raw matter of the earth. [...] The tools of art have too long been confined to “the studio”» (Smithson [1968]: 101-102). Not only industrial products, but also artworks, galleries, museums, and *cities* turn out to be *Gestell*, since they are closed systems, which *impose* a certain way of life: «The city gives the illusion that earth does not exist. Heizer calls his earth projects “The alternative to the absolute city system”» (Smithson [1968]: 102).

When we look further, we can see that in this industrial culture the human body could also be quantified and finally transformed into *Gestell*. Humanity is on the road to «trans-humanism», and Smithson already witnessed the problems related to this transformation of the human body and consciousness when involved in industrial processes: «The artist and the miner must become conscious of themselves as natural agents. When the miner loses consciousness of what he is doing through the abstractions of technology, he cannot cope with his own inherent nature and external nature» (Smithson [1979]: 379).

This cements the fact that this «old normal» led us to a dead end: namely to a climate catastrophe, a pandemic and to a deeper crisis of humanity. Now if we ask for a *new normal*, for *new* aesthetic concepts and theories, as well for *new* forms of art, we may be going the wrong way. If we follow Vattimo and his notion of «weak thought», there were attempts in the history of philosophy to overcome the problems (or the «cultural diseases») of modernity, however, inasmuch as «going beyond» (überwinden) forms *part* of modernity in its tendency to surpass *the old* again and again, it repeats and confirms its own essence and would necessarily fail. The repetition of these attempts *ad infinitum* and the

despair of the self are described by Kierkegaard in his work *Mortal disease*. In Vattimo's view only Nietzsche manages to break free from modernism entirely, accepting its *weakening*, or in Smithson's terms, its *entropic* tendency, instead of trying to overcome it. Nietzsche's (and later Heidegger's) concept of *Verwindung* has the meaning "to recover" from disease, and «contains no notion of dialectical sublimation (*Aufhebung*) nor of "leaving behind", which characterizes the connection we have with a past that no longer has anything to say to us» (Vattimo [1987]: 7).

Can we recover from the disease of our modern culture only by accepting, recognizing and radicalizing its «entropic» forces? Another alternative to recover from the disease is through the imposition of a strong repressive, closed, and totalitarian system; this resembles Heidegger's *Verhängnis*, the metaphysical essence of the West-culture, which claims rational «planetary governance» (Heidegger [1936-1946]: 75). Indeed, the only phenomenon in Nature, which opposes entropy is information (essentially metaphysical) since it organizes or creates order. «The eternal war» between information and entropy affects everything existing, «from atoms to economies» (Hidalgo [2015]: X). Maybe now we are experiencing «the great reset» (Schwab et al. [2020]), the transition from blind to considerably rational, «purposeful capitalism» (Mazzucato [2019]), which will be «more sustainable» but will imply also «less sovereignty» (Vilimsky [2009]); a global *Gestell* imposed from the Industry 4.0, paradoxically to save the planet.

Smithson has already grasped the power of entropy in his oeuvre that may be seen as an alternative to *Gestell*, to *Simulacra*, to *Lethe*. In the following, I hope to demonstrate this by showing that his works are multi-stratified superimpositions, where every perceivable stratum has also meaning, where conflict and hidden processes or taboos are not suppressed or excluded, but exposed in dialectical manner (i.e. *displaced*) in reference to other processes and meanings.

#### 2.4 Smithson's multi-stratified oeuvre as alternative to the «imposed» and to *Simulacra*

In the following, I will discuss the «displacement» in Smithson's work. This concept has at least three meanings in his oeuvre: firstly, in opposition to Freud's notion, it could be understood as dialectical *exposing* of the hidden, forgotten, or forbidden industrial and cultural processes, however not by reducing but by increasing the tension or even by causing disruption to the experience of the viewer. Secondly, it refers to the feeling of displacement when the body is exposed to the site. This is Smithson's «oceanic feeling» or «sense of cosmic rupture» as his alternative to the object-cognition. Thirdly, we can speak about many «displacements» in Smithson's works, where every displacement, with a reference to some axiological or existential sphere, has built a visual and intelligible stratum. These meanings are also emphasized in Ann Reynolds' work *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*.

Industrial processes and devastation are *taboo* in the industrial culture. Smithson performed many «displacements» in his works, trying to expose these processes, to make them transparent and visible. In these displacements we can see the same figure of logical «retorsion»; they are in this context symptoms of *Verwindung*, i.e. recovery from the industrial disease. These displacements are not explicit, unambiguous, «linear» or one-dimensional, on the contrary, they are very dialectical, multidimensional, representing the «strata» of the consciousness, the «strata» of the reality, in their dialog: «By refusing "technological miracles" the artist begins to know the corroded moments, the carboniferous states of thought, the shrinkage of mental mud, the geologic chaos-in the strata of esthetic consciousness» (Smithson [1968]: 107), and much more, in their physical interaction in and throughout the artist's body: «The strata of the Earth is a jumbled museum» (Smithson [1968]: 110).

Smithson's works are extremely complicated «montages» of his body experiences. Reynolds writes that Smithson experimented with different «frameworks» in order to organize in dialectical

manner implicating conflict, his «perceptual experience of the site» (Reynolds [2004]: 222). The artist created complex works, as media, as montage and as content. They refer to different existential and axiological spheres; they consist of different interrelated strata. We can comprehend the didactic mission of Smithson's works, their resistance to the imposed and to the industrial culture, only if we also understand their multi-stratified essence.

Adorno criticized industrial culture with its tendency to transform the cultural objects in *Gestell*: «The culture industry has three crucial effects on cultural objects. Firstly, it makes from them *commodities*. Secondly, it *fragments* these objects. Thirdly, it makes them so easily assimilative that they cannot generate a real experience» (Stojanov 2012, 127). Thus, according to Adorno, «the fragmentation of cultural objects means that their elements are abstracted from the structural logic of those objects in their historical genesis» (Stojanov 2012, 127). Not only is *the imposed* product of industry abstracted from the processes which built it, but also the objects of art: «The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. [...] Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement» (Smithson [1972]: 154-155). This fragmentation, states Stojanov:

*[S]hould be seen as the central mechanism of the assimilative preparation of these objects; a preparation that consists in breaking down their original resistance and their independence from the subjects who try to appropriate these objects. Yet, according to Adorno, cultural objects can generate a real experience and initiate a process of Bildung only on the condition they remain sovereign objects that resist their assimilation in pre-given subjective schemes of reality perception. (Stojanov 2012, 127-128)*

Smithson's works, inasmuch as they are complicated «displacements», difficult to decipher, have the potential to question the already exist-

ing interpretation of reality, to provoke conflict or resistance in the person experiencing them and, in this sense, to educate. Reynolds explains in this context that Smithson's works produced oft «physical and psychological tensions» or even «discomfort» (Reynolds [2004]: 196).

The artist, repeatedly, never thought to isolate his works «in any particular way» (Smithson [1973]: 311). They have many strata and are also strata from larger strata, they only exist in their sometimes non (chrono-)logical, irrational, conflictive interrelatedness to other objects and sites:

*All of Smithson's displacements are in some sense stills – arrested, partial, and dislocated events that depend on other images and contexts for signification. Like Eisenstein's montage, they are also superimpositions. The splitting and superimposition in Smithson's displacements occur simultaneously – voids filled, frames occupied – and conflict produces their meaning. (Reynolds [2004]: 226)*

Smithson's works are always «fragmentation of a greater fragmentation». The artist used such «doublings», as Reynolds states – referring to his proposal *Towards the Development of a Cinema Cavern or the Movie Goer as Spelunker* – also to expose the taboos: «Such doubling, in terms of making and then viewing the film at the site, would have structurally echoed the taboo against women entering the mine that Smithson discussed with Wheeler: «It's a very strong taboo. I read somewhere there is a strong feeling that, in the primitive sense, the tube is like a vagina, kind of like a Freudian protectiveness» (Reynolds [2004]: 227). These «doublings» appear also when two displacements have taken place, when they overlap, leaving two often conflictive strata in the artwork; in this sense they are also denominated «superimpositions». «Doublings» appear also in relation to the different references and spheres of reality.

We see that Smithson's works are an alternative to *the imposed*, to the lobotomized commodities; they are antagonists to *Gestell*, inasmuch as they are multidimensional, complicated and full of conflicts. They are postmodern «superimpositions» of

the imposed, since they are exposing the hidden processes and principles that built it. In such dialectical, critical «doubling», or «retorsion» we can see Smithson's effort to overcome modern industrial culture, to recover from its disease.

The concept of «superimposition» is used often in photography, cartography and cinematography. Reynolds, in analyzing Smithson's works, refers to Eisenstein's understanding of superimposition as a complex montage of images, which also implies conflict (Reynolds [2004]: 224). Special effects of movement, depth, as well as other illusions can be created through superimposition, however the author stresses that «Superimposition can also produce visual – and aural – conflict» (Reynolds [2004]: 223), and Smithson used it to produce a conflict:

*Smithson demonstrated this by superimposing mirrored chambers over the two pictures on the stereo-scope card in a plan of a simple box stereoscope [...]. The conflict between mind and body, conditioned expectation and reality, that the Enantiomorphic Chambers generates opens up a visible gap between the physiological aspects of vision—its binocular structure—and the experiences they produce. (Reynolds [2004]: 223)*

Every stratum constructs the plasticity and the meaning of the work. Conflict has an important function in the whole. Popper in his book *The open society and its enemies* (1945) places emphasis on the importance of conflict in the «open society», i.e. non-totalitarian society. Conflict has an important function in art, if we understand an artwork as a process and even more, in Smithson's terms, as a dialectical process, as position, as negation and then as superimposition, manifested in a series of displacements. The final product of industry and culture – the imposed – consists of only one simple «position». There is no tension or conflict in «the imposed»; it is easy to be consumed, comprehended and assimilated. With all these «displacements», conflicts and «superimpositions» Smithson questions the «object-cognition», the imposed with its limits, and his purpose is to provoke this feeling of «displacement». This

is also valid for the movie *Spiral Jetty*, where the artist tried to represent the aesthetic impact of the site's *scale* on his body and mind: «Sky and earth, filmic and “natural” reflections intermittently collapse together, causing the jetty to momentarily disappear behind these flashes of reflected light» (Reynolds [2004]: 225).

Summarizing, Smithson's works are complicated narratives. Each work is in its essence a «story» (in German: *Geschichte*) built from different strata. The German word *Geschichte* refers to *Schichten*, in the sense of geological strata, and also signifies «history». The verb *schichten* means «stratify», and *Geschichte* is the substantive originated from the past perfect, as «ge- indicates. *Geschichte* is the stratified past time, where each stratum has meaning, and where all strata together build a substrate for the new upcoming events.

Jean Baudrillard paints in his work *The Illusion of the End* (1992) an almost apocalyptic image, a fatal end of the postmodern era, in which history disappears in the flow of information broadcast every day by the media. In an increasingly accelerated transmission of news and news events, the story loses its substance, or using Smithson's terminology we could say its substratum. The individual no longer remembers the events of yesterday, of last year, s/he loses her/his memory, and the reality loses its depth. In this sense Smithson's works are true stories, are *Geschichten*; they may be seen as an alternative to the flow of information (metaphorically, to the entropy of the information, of truth and memory, or to *Lethea*), as true *A-Lethea*, or «knowledge». This also cements their potential to educate.

### 3. CLOSING REMARKS

We can only imagine what kind of art works could be developed in the current conditions, where social interaction and the analog reality in general became *taboo*. Perhaps such dialectical forms of artistic experience will be developed, which relate to outside and inside, real and virtual, giving birth to interesting aesthetic forms and

categories. Three-dimensional, virtual art works in the sense of «three-dimensional maps» could refer to some «oceanic» site or real experience; with such «fragments» from the immense nature, artists could intervene in urban landscapes and question the everyday perception. Earth Art works could be developed on grand scale: «Remote places such as Pine Barrens of New Jersey and the frozen wastes of the North and South poles could be coordinated by art forms that would use the actual land as a medium» (Smithson [1968]: 95). Such coordinated efforts between artists could be developed on a grand magnitude, to defend nature. Here will be only summarized how Earth Art could awaken society to the dangers of the industrial culture and its *Gestell*, and what sources it opens to convalesce the current disease.

As was already emphasized, in Earth Art the observer is no longer merely an observer but a co-experiencer; s/he is *in* the work of art, involved with her/his body perceptions in a unique experience of reality. S/he is *exposed* to the environment, not the art *object* to her/him. By aesthetically sensitizing the observer and engaging her/his entire body, Earth Art could be a mediator of environmental values, could awaken awareness to ecology, could provoke the feeling of immense, infinite, process-based and open-ended reality and help to overcome the «object-cognition». In this context Richard Long's works are an alternative to the «diseases» of the big cities; they invite us to hear nature, to hear our own voice, to meditate, and in this sense to free us from the «imposed», allowing us to discover and adopt more authentic values. To revise the imposed and often blindly adopted values critically means to make first step towards authenticity, which is profoundly related to our feeling of happiness and fulfilment.

Adorno argues that «the modern cultural industry denies the individual's access to the world and prevents the process of self-development, that is, of *Bildung*» (Stojanov 2012, 126). Thus, Earth Art could also be in the future an important didactic resource that teaches us how to resist cultural industry. The individual can discover through Earth Art the risks and possibilities of the current

reality, can reach critical orientation and authentic happiness in a society. Art becomes didactic by exposing the current time: «The artist must come out of the isolation of galleries and museums and provide a concrete consciousness for the present as it really exists, and not simply present abstractions or utopias» (Smithson [1979]: 379).

In the last decade, digital reality appears and consumes our consciousness instead of the analog reality. The current pandemic accelerated the process of digitalization, which already affected all spheres of life, including museums, galleries and art in general. We can speak about the «digital coup» we are experiencing now. On one hand, digitalization presents new opportunities to save the environment through the optimization of processes and technologies. On the other hand, it contains risks, one of which is human isolation from the environment and consequently alienation from nature. When our consciousness is involved in a virtual reality, we lose contact mentally and physically with our natural, material environment. This could also lead to a posterior loss of sensitivity and to an axiological blindness regarding the environment. Such digital artworks may appear in the future, engaging us to experience them with our entire body as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Inasmuch as a Land Art work is essentially *Gesamtkunstwerk* because of this integral experience of the body it evokes, it could prevent or help to overcome the negative effects of the digital «simulacra» on our perception of ecological values. How will everything change after this «digital coup», taking into account that physical space is now stigmatized and displaced (in Freudian sense), and our freedom in physical space is reduced? We must consider that new structures will be build up in virtual space; it is a new market with new scope. One remembers how cities established next to a market or to a port in the Middle Ages, how the arts developed in the palace, in the cathedral and in other public spaces. We can only imagine how social structures, the arts and indeed the whole culture will change after this shift into digital space, in the context of Industry 4.0. Again, Earth Art offers an alternative.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, T.W., 1991: *Culture Industry Reconsidered*, in Bernstein, J. M. (ed.), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, transl. by A. G. Rabinbach, Routledge, London, pp. 98-106.
- Baudrillard, J., 1981: *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. by S. F. Glaser, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor MI, 1994.
- Baudrillard, J., 1992: *The illusion of the end*, transl. by C. Turner, Stanford University Press, Redwood City CA, 1994.
- Dreher, T., 1992: *Robert Smithson: Land Reclamation and the Sublime*, "Artefactum" 45, pp. 26-30.
- Eco, U., 1962: *The Open Work*, transl. by A. Canocogni, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989.
- Graziani, R., 2004: *Robert Smithson and the American Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, New York .
- Heidegger, M., 1936-1946: *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik (1936-1946)*, in Herrmann, F.W. (ed.), *Vorträge und Aufsätze. Gesamtausgabe*, Band VIII, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M., 2000, pp. 67-99.
- Heidegger, M., 1953: *Die Frage nach der Technik*, in Herrmann, F.-W. (ed.), *Vorträge und Aufsätze. Gesamtausgabe*, Band 8, Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, pp. 5-37.
- Hidalgo, C., 2015: *Why Information Grows: The Evolution of Order, from Atoms to Economies*, Basic Books, New York.
- Hobbs, R., 1981: *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Hobbs, R., 1982: *Robert Smithson: A Retrospective View*. Exhibition catalogue, Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum der Stadt Duisburg and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Cornell University, Ithaca .
- Kastner, J., Wallis, B. (eds.), 2010: *Land and Environmental Art (1st Edition)*, Phaidon, New York.
- Linsley, R., 2004. *Robert Smithson and Art After Pollock*, in Smithson, R., & Arnold, G., (ed.), *Robert Smithson in Vancouver: A fragment of a greater fragmentation*. Vancouver Art Gallery, pp. 68-74.
- Mazzucato, M., 2019: *How to create a more purposeful capitalism*. World Economic Forum, URL: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/purposeful-capitalism-economics-mariana-mazzucato/>
- Popper, K.R., 1945: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2020.
- Reynolds, A., 2004: *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- Schwab, K., Malleret, T., 2020: *COVID-19: The Great Reset*, ISBN Agentur Schweiz, Zürich.
- Smithson, R., 1966: *Entropy and the new monuments*, in Flam, J. (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, The Documents of Twentieth-Century Art*, University of California Press, Oakland CA, 1996, pp. 10-24.
- Smithson, R., 1966-67: *The artist as site-seer; or, a dintorphic essay*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 340-346.
- Smithson, R., 1968: *A thing is a hole in thing it is not*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 95-97.
- Smithson, R., 1968: *A sedimentation of the mind: Earth projects*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 100-114.
- Smithson, R., 1972: *Cultural confinement*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 154-157.
- Smithson, R., 1973: *Robert Smithson on Duchamp/Moira Roth*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 310-313.
- Smithson, R., 1979: *Untitled (1971)*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, p.: 376.
- Smithson, R., 1979: *Untitled (1972)*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, p.: 379.
- Smithson, R., 1979: *Proposal (1972)*, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley CA, 1996, pp. 379-380.

- Stojanov, K., 2012: *Theodor W. Adorno-Education as social critique*, in Siljander, P., Kivelä, A., Sutinen, A. (eds.), *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, Boston MA, Taipei, pp. 125-135. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789462090316>
- Vattimo, G., 1985: *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture (Revised Edition)*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 1988.
- Vattimo, G., 1987: "Verwindung". *Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy*. "SubStance" 16 (2), pp. 7-17, doi:10.2307/3685157, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3685157>
- Vattimo, G., 1996: *Belief*, transl. by L. D'Isanto, D. Webb, Polity Press, Boston MA, 1999.
- Vilimsky, S., 2009: *2089/J (XXIV. GP)-Teilnahme am «Bilderberg-Treffen» vom 14.-17. Mai, im Nafsika Astir Palace Hotel, in Vouliagmeni (in der Nähe von Athen), Griechenland*. (s. f.). Recovered 14.03. 2021,: [https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/J/J\\_02089/index.shtml](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/J/J_02089/index.shtml)
- Von Hildebrand, D., 1922: *Sittlichkeit und ethische Werterkenntnis: eine Untersuchung über ethische Strukturprobleme*. 3. durchgesehene Aufl., Patris Verlag, Vallendar-Schönstatt, 1982.
- White, J.R., 2006: *Ecological value cognition and the American capitalist ethos*, "Environmental Philosophy" 3 (2), pp. 44-51.
- White, J.R., 2007: *Lived Body and Ecological Value Cognition*, in Cataldi, S., Hamrick, W. (eds.) *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, Suny Press, New York, pp. 177-189.



**Citation:** D. Alvarogonzález (2021) The Classification of the Substantive Arts. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 159-168. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12470

**Copyright:** © 2021 D. Alvarogonzález. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## The Classification of the Substantive Arts

DAVID ALVAROGONZÁLEZ

Department of Philosophy University of Oviedo, Spain  
dalvar@uniovi.es

**Abstract.** In this paper, I discuss certain criteria for classifying the substantive arts. In the first section, I explain the idea of substantive arts and then put forward sociological, historical, thematic and metaphysical criteria for classifying the arts that I deem to be external to the classified materials. I subsequently outline five classification criteria internal to works of art, themselves understood as techniques. Such criteria take into account the materials used in the works, the degree of destruction exercised therein, the degree of disconnection between the artist and the artwork, the sense organs involved in perceiving these works and the scope of the analogies between them and the other parts of reality. To end, I draw final corollaries in line with the discussion.

**Keywords:** Substantive arts, Classification, Lessing, Abstract art.

### 1. THE IDEA OF SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS ADJECTIVE ARTS

Discussing classification criteria encompasses a set of arts that have since the 18th century been known as fine arts, noble arts, useless arts, aesthetic arts, poetic arts, contemplative arts and superfluous arts. Following the expression coined by Gustavo Bueno [2000a], I refer to them as «substantive arts» and make use of the idea of substantive arts I have advanced elsewhere (Alvarogonzález [2021]). In this use, «substantive arts» stands in opposition to «adjective arts»; the latter serve certain purposes external to themselves, be they psychological, political, religious, military, social, economic, entertainment or other purposes. However, the substantive arts are not intended to serve any particular institution or any immediate practical purpose.

As I have argued, the substantive arts constitute a set of techniques and technologies that seek to invent certain products or actions that bear a recognizable analogy to other parts of reality. Analogies always have an exploratory or analytical purpose (Alvarogonzález [2020]). Consequently, as a technical or technological invention, a work of art contributes to exploring new patches of real-



ity, makes it possible to analyze parts of existing reality or performs both tasks at the same time. In allegorical works of art, this analogical character is evident; however, even in so-called abstract art the artworks' connection to the rest of reality is never lost. This connection may affect only the formal parts of the artistic work or may also relate to certain concepts that are not immediately «things», but that also form part of the reality external to the artwork.

As techniques and technologies, the pure substantive arts such as painting, sculpture and music are limited to certain highly specific regions of reality, involve very specific abilities and are irreducible to each other. There are artistic movements (classicism, romanticism, impressionism, etc.) that look to establish crosscutting values for various artistic categories (music, painting and literature, for instance), but their success in doing so is debatable. In any case, it seems that this crosscutting nature relates more to the ideological or doctrinal moment of these arts rather than to their technical or technological moment.

## 2. THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE ARTS

In this section, I draw a distinction between external and internal classifications of a given region of reality. By way of example, classifying triangles by color or components is external to the geometric concept of a triangle. However, classifying them by the relative length of their sides (equilateral, isosceles, scalene) is internal to the concept, since the triangle is defined as a three-sided polygon. Similarly, the compound classifications made by the first alchemists are laundry lists that mix together heterogeneous external criteria (color, taste, state of aggregation of matter, etc.) and lack a single basis for division, whereas the periodic table of the chemical elements is a classification internal to the concept of the chemical elements and internal to the laws of chemistry. In what follows, I take cues from the idea of substantive arts as discussed above and touch on the

classification criteria that are external and internal to such idea. My discussion will focus on certain post-18<sup>th</sup>-century classifications since, prior to this date, what I call «substantive arts» were classified together with techniques and sciences (Kristeller [1951]; [1952]).

The progressive loss of interest in arts classification programs is a sociological fact, but it has no theoretical justification. In my view, there is no unified art or total art that would render the task of classifying the substantive arts unnecessary. Just as the internal classification of triangles, according to their sides and angles, confirms the definition of a triangle as a three-sided polygon, the classification of substantive arts, using criteria that are internal to their own definition, will allow us to evaluate the fertility and accuracy of that definition.

### 2.1. Discussion of certain classification criteria external to the idea of substantive arts

#### 2.1.1. Empirical, sociological and historical classifications

External classifications need not refer to any specific idea of art to distinguish and classify the arts, since the arts are activities or historical-cultural institutions alongside others. Just as there are techniques, trades, guilds, schools and a host of diverse institutions, the substantive arts (sculpture, painting, music, literature, theater, dance) are also organized into groups and guilds that follow their own dynamics, differing from others on the basis of social indicators (status, teachings, common interests, etc.) (Dickie [1974]; Fokt [2014], [2017]; Danto [1973], [1998]). It suffices to consider that these institutions are the mere result of human activity and, consequently, open to retrospective, historical analysis (Levinson [1979], [1989], [1993], [2002]). Musicians' guilds differ from painters' or sculptors' guild, and each of them has its own uses, techniques, teachings and traditions in which the various styles are framed (Carney [1994]). Put forward by Davies, the «cladistic» theory of art is based on a historical point of view that purports to be purely denotative and

philosophically neutral (Davies [1997], [2004], [2015]). From these perspectives, the distinction between the arts in their adjective and substantive function does not need to be significant, since there is a historical and institutional continuity between them. From these tenets, the classification of the arts is but the verification of certain historical processes in which some institutions oppose others (musical institutions versus pictorial institutions, for example). In general, these authors recognize that it is not possible to reconstruct a single historical course encompassing all the substantive arts or one that allows us to construct a phylogenetic classification in which certain arts emerge from others. Rather, it is a question of verifying that each of the substantive arts has its specific technical sources and follows its own courses and dynamics, although certain parallels could be established between some of them at certain points.

### 2.1.2. Thematic classifications

Classifying the arts by their subject matter is also external to the concept of substantive arts that I take as a reference here. The distinction between religious versus profane or military versus civilian works of art mixes highly heterogeneous arts together, such as music, painting, sculpture, architecture and dance. Certain thematic classification criteria qualify as ontological (dealing with nature), anthropological (dealing with human subjects), zoological or theriological (depicting non-human animals) or even divine (dealing with gods and angels).

In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant defined beautiful art as distinct from mercenary mechanical trades, as «a manner of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication» (Kant [1790]: § 44). Kant compared the beautiful arts to the languages and classified them based on the content they transmit. On the one hand are certain arts – oratory and poetry – that express thoughts and on the other are the arts that

express intuitions. Sculpture, architecture, painting and gardening express the form of intuitions while music and the art of colors express their subject matter (Kant [1790]: § 51). All of them must be connected with moral ideas or else they would merely be distraction (Kant [1790]: §52). Kant's classification is eminently external to the structure of the arts, akin to a linguist classifying national languages following the matters dealt with in the speech acts instead of using other internal classification criteria such as their phonological, morphological, syntactic or semantic structure.

### 2.1.3. Metaphysical classifications

Among many others, an example of a classification of the arts based on metaphysical criteria is given by Hegel in the introduction to *Aesthetics*, where he distinguished five arts, classifying them according to their degree of materiality and spirituality. For Hegel, the content of genuine art is ideal, since art is not an imitation of nature but rather an expression of the absolute spirit. The more material arts, in which technical aspects prevail, are at the same time the least expressive compared to the high expressiveness of the most spiritual arts since beauty is but the sensory manifestation of life and spiritual freedom. From more to less material, the scale of the arts put forward by Hegel was as follows: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry (Hegel [1818-1829]: 82-90).

In certain core issues, Hegel's classification is reminiscent of the classification of disciplines made by the Neoplatonist Plotinus, although it must be kept in mind that the idea of «arts» in Antiquity is most different from Hegel's Romantic idea, since for Plotinus the arts include all techniques. Plotinus based his classification on the various degrees of materiality and spirituality of the arts and considered, like Hegel, that the more spiritual and less material arts were superior. Thus, as in Hegel's scale, the lowest place in the hierarchy is held by architecture, followed by medicine and agriculture, which help nature, and then painting, which imitates it. The arts that improve human action, such as rhetoric, music and poli-

tics, are even more spiritual, while the purely intellectual, most exalted art is geometry (Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV, 4, 31; V, 9, 11).

Based on this paper's tenets, all the arts are material to the same degree, although each one of them has specific material contents (stones, sounds, dyes, human operations, etc.), while Hegel's and Plotinus's ideas of spirit are eminently metaphysical.

#### 2.1.4. Nelson Goodman's distinction between allographic and autographic arts

Nelson Goodman differentiated between autographic and allographic art. In autographic art, there is a closer link between the author and the artwork, and the distinction between original and copy is highly significant, as in painting. In allographic art, however, the work lacks that close relationship with the author, as in music, when the same musical piece is performed thousands of times, or in literature, where the work is multiplied in thousands of copies (Goodman [1968]: 112-115). This criterion for classifying the arts is of great interest to those who trade in works of art, but its philosophical significance is controversial. Eddy Zemach defended that, once certain works can be reproduced with such a high degree of accuracy that they can only be distinguished from the original by procedures beyond normal perception, the insistence on possessing original artworks could be interpreted as a variety of fetishism, as an irrational reverence for something (Zemach [1986], [1989]). Contrary, Steven Farrelly-Jackson argued that the full aesthetic response to an artwork entails its consideration as a performance (even in painting and sculpture), and includes interest and valuing of objects as parts of the artist's life (Farrelly-Jackson [1997]). The idea of substantive arts I have defended elsewhere (Alvargonzález [2021]) implies that the expressive aspects of artworks are neither necessary nor sufficient characteristics to define substantive arts. Consequently, at this point, my position is closer to Zemach's than to Farrelly-Jackson's.

#### 2.2. The internal classification criteria to the idea of substantive arts

As I see it, the substantive arts are a set of techniques and technologies by means of which certain products or actions are invented that have a recognizable analogy with other parts of reality (Alvargonzález [2021]). Substantive works of art do not have an immediate practical purpose and, in this regard, are far removed from ordinary life. Since they are constructed by analogy with other parts of reality, they fulfill the objective aims of any analogy, i.e. exploratory and analytical purposes (Alvargonzález [2020]): a work of art can aid in exploring new patches of reality and in analyzing parts of existing reality. Frequently, these two tasks occur simultaneously and in varying proportions in the same work of art, which means that they do not serve as criteria for classification.

The substantive arts are techniques and, as such, depend directly on a number of factors. First, they depend on the materials used. Second, they depend on the degree of destruction that these materials allow. Third, since there are techniques that build products (productive techniques, poetry), such as pottery techniques, and techniques that build processes (techniques of praxis), such as hunting techniques, a further distinction can be made between the arts of *poiesis* and the arts of *praxis*. Moreover, works of art are designed to be perceived, so the sense organs involved in perception provide us with another firm criterion for classification. Lastly, as I have said, works of art involve analogies with other parts of reality that are external to them. These analogies can be restricted only to terms and the relationships between terms or can also include operations. Below I outline the reasons why some of these criteria lead to significant classifications of the arts while others do not.

##### 2.2.1. Classification based on the materials used to construct the analogy with respect to the rest of reality

Given the physicalistic component of all works of art, a pertinent criterion for classifying the sub-

stantive arts looks at the materials used to construct the exploratory and analytical analogies of which the essence of such arts consists. Making a work of art with stones is not the same as making a work of art with sounds. Stone construction must follow dynamic and static laws, while sound construction must follow the laws of acoustics, harmony and tonality.

The most relevant classification of the arts based the materiality of the arts themselves makes a differentiation between the arts that use the human language of words and those that do not. Moses Mendelssohn differentiated the beautiful letters (theater, poetry, literature), which use «arbitrary signs» such as the language of words, from the fine arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music), which use «non-arbitrary signs» that he called «natural». To quote Mendelssohn: «All real and possible things can be expressed by arbitrary signs [the language of words] as soon as they have a clear concept of them. For this reason, the field of beautiful letters extends to all imaginable objects», while the object of the arts that he calls «natural» is more limited since these arts «use preferably natural signs» (Mendelssohn [1757]: 253). While launched from Mendelssohn's idealist philosophy of art, this classification is nevertheless materialist in practice since it follows the criteria based on the materials with which the works are constructed. As can be seen, the category of arts made with non-arbitrary signs – Mendelssohn's «natural» arts – is a negative category within which we must continue to classify various species.

Two centuries later, Ayn Rand made a distinction between conceptual arts such as literature and the non-conceptual, visual and auditory arts (Rand [1971]: 45-75). This criterion contradicts her own definition of art since, according to Rand, all the arts are essentially conceptual, since they are all the product of the conceptual level of human consciousness. In any case, leaving aside the adequacy of the label used by Rand («conceptual» versus «non-conceptual»), she treads the same terrain, differentiating the arts using the human language of words from the other arts.

### 2.2.2. Classification based on the degree of destruction of reality

Since they are a variety of techniques and technologies, the substantive arts always entail a certain degree of destruction of reality. In techniques and technologies, this destruction can be stronger or weaker and ranges from the simple channeling of certain natural processes to pursue human ends, as with a sailing ship or windmill, to absolute destruction, such as in hunting and military techniques (Bueno [2000b]). In the arts, this destruction and recomposition of the parts retains the scale of the human sense organs' discrimination capacity.

All the arts, even the most abstract arts, construct analogies using geometric, biological, ethological, acoustic, technical and other morphologies. Consequently, «abstract» art is abstract in relation to certain morphologies, but never in absolute terms, even though it prefers geometric over anthropological morphologies, or acoustic morphologies that do not contain verbal structures. When the degree of destruction is maximum, abstract works of art still cannot dispense with the forms provided at the scale of human perception, even if such forms are the result of destroying reality at various levels and these formal parts are combined in a strange manner. The degree of destruction and explosion of reality may be higher or lower within the same art, as happens with the arts that tolerate both «figurative» and «abstract» modulation. Accordingly, this criterion is not valid to differentiate certain arts from others. In his system of fine arts, Étienne Souriau differentiated the arts of the first order or unrepresentative arts (arabesque, abstract painting, non-vocal music) and the second-degree, representative arts (Souriau [1947]: 115-125). However, this criterion falls short in classifying the arts, since there are arts with both modalities: abstract and representative painting and sculpture, non-vocal versus vocal music, arabesque versus representative drawing. On the other hand, pure prosody, which Étienne Souriau considered the abstract modulation of literature, does not give rise to

art, since the accent, tones and intonation cannot stand on their own (Souriau [1947]: 132). At any rate, these prosodic features are also formal parts of any literary work (Souriau [1947]: 121, 126).

However, the arts linked to the human language of words (literature, theater, vocal music, sound film) leave no room for the abstract since the level of a language that has been blown up always includes a structured vocabulary with references to specific things and actions. For this reason, these arts are always «representative» arts, «allegorical» arts, arts that have some references outside them, arts preserving the anthropic scale of the language of words and of human operations. One could posit that an abstract work of art could be deemed «self-referential» since it shows itself to itself, as its own reference, as with the theorems of the formal sciences. This interpretation is tantamount to holding that these abstract arts do not refer to anything outside of themselves. The prominent case would be non-vocal music, which is necessarily an abstract art. However, these arts imply the composition with certain morphologies that are not completely detached from other morphologies of reality, even when taken from the formal sciences. In reality, all the arts are «allegorical» to a greater or lesser extent, such that works of art or their constituent parts are always connected by analogy to things in the world that are outside the work of art itself.

In the directly representative arts (the arts that do not admit the modality of abstract art), the doctrine of modality may be used to construct the related classification. The depiction of impossible things and events is typical in science fiction narratives that violate the principles of science. Depicting possible yet non-existent things and events occurs in fictional narrative. In this regard, representing existing or necessary things and events transports us from the arts into the sciences. If exclusively existing things are represented, then we find ourselves in the field of history or forensic reconstruction, and if necessary things are «represented» (strictly speaking, they are constituted) we are in the field of the other formal, natural and human sciences. Because they

are directly allegorical, representative works of art often analyze the reality to which they refer. Such would be the meaning of the cathartic function of these arts, which allows us to appreciate how confused and false ideas amalgamate with clear and true ideas so that, in the world, they appear as inseparable, although they could be analytically dissociated.

### 2.2.3. Classification based on the connection or disconnection of human subjects in executing the artwork

As techniques or technologies, the arts can benefit from the classic Aristotelian classification that differentiates the techniques that give rise to artifacts or products, and those that lead to actions. The former are the productive techniques (in Greek *poiein*, in Latin *facere*), such as the potter's technique, while the latter are the techniques of praxis (in Greek, *pratein*, in Latin *agere*), such as military techniques and persuasion techniques (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [1140a-1140b]: 30). By applying this criterion to the substantive arts, we can differentiate the arts that consist of the active execution of a process by one or more interpreters. This is so in the «performing arts»: theater, music, dance and dramatic cinema. Yet there are other arts that produce a product that has a separate existence from its author and its interpreters, as is the case with painting, sculpture, architecture and literature. Films and recorded music pose special problems since the performance becomes a product.

Ayn Rand made a distinction between the «primary» arts (literature, music and the plastic arts) from the «secondary» arts that present the human body in action (such as dance) (Rand [1971]). For Rand, music is a primary art. She posits that the secondary arts require the primary ones: dance requires music, theater requires literature. Cinema would be a secondary performing arts.

Nelson Goodman differentiated «uniphasic» arts, which do not require a performer, such as painting and literature, from «biphasic» arts, which require a performer, such as live music

(Goodman [1968]: 99-127). In any case, Goodman's distinction does not correspond to mine or Rand's since, for Goodman, the cast sculpture would be an example of biphasic art, compared to the carved sculpture that would be uniphasic (Goodman [1968]: 112-115).

Arts involving real-time execution are very similar to games in that they do not admit separation from their operative exercise. In games, the analytical and exploratory functions are highly attenuated, and the propedeutic and entertainment functions, which put them closer to sport, prevail. In any case, in games, the «spectator» of the arts (for example, the spectator of the theater or dance) becomes an actor who has to participate in the game, notwithstanding the fact that certain games may also be shows. In games and competitive sports, there is an immediate goal: victory. In any case, in the performing arts, there is a real-time interaction between the artist and the spectators and among the spectators.

#### 2.2.4. Classification based on the sense organs involved in the perception of the work

The substantive arts always have a phenomenological, perceptual and subjective component. As such, regard should be had to the sense organs involved in each of them. With this criterion, the exclusively visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, dance) are differentiated from the exclusively auditory arts (music, oration) and from those that involve both sight and hearing (theater, cinema). Here I follow Plato, who considered that the arts that he called «superior» only involve sight and hearing (*Greater Hippias* 302 a, and ff.), thus excluding the culinary arts from the fine arts (*Gorgias* 462, 463d). Mendelssohn shared a similar criterion, stating that the fine arts use natural signs acting via hearing and sight since we do know of any beautiful art concerning the other senses (Mendelssohn [1757]: 1997). The reason that there are no substantive arts built up around the senses of smell, taste and touch is that, in those senses, humans lack a range of perceptual discrimination as rich and varied as our ability to

discriminate sounds and visual stimuli (Souriau [1947]: 110-112).

Ayn Rand held that sight and touch alone provide us with a direct notion of entities. Hearing, taste and smell either provide us with information about some of the attributes of the entities or put us in contact with the consequences produced by the entities, but they do not put us in the presence of the entities themselves. For this psych-epistemological reason, Rand considers that music radically differs from the visual arts (Rand, [1971]: 45-75).

Étienne Souriau posited that the fine arts form a system and can be classified based on what he considers to be nine artistically usable qualia: lines (arabesque and drawing), volumes (architecture and sculpture), colors (abstract and representative painting), luminosities (light projections, cinema, photography), movement (dance and pantomime), articulated sound (literature) and musical sound (music) (Souriau [1947]: 126). The problem is that the qualia supporting this classification remain a *petitio principii*, as when Souriau differentiates «articulated vocal» sounds from «musical» sounds. The difference between articulated and musical sounds takes for granted that which it seeks to define, i.e. the existence of a human language of words as opposed to the existence of etiologically human music, which are both human techniques arising prior to the corresponding fine arts. In my view, the psychophysiological criteria linked to the phenomenology of human perception are not sufficient to ground a classification of the arts, although they should never be disregarded.

#### 2.2.5. Analogy can affect terms, relationships and operations: a reinterpretation of Lessing's classification

In *Laocoon*, Lessing made a distinction between painting and poetry based on the role that time plays in these arts. He found that there are certain exclusively static arts, which are the plastic arts. Lessing referred to painting alone, but sculpture (leaving aside kinetic sculpture) and architecture also meet the requirements of static art. In other arts, though, the succession of the

parts of the work is a distinctive feature, as they are «narrative arts». Lessing referred to poetry, but it is logical to make the supposition that music, dance and cinema are closer to poetry than to the static arts (Lessing [1762-66]).

A more precise reformulation of Lessing's criterion must take into account the fact that contemplating sculpture requires movements of the spectator and, therefore, at least in that precise sense, it is not entirely static. The same goes for the contemplation of a painting, which involves the voluntary movements of the eye muscles: the perception of painting does not occur instantly but is mediated with the gaze in a complex process that also entails the passage of time. In painting and sculpture, time is the perceptual time of the spectator, while in cinema, theater, literature and dance, time is one of the constituents of the work itself that contributes to determining the artwork's structure and internal morphology. Reinterpreting Lessing's criterion implies looking at the artwork's nature. In certain arts, the spectator governs the process of receiving the artwork while in others this process is narratively guided by the artist. Thus, one could speak of «Eleatic», static arts compared to other «Heraclitean», processual arts. The static arts seem capable of transcending time, as is the case of the Grecian urn in John Keats's famous ode.

When taking substantive arts as analogies, Lessing's classification can be reinterpreted by accounting for the fact that the analogies present in certain works of art are focused exclusively on the terms and the relationships between terms (as in painting), while analogies of other works of art have formal parts that are processual (they are operations). In the latter case, a formal consideration of time is necessary: it is not that time appears materially represented by a clock in a painting, but that the artist's work must unfold in time.

In the procedural arts, the artist leads the reader or viewer to read, hear or see what the author determines. The spectator or reader agrees to be guided and places himself in the hands of the author, who thus becomes a *psychagoge*, a «conductor of souls». In the *Ion* (535-536), Plato acknowledged the psychagogical function of cer-

tain arts in stating that poetics moves the passions of the public since it makes the public rejoice, flush and sadden. For both Plato and Tolstoy, these arts are like an infection, exciting the emotions and disturbing the subject's harmony. Moses Mendelssohn also acknowledges this psychagogical function of works of art in remarking that artists awake and appease the spectators' passions and make them fear, calm down, get angry, laugh and shed tears (Mendelssohn [1757]). As Spinoza taught, no one can claim to be completely free of passion and emotion. Subsequently, Johannes Nikolaus Tetens would conceptualize these passions and emotions as «feelings» (Tetens [1777]). William Wordsworth, in his famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, advocated for the cognitive function of poetry, which causes our emotions to cease to be impenetrable and become transparent (Wordsworth [1802]: XXXVII). Only the so-called plastic arts (architecture, sculpture and painting) remain in the immanence of terms and relationships, thus relatively leaving aside the operations that, while appearing when they are constructed, play but a minor role when they are contemplated. In any case, the psychagogical function does not completely disappear in the visual arts, which also produce psychological effects on the spectators; nevertheless, the processual arts inevitably deploy this function.

Based on this theory of the analogical objective finality of works of art, I make the supposition that the sentimental conduction of the psychagogical arts allows us to explore certain subjective and social contents while presenting viewers with the opportunity to take some distance from their real correlates. Just as a painted lion does not bite, neither is the image of an emotion or a feeling the feeling itself, such that harmless analysis of feelings is possible. Aristotle, in *Poetics* ([1449b]: 21-28), introduced the notion of «catharsis», a Greek word meaning «cleansing», and compared the cathartic function of tragedy with medical purgation so that the audience undergoes a purification of excessive passions (Golden [1973]). In *Politics* ([1341b]: 37-39), Aristotle stated that music ought to be used for catharsis as it occurs in certain religious ceremo-

nies (Lear [1988]). Aristotle's catharsis has also been interpreted as a clarification of emotions (Golden [1973]) Lessing, in *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, defended that, through tragedy, the audience experience the purification of the uncontrolled emotions of pity or fear, finding the proper balance between them (Lessing [1769]: essays 77 & 78). Benedetto Croce stated that this catharsis produces a calming effect since the audience, vicariously experiencing certain feelings without the need of undergoing them, manages to free itself of those affections (Croce [1966]: 219).

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Table 1, I summarize some of the conclusions about the classification of the arts following from the foregoing discussion.

**Table 1.** The classification of the substantive arts.

	with language of words	without language of words
<b>building objects</b> [poieîn, facere]	Literature	Plastic arts: Painting Sculpture Architecture
<b>executing actions</b> [prateîn, agere]	Theatre Sound film	Non-vocal music Dance
<b>Scenic arts</b>	Vocal music	

The human language of words is such a specific technique and has so much power and precision when constructing analytical and exploratory analogies that the arts constructed with it (even if they only partially make use of it) are inevitably guided by the content of the text and inextricably linked to a specific language. The human language of words is always procedural, since the words have to take the place of each other in the speech and reading acts. Therefore, the arts that use it will always be procedural arts in which the psychagogical function can never be entirely absent. Furthermore, the arts that use the human language of words cannot be modulated into «abstract art» since language is always allegorical.

The non-verbal visual arts, the plastic arts, enjoy the privilege of immediacy, concreteness and clarity, as well as the distinctiveness of visual perception. They are poetic arts that always entail the construction of objects.

On the other hand, since they are abstract procedural arts, dance and non-vocal musical works of art make it possible to evoke passions, feelings, and states of mind in a manner perhaps more lively than the plastic arts, yet at the same time in a less objective way.

The distinction between abstract art and representative art proves moot to classifying the arts, for, as I have found above, there are no abstract arts in an absolute sense and the same art (painting, sculpture) frequently supports both representative and the abstract modalities. Equally significant is the fact that certain arts, like those using the human language of words, do not support the modality of abstract art.

### REFERENCES

- Alvargonzález, D., 2020: *Proposal of a Classification of Analogies*, "Informal Logic" 40 (1), pp. 109-137.
- Alvargonzález, D., 2021: *The Idea of Substantive Arts*, "Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi e Saperi dell'Estetico" 14 (1), pp. 157-175.
- Aristotle, 2011: *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by R.C. Bartlett, S. D. Collins, University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL.
- Aristotle, 1996: *Poetics*, transl. by M. Heath, Penguin, London.
- Batteux, C., 1746: *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.
- Bueno, G., 2000a: *Estética y filosofía del arte*, in Pelayo, G. (ed.), *Diccionario filosófico*, Pentalfa, Oviedo, pp. 649-677.
- Bueno, G., 2000b: *Televisión: apariencia y verdad*, Gedisa, Barcelona.
- Carney, J.D., 1994: *Defining Art Externally*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 34, pp. 114-123.
- Croce, B., 1966: *Philosophy, Poetry, History: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. by C.J.S. Sprigge, Oxford University Press, Oxford.



- Danto, A.C., 1973: *Artworks and Real Things*, "Theoria" 39, pp. 1-17.
- Danto, A.C., 1998: *The End of the Art: A Philosophical Defense*, "History and Theory" 37 (4), pp. 127-143.
- Davies, S., 1997: *First art and art's definition*, "Southern Journal of Philosophy" 35 (1), pp. 19-34.
- Davies, S., 2004: *The Cluster Theory of Art*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 44 (3), pp. 297-300.
- Davies, S., 2015: *Defining Art and Artworks*, "Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism" 73 (4), pp. 375-384.
- Dickie, G., 1974: *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY.
- Farrelly-Jackson, S., 1997: *Fetishism and the Identity of Art*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 37 (2), pp. 138-154.
- Fokt, S., 2014: *The Cluster Account of Art: A Historical Dilemma*, "Contemporary Aesthetics" 12, pp. 1-14.
- Fokt, S., 2017: *The Cultural Definition of Art*, "Metaphilosophy" 48 (4), pp. 404-429.
- Golden, L., 1973: *The Purgation Theory of Catharsis*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 31 (4), pp. 473-479.
- Goodman, N., 1968: *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis.
- Hegel, G.W.F., 1818-1829: *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, transl. By T.M. Knox, 2 vols., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975.
- Kant, I., 1790: *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Kristeller, P.O., 1951: *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics*, I, "Journal of the History of Ideas" 12 (4), pp. 496-527.
- Kristeller, P.O., 1952: *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics*, II, "Journal of the History of Ideas" 13 (1), pp. 17-46.
- Lear, J., 1988: *Katharsis*, "Phronesis" 33 (3), pp. 297-326.
- Levinson, J., 1979: *Defining Art Historically*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 19, pp. 232-250.
- Levinson, J., 1989: *Refining Art Historically*, "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 47 (1), pp. 21-33.
- Levinson, J., 1993: *Extending Art Historically*, "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 51, pp. 411-423.
- Levinson, J., 2002: *The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 42 (4), pp. 367-379.
- Lessing, G.E., 1762-66: *Laocoon: or The Limits of Poetry and Painting*, transl. by W. Ross, Ridgeway, London, 1836.
- Lessing, G.E., 1769. *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, transl. by V. Lange, Dover, London, 1962.
- Mendelssohn, M., 1757: *On the Main Principles of the Fine Arts and Sciences*, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by D.O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 169-192.
- Plato, 1925: *Lysis. Symposium. Gorgias*, transl. by H.N. Fowler, W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, Cambridge MA.
- Plato, 1925: *Statesman. Philebus. Ion*, transl. by H.N. Fowler, W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, Cambridge MA.
- Plato, 1926, *Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias*, transl. by H.N. Fowler, W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, Cambridge MA.
- Plotinus, 253-270: *Enneads*, transl. by S. MacKenna, ed. by J. Dillon, Penguin Books, London, 1991.
- Rand, A., 1969 & 1975: *Art and Cognition*, in *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, Mass Market Paperback, 1971, pp. 45-75.
- Souriau, É., 1947: *La correspondance des arts. Éléments d'esthétique comparée*, Flammarion, Paris.
- Tetens, J.N., 1777: *Philosophical Essays on Human Nature and Its Development*, ed. by E. Watkins, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA, 2009.
- Wordsworth, W., 1802: *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems (Preface)*, Longman and O. Rees, London.
- Zemach, E., 1986: *No Identification Without Evaluation*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 26, pp. 239-251.
- Zemach, E., 1989: *How Paintings Are*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 31, pp. 363-368.



**Citation:** C. Colangelo (2021) Salvezza nel ritmo? Crisi e limitazione in Henry Maldiney. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 169-179. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-12677

**Copyright:** © 2021 C. Colangelo. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Salvezza nel ritmo? Crisi e limitazione in Henry Maldiney

### Salvation in the rhythm? Crisis and limitation in Henry Maldiney

CARMELO COLANGELO  
Università di Salerno (Italy)  
ccolangelo@unisa.it

**Abstract.** In the frame of an in-depth analysis on the fundamental motifs and main intentions of the works of Henry Maldiney, the essay focuses on the relationship between the dimensions of «limitation» and «unlimited» – the latter understood as the emergence of the «unlimited» within the very heart of a «limited» living body –, crucial for understanding Maldiney's anti-objectivist attitude and his conception of reality as a surprise. More specifically, the author brings to the fore the concepts of «crisis», «rhythm» and «form», also with regard to the aesthetic-artistic experience, and how the rhythmic nature of a living form can ensure an approach to reality which does not overlook its nature of surprise.

**Keywords:** Rhythm, Aesthetics, Limitation, Landscape, Space.

«La vita per loro è solo un errore di ortografia nel testo della morte» (Maldiney [1973]: 202). «Loro», per Henri Maldiney, siamo tutti noi, almeno per il tempo in cui non consideriamo il reale delle cose e degli altri diversamente che nei modi dell'oggettività e della rappresentazione o in quelli della previsione, del «progetto», del calcolo. Per tutto il tempo, cioè, in cui restiamo chiusi al fatto che la realtà – se riconosciuta nel modo radicale in cui domanda di esserlo, attraverso il sentire (che è sempre al contempo un sentirsi) – è qualcosa di ben differente da ciò che può essere previsto e computato, preso a tema e rappresentato.

Nel 2011, nella sua intensa *Introduction aux «Œuvres philosophiques»* di Maldiney presso le Éditions du Cerf, Jean-Louis Chrétien notava come, «pur suscitando un numero crescente di studi e dialoghi», una delle opere «più forti e rigorose della filosofia di lingua francese del XX secolo» fosse ancora «ampiamente misconosciuta» (Chrétien [2012]: 8). Parecchio è cambiato da allora, se è vero che,

soprattutto dopo la morte del filosofo nel dicembre 2013, saggi, volumi collettanei, monografie, incontri sul suo pensiero si sono considerevolmente moltiplicati, aprendo la strada a una lettura e a una contestualizzazione della sua riflessione che, nel rilevarne le molteplici linee di forza, hanno dato sempre meno spazio a quell'attitudine per più di un verso «mimetica» che ne ha marcato la prima ricezione (talvolta influenzando la forma stessa del commento, se è vero che non di rado esso si è articolato ricalcando l'inclinazione di Maldiney alla iterazione tematica e argomentativa, alla densità dell'enunciato, alle soluzioni paratattiche, alle clausole icastiche o ellittiche). Tanto più significativa è allora la circostanza che quanti negli ultimi anni hanno avviato un confronto più franco e deciso con gli scritti di Maldiney, vuoi per riepilogarne con decisione le risultanze, vuoi per esaminarne il rapporto con altri autori ed opere – contemporanei e non –, vuoi per analizzarne tratti maggiori o specifici elementi di dettaglio, raramente hanno potuto fare a meno di prendere le mosse dalla pungente provocazione antioggettivistica, dalla critica tenace della tematizzazione su cui egli ha perseverato lungo tutto il suo lungo itinerario intellettuale. Fare i conti con Maldiney ha significato in effetti tentare di comprendere sempre meglio quella che è forse tra le sue idee più regolarmente ricorrenti, consegnata a una formula che nei suoi scritti costituisce quasi un *Leitmotiv*, se non una sorta di scongiuro o viatico, a incitare il pensiero a muoversi oltre la riduzione dell'alterità delle cose e degli altri a esangue abitudine, a insieme di elaborazioni percettivo-cognitive acquisite e inerti. Ogni lettore di Maldiney conosce questa formula, con le sue numerose varianti e amplificazioni: «Il reale è ciò che non ci aspettavamo, e che tuttavia nel suo apparire si mostra come sempre già là» (Maldiney [1973]: 169). Rendere conto dell'intrico fondamentale di uomo e mondo, cogliere il costituirsi del loro rapporto di coimplicazione è possibile solo a partire dalla consapevolezza che il reale è inimmaginabile, alogico, «sorprendente (*sur-prenant*)» (Maldiney [1993]: 258) e che incontrarlo non può che sconvolgere, perché esso, nella sua indipendenza irrefutabile, eccede

ogni modo di cattura, qualsiasi segno, simbolo o concetto sia inteso a stabilizzarlo. È reale ciò che, irrompendo nella sua contingenza e nella sua pura fattualità – né prevedibili né spiegabili – ci sconcerta, lacerando la trama delle significazioni date. Detto in un diverso lessico, secondo Maldiney, nel momento in cui d'un colpo accade che la realtà sorprenda il nostro esserci rendendo inattuabile l'iscrizione delle cose in quadri preordinati, si apre per noi una regione d'abitudine inappercepita, benché primordiale e sottotraccia continuamente attiva. La comparsa istantanea di *ce qui est* impedisce che la soggettività e il mondo restino recipibili come reciprocamente esterni e indipendenti. Li manifesta come implicati in una dinamica fondamentale di corrispondenza reciproca, in quanto entrambi appartenenti a uno spazio debordante, vibrante. Si tratta di quell'ossimorico «luogo senza luogo» (Maldiney [2000]: 400), nel quale l'uomo è espulso da ogni coordinata geografica e storica, in una condizione di disorientamento e di passività essenziali, giacché ciò che allora si offre al suo sentire non è semplicemente un disordine, eventualmente riconducibile – fosse pure a fatica – alle misure e alle scansioni di un «cosmo», comunque inteso, bensì una dilatazione che non cessa di spalancarsi, inghiottendo ogni contorno e determinazione: una breccia incolmabile, la cui realtà non si oppone a nulla. Momento destabilizzante, critico nel significato più proprio della parola, in cui il sentire elementare, ponendo gli uomini in una condizione di comunicazione preconconcettuale con i «dati iletici» offerti da colori, forme, suoni al di fuori «di qualsiasi riferimento a un oggetto percepito» (Maldiney [2000]: 189)<sup>1</sup>, li espone alla presenza ubiqua, in certo senso illocalizzabile, di un pericolo o una minaccia fondamentali.

È il momento in cui l'esserci, avvertendosi immerso nelle «interferenze dello spazio», sottoposto alle «vicissitudini del tempo», abbandonato alle «intermittenze del cuore» (Maldiney [2000]: 231), si ritrova preso in un'alterazione incalzante, esposto irrimediabilmente al cambiamento, mes-

<sup>1</sup> Su questo specifico punto Maldiney si tiene particolarmente prossimo a Straus (1930).

so alla prova. L'uomo, insomma, si scopre suscettibile di una fondamentale possibilità di frattura e lacerazione, e situato, in quanto esserci, sul bordo di un possibile dileguare di ogni determinazione. Allora l'esperienza che egli ha di sé e del mondo – di sé nel mondo, in virtù della dimensione affettivo-motrice che innerva l'*aisthesis* – si manifesta nel suo tratto più sconcertante. Potremmo dire che in Maldiney l'esperienza, se colta nel senso forte del termine (come incontro e come «traversata»)<sup>2</sup>, è qualcosa che, forzando la supposta continuità dell'esistenza, la sospende e la interroga. L'esperienza in senso proprio è ciò che si rivela impossibile da ricomprendere sul piano di una successione regolare di prima e di poi, di una scansione ordinata di vicino e lontano, sempre assumibili nel presente di una coscienza certa di sé e fiduciosa nelle potenzialità del proprio lavoro di costituzione. Ciò che così è decisivo cogliere è che negli scritti di Maldiney, il reale, apparendo come *indeterminabile e illimitato*, si trova convocato sotto l'aspetto convulso dell'informe.

Anne Boissière ha osservato che la maggiore difficoltà che presenta una comprensione effettiva delle ricerche di Maldiney sta nel fatto che le nozioni principali a cui esse ricorrono – *rencontre, événement-avènement, origine, crise, forme, rythme*, e altre ancora – «soffrono particolarmente a essere presentate al di fuori del loro terreno d'origine» e che trasmetterle «in modo dottrinario» comporta un alto rischio di «vacuità tautologica», nella misura in cui è facile finire col proporre «una ripetizione che le svuota della loro sostanza» (Boissière [2018]: 3). Evitare questi pericoli, e

insieme tornare a interrogare gli snodi più rilevanti delle argomentazioni del filosofo, richiede allora di tenere presente da un lato che per Maldiney la «cosa» del pensiero, ciò che lo concerne più intimamente – ma come un impensabile a cui esso è chiamato a restare in rapporto – è l'empiria estrema, senza mediazione possibile, ovvero qualcosa di inintegrabile, perché refrattario a qualunque conoscenza positiva intenda circoscriverne una volta per tutte gli aspetti; dall'altro, che discutere il rischio fondamentale che per lui è implicito nelle dimensioni spaziali ed emozionali del sentire rende necessario restare in ascolto dei modi caratteristici in cui egli, insistendo su alcuni fenomeni dal forte valore paradigmatico, delinea le figure di tale rischio e ne indica i maggiori elementi di consonanza.

Così, per inquadrare, senza limitarsi alla glossa, la questione del rapporto tra i concetti di «crisi» e di «forma», nell'intento di rilevare alcuni aspetti generalmente inappercipi della complessa problematica del «ritmo», è bene cominciare chiamando in causa la natura singolare degli spazi vissuti del «paesaggio» e della «notte», il fenomeno perturbante della «vertigine», la stessa figura del «caos» – discussa da Maldiney in riferimento alle elaborazioni teoriche di Paul Klee<sup>3</sup>. Si tratta, com'è noto, degli «esempi» che egli allega più volentieri (oltre a quello delle crisi psichiche, nella follia) per illustrare il passaggio drammatico in cui l'incontro col reale pone l'uomo alle prese con una soppressione dei limiti che lo fa vacillare, giacché il suo stesso «qui» è provato all'improvviso come essen-

<sup>2</sup> È bene ricordare che per precisare il senso in cui andrebbe assunta l'idea di «esperienza», nei suoi scritti Maldiney fa spesso leva sulla presenza, nel termine, della radice *per*, «attraverso», nella quale, scrive, si trova espressa «la situazione prima, inaugurale, dell'uomo in mezzo al mondo, al quale egli è aperto e in cui allo stesso tempo è perduto». Quella che per il filosofo è «la più ricca delle radici indoeuropee» rinvia cioè ai nostri «comportamenti primordiali», determinandoli come «traversate» critiche, che comportano «arresti, rotture, scarti, slanci», nei quali è sempre in causa la struttura dell'essere al mondo come tale (cfr. Maldiney [1993]: 77, 89).

<sup>3</sup> Come è stato osservato (Ghitti 2016), ciò che Maldiney valorizza del «non-concetto» di caos proposto da Klee ([1969]: 9) è il fatto che a esso non potrebbe essere opposto alcun termine positivo. Il caos vero e proprio, cioè, non è pensabile come un mero «stato di disordine», non è riducibile a un'idea determinata dal suo rapporto con quella di cosmos. Si può aggiungere che, estraneo a qualsiasi opposizione pertinente, refrattario al principio di contraddizione, il caos di cui parla Klee non è né contrario né simile a nulla. È la ragione per cui per il filosofo a esso è necessario alludere come a un «ente che non è o un niente che è», non pensabile altrimenti che nei termini di uno spalancarsi di un vuoto, di una «beanza che inghiotte limiti e determinazioni» (cfr. Maldiney [1993]: 13).

zialmente ingiustificato, senza alcun rapporto con un fondamento che possa supportarlo (cfr. Maldiney [2002]: 44). Riguardo al paesaggio, a partire dalle analisi proposte a suo tempo da Straus (1935: 336 ss.), Maldiney in effetti avverte:

*Non confondiamo lo spazio del paesaggio con quello di una geografia pittoresca. Esso è lo spazio in cui siamo perduti. Nel paesaggio in senso stretto non ci sono né coordinate, né indicatori. Il solo punto-origine è quello in cui noi ci troviamo. Punto-origine di cosa? Dello spazio compreso sotto il suo proprio orizzonte, che non vale che per esso. Nel paesaggio noi erriamo di qui in qui: qui sempre al centro. Non avanziamo da un qui a un là di cui sarebbe possibile supervisionare le posizioni e determinare le relazioni in una struttura globale, in un sistema di riferimento. Quando andiamo di qui in qui, l'uno si sostituisce all'altro, e l'orizzonte ci accompagna, sostituendosi anch'esso a sé stesso. La relazione qui-orizzonte non cambia. Come nella foresta incantata, qui siamo perduti nel mondo intero inscritto nell'orizzonte, lo stesso, sempre, che non esiste se non a partire da questo qui a cui esso rinvia, dall'assoluto qui. (Maldiney [1993]: 134)*

Così inteso, il paesaggio non è in nessun caso riconducibile a un sito o a uno spettacolo: lo spazio «immersivo» che lo caratterizza è piuttosto quello in cui, errando di luogo in luogo, patiamo i mutamenti di orizzonte prodotti dai nostri stessi spostamenti. Vi siamo smarriti perché il rapporto cangiante qui-orizzonte non è più determinabile, sicché ci troviamo simultaneamente in relazione con un tutto costituito di fenomeni instabili, di presenze intermittenti, provvisorie, sempre tramate di assenza<sup>4</sup>.

La situazione della «notte», quando sia vissuta nella sua radicalità elementare, riferisce di una dinamica similmente sconcertante:

*La notte è allo stesso tempo il momento e lo spazio dell'in-determinato. L'elementare vi regna nell'assenza di figura. I limiti degli esseri e delle cose vi si sottraggono e, con essi, si dissolve il principio di individuazione [...] Colui che non si affida alla notte e vanamente la rigetta, vi si trova in preda a un'ostilità randagia. Vi avverte l'imminenza di un pericolo allo stesso tempo indeterminato e senza casualità. Nell'assenza di limiti tutto è contatto. La distinzione dentro-fuori scompare a profitto di una spazialità ubiqua, uniformemente accordata al tono della minaccia. (Maldiney [1993]: 161)*

Lo spazio notturno è insomma per più di un verso prossimo allo spazio che, nel paesaggio, ci vede perduti in un «qui» indeterminabile. Con la circostanza ulteriore, vieppiù perturbante, che «nella notte l'orizzonte è su di noi, senza possibilità di allontanamento» (*ibidem*).

Ma è forse con la descrizione fenomenologica della situazione-limite della «vertigine» che Maldiney ha rilevato con maggior intensità teoretica la possibilità che nell'immediato dello spazio vissuto si produca un annullarsi delle opposizioni qui-là e alto-basso, anzi un'autentica «inversione e contaminazione» delle due polarità (Maldiney [1973]: 205). In *Esistenza: crisi e creazione* si legge:

*Per chi prova [la vertigine], in piedi su un declivio, il movimento apparente dello spazio che si scava a valle sotto i suoi piedi dall'orizzonte e che al tempo stesso a monte lo sovrasta, che, quindi, lo attira e lo espelle allo stesso tempo, si estende a tutto l'Umwelt, mentre, esposto da ogni parte a questi due movimenti di attrazione e di repulsione, è abbandonato alla contraddizione di un'unione che assorbe e di un'espulsione che respinge. Egli è collocato nell'abisso al punto zero del dissimularsi dell'Umwelt. Non c'è più un qui. Ciò che può porre fine all'illusione vertiginosa è precisamente la caduta reale. Questo auto-movimento forzato sostituisce la percezione dell'auto-movimento abissale del tutto. L'auto-movimento dell'Umwelt nella vertigine è senza forma. (Maldiney [2002]: 43-44)*

Come dire che quando la vertigine si impadronisce di noi, non siamo più in grado di collocare noi stessi e le cose in uno spazio orientato secondo le direzioni opposte alto-basso, e di fatto ces-

<sup>4</sup> Per una contestualizzazione storico-filosofica dell'analisi del paesaggio in Maldiney vedi Messori (2014). A conferma della fecondità di tale analisi, di recente essa è stata utilmente convocata al servizio di una considerazione rinnovata di esempi letterari, pittorici e fotografici di arte del paesaggio (cfr. Coste 2018).

siamo di poterci dire in un nostro qui-ora determinato. Facendo dileguare la certezza di essere il centro di un orizzonte che si muove con noi, la vertigine consegna interamente l'individuo a un flusso indistinto di contrari che si annullano a vicenda; letteralmente, non *ci* siamo più, siamo perduti fuori dal mondo.

Le «situazioni» esperienziali del paesaggio, della notte, della vertigine parlano dell'affiorare di un'inopinata *illimitazione* nel cuore stesso della corporeità vivente *limitata*. In esse l'uomo è impossibilitato a sostenersi, provando il venir meno di ogni stabilità. Il darsi di una improvvisa «fuga dei fenomeni, nella quale si dissolve la finitudine fluente che egli sente di divenire» (Maldiney [2000]: 231), lascia irrompere una congiuntura insopportabile, una vera e propria *crisi*.

È soprattutto *Della transpassibilità* – tra gli scritti più stimolanti di Maldiney – a chiarire cosa propriamente occorra intendere con questo termine. Una «crisi» autentica, vi si legge, «ha in sé due aspetti, apparentemente contrari»: oltre a ciò che la fa provare come una lacerazione e un rischio distruttivo, essa è anche il punto di scaturigine di un'azione precedentemente irrealizzabile, il momento di passaggio a una «decisione» che non discende da niente di anteriore (Maldiney [1991]: 66-67). Una crisi, cioè, secondo Maldiney, può essere considerata anche come l'irruzione di «un *nulla efficace*» (*ibidem*)<sup>5</sup>. In dialogo serrato con le prospettive di Weizsäcker (1940) riguardo all'antilogica precipua delle dimensioni vitali e pre-egoiche del «patico» (*Pathische*) e dell'«improvvisazione» (*Improvisation*), Maldiney considera cioè che, nel momento in cui l'esistenza esperisce un *illimitato insostenibile*, e si trova così esposta all'annullarsi della forma finita che pure essa è essenzialmente, può prodursi uno scatto decisivo: un «salto originario e privo di appoggio, in grado di inaugurare il suo stesso spazio operativo» (Maldiney [1991]: 68). Una crisi è insomma l'occasione di un'alterazione decisiva dell'esistenza, di una sua trasformazione. Quando la presenza vivente della corporeità dell'esserci si

trova investita da qualcosa che non può sostenere e a cui è però obbligata a far fronte, essa accede alla «non-positività di una decisione che emerge a se stessa dal nulla» (*ibidem*). In questo senso, come è stato osservato, nella crisi «il presente non è più un istante-limite, ma un presente-origine, è il momento della rottura e della scomparsa e insieme il “punto-sorgente” a partire dal quale l'io è costretto ad avvenire a sé stesso o a perdersi» (Brunel [2012]: 58).

Non si sottolineerà mai abbastanza come proprio in questo snodo della riflessione di Maldiney – alla confluenza del rilievo della paticità del sentire, dell'individuazione delle virtualità annientatrici e insieme trasformative che l'esperienza del «reale» porta con sé, della contestazione di oggettivismo e soggettivismo – trovino radice tanto la considerazione teoretica dell'ambito psicopatologico, quanto l'analisi del nesso tra strutture dell'esistenza e invenzione estetico-artistica. Ed è più esplicitamente nel secondo di questi campi d'interesse privilegiati di Maldiney – a cui nel seguito soprattutto ci si riferirà – che svolge un ruolo centrale la nozione di forma, intesa in modo peculiare, in risonanza con le elaborazioni teoriche di Hans Prinzhorn<sup>6</sup> e in forte discontinuità rispetto a quanto essa designa nel quadro di quell'interpretazione derivata del sentire che è la percezione oggettiva, lì dove essa sottintende in fin dei conti la totalità circoscritta di un oggetto, opposta a un fondo che le è estraneo e su cui essa risalta. Sul piano dell'oggettività, la forma rinvia ai contorni che racchiudono la cosa, identificandola, e rappresenta con ciò uno dei più efficaci dispositivi di traduzione del reale in rappresentazione, in immagine significativa, cognitivamente trattabile. Per Maldiney, se si intende restare sul piano della comunicazione con il reale in causa nella corporeità sensibile, occorre superare questa contiguità dell'idea ordinaria di forma all'area semantica della *delimitazione*. Una simile vicinanza è il risultato di un'attitudine tutt'altro che originaria, consisten-

<sup>5</sup> Vedi in proposito le notazioni puntuali di Serban (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Nel 2001 Maldiney osservava senz'altro come il libro di Prinzhorn del 1922 *Bildnerie der Geisteskranken* di fatto fosse rimasto «ancora insuperato» (Maldiney [2001]: 96).

te nella comprensione delle forme sensibili come exteriorità inattive, apparenze scisse dai modi in cui esse si danno, come configurazioni disgiunte dalla dinamica spaziale attraverso la quale si producono. La forma può essere colta in termini di integrità chiusa, senza rapporto – se non di esclusione – con un fuori estraneo, soltanto se ci si distoglie da quella che è invece la sua consistenza effettiva: non il suo essere *data* al sentire, ma il suo *darsi* a esso secondo modalità che non sono mai separate dalle vie stesse attraverso cui vi si dà. In altre parole, non la sua apparenza, ma il suo *apparire* o, con un termine a cui Maldiney ricorre volentieri, la sua *auto-genesi*. Investita di questo valore semantico più fondamentale, «forma» non indica più l'oggettività di una totalità chiusa in e su sé stessa. Intesa non in quanto *Gestalt*, ma come *Gestaltung* – ovvero come «forma in formazione»<sup>7</sup>, essa non rinvia ad alcun oggetto, e anzi propriamente non significa più nulla all'infuori dello stesso incontro affettivo che abbiamo con essa. Non tagliata dai suoi fondamenti apparizionali – dal percorso che, nell'esperienza sensibile, la conduce a manifestarsi, e che essa non smette di implicare in sé – la forma è avvertita emozionalmente come una *dinamica di configurazione*: come forma pulsante di un suo singolare auto-movimento. Facendo leva su questa idea di «forma in formazione», di qualcosa che è «reale» non potremo più dire che è *nello* spazio, bensì che *manifesta* lo spazio, addensandolo e insieme come sprigionandolo ai nostri occhi. Una forma è illocalizzabile a partire da qualcosa di diverso da essa; piuttosto si erge in uno spazio che è essa stessa a dischiudere, e che in quel momento è per noi l'unico spazio reale.

Per quanto le ricostruzioni del modo in cui la nozione di forma appare nel pensiero di Maldiney siano divenute sempre più fini, articolate e –

soprattutto – documentate (si vedano ad esempio le analisi notevoli di Popa [2011]; Jacquet [2017]: 346-351; Frohoff [2018]), non sempre si è rimasti sufficientemente attenti al fatto che la forma, resa così all'immanenza del suo proprio apparire, è discussa dal filosofo anzitutto per la sua capacità di assolvere a un compito assolutamente decisivo in relazione alla esperienza rischiosa – notturna, vertiginosa, caotica – dello spazio vissuto. Disoggettivata, assunta come *Gestaltung*, la forma è ciò che salva il sentire dal suo abissale rischio confusivo, supportando l'esistenza nella crisi, strappandola allo sprofondamento nell'infinito. Quando improvvisamente dilegua la possibilità di assicurare a un qui-ora determinato noi stessi e le cose, e noi ci troviamo alle prese con una «fusione indistinta di opposti che si ignorano», con un «indeterminato mobile, senza misura» (Maldiney [2000]: 44), l'apparizione di una «forma in formazione» consente di sostenere questo incontro senza che l'esserci sia costretto a ricorrere alla riduzione del reale a effettualità calcolabile o a mera immagine, ovvero a trincerarsi nell'oggettività o nella tematizzazione. Non basta dire che, in quanto manifestarsi istantaneo di un sincronismo dinamico di essere, apparire, sorgere, la presenza di una forma orienta lo spazio offrendosi come riferimento, dunque come un soccorso al nostro essere perduti. È indispensabile aggiungere che la forma implica e coinvolge nella dinamica della sua spazialità: la sua presenza immediata induce a unirci al movimento che la costituisce. L'unità instabile di una *Gestaltung* – il fatto che in verità «non esiste un punto di cui si possa dire *“fin qui è lei”*, e oltre il quale essa cesserebbe di aver luogo» (Maldiney [1993]: 113) – fa sì che a un certo momento tutti i nostri rapporti col mondo comincino a passare per la sua apparizione. Abitando lo spazio a partire da essa ci è allora possibile restare esposti al reale, incontrandolo senza essere travolti dalla sua estraneità alle determinazioni abituali. Maldiney ne è convinto, e si può dire che le sue analisi abbiano mirato a rendere sempre più perspicuo questo snodo determinante: attirando a sé, facendo sentire il suo esser-là come uno scambio perpetuo di figura e fondo, una forma in forma-

<sup>7</sup> Da un punto di vista teorico, la designazione della forma in termini di *Gestaltung* è, tra l'altro, indicativa di una franca sospensione della maggiore opzione metodologica della *Gestalttheorie*: in nessun caso per Maldiney «la spazialità è inaugurata dal rapporto figura-sfondo (...) La forma non è la contropartita del fondo, perché non è la figura» (Maldiney [1993]: 240).

zione coinvolge il nostro stesso esistere sensibile *nei contorni mobili* in cui essa si articola, ci spinge a dislocarci presso di essi e, così facendo, consente di non cedere allo smarrimento. Grazie alla sua tipica, errante «inesattezza», il darsi di una *Gestaltung* permette qualcosa a cui nessuna volontà o progetto può accedere: accogliere l'ambiguità insidiosa delle apparenze rispondendo lealmente all'incombenza della loro prossimità incondizionata, e però insieme salvandoci dal pericolo che questa comporta.

Il punto su cui conviene insistere – giacché di solito solo tangenzialmente viene rilevato – è che, secondo Maldiney, se ciò accade, è proprio perché la condizione primaria della vita di una forma consiste nel fatto che essa non si dà mai *entro* un limite, ma sempre e solo *attraverso* di esso. I suoi margini non sono frontiere definitorie che, rigettandola all'interno, la staccherebbero da un fondo, bensì luoghi mobili di scambio tra un fuori e un dentro co-originari, la cui relazione, cioè, non è di reciproca esclusione e non avviene soltanto sul contorno, bensì ovunque attraverso di esso. L'analisi dell'esperienza sensibile mostra che una forma in formazione deve la sua capacità di porci in comunicazione con il reale alla *permeabilità* dei suoi limiti, grazie ai quali il fondo stesso non sussiste altrimenti che partecipando di ciò che appare, e simultaneamente ciò che appare non vive se non dandosi come articolazione dinamica di un fondo, come sua scansione secondo coordinate mobili che lo sguardo è chiamato a seguire. C'è forma quando un fenomeno estetico, nel senso lato della parola – che si tratti di un elemento del paesaggio, di un *Denkmal*, di un graffito parietale, di un dipinto, di una forma architettonica, ecc. – si mostra ordinato secondo una sorta di peculiare alternanza di espansione dei suoi limiti e di concentrazione in essi. Se una *Gestaltung* rende possibile non misconoscere il reale, e però al contempo non restarne sommersi, è perché, potremmo dire, si offre al nostro esserci come una zona tensionale in cui un apparire si realizza illimitandosi, cioè aprendo i limiti attraverso cui pure in effetti si dà. Vivendola, l'io finito, alle prese con la crisi, può sentire che in realtà non si costituisce in quanto

io se non «mantenendo *indefinitamente* in apertura la limitazione che definisce la sua *finitudine*» (Maldiney [1991]: 114, mio corsivo).

È noto con quale forza Maldiney abbia spiegato questa dinamica dell'incontro vissuto con una «forma in formazione» ricorrendo all'idea di *ritmo*, fondamentale nella sua riflessione, che su questo punto – come ha accuratamente mostrato Raphaëlle Cazal (Cazal 2016) – utilizza, rielaborandolo, il materiale estetico e storico offerto dalle ricerche capitali di Alois Riegl. Cogliere il rapporto che tale idea intrattiene con le nozioni di limite e di illimitato rende possibile una sua migliore messa a fuoco. Il fatto è che per Maldiney il ritmo, qualificato come la «verità della comunicazione prima col mondo» (Maldiney [1973]: 207-208), rappresenta l'indicatore generale del manifestarsi della *fluidità* di una forma (a questo proposito, si ricorderà come *Regard parole espace* rinvii alle osservazioni di Émile Benveniste in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*)<sup>8</sup>. È grazie ad esso, in effetti, che possiamo sentire e vivere una forma come l'avvicinarsi persistente di una dilatazione dei suoi limiti e di un raccoglimento in essi, in una sorta di respirazione in cui si alternano e rinviano un momento centrifugo di espansione e un momento centripeto di raccolta, intimamente associati. Non meraviglia in questo senso che ciò su cui il filosofo abbia insistito sia stata la particolare tensione di *pieno* e di *vuoto* che caratterizza una forma nella sua effettualità dinamica. La presenza di una *Gestaltung* è marcata da una ritmicità suscettibile d'inscrivere in essa l'assenza, e con ciò di porre la nostra esistenza in rapporto a

<sup>8</sup> Meglio avere sotto gli occhi le notazioni di Benveniste a cui Maldiney si richiama: «Tra σχημα e ρυθμος c'è una differenza: σχημα si definisce come una "forma" fissa, realizzata, posta in certo qual modo come un oggetto. Al contrario ρυθμος, secondo i contesti in cui lo si trova, designa la forma nell'attimo in cui è assunta da ciò che si muove, è mobile, fluido, la forma di ciò che non ha consistenza organica: si addice al *pattern* di un elemento fluido, a una lettera arbitrariamente modellata, a un peplo che si dispone a piacimento, alla particolare disposizione del carattere o dell'umore. È la forma improvvisata, momentanea, modificabile» (Benveniste [1966]: 396).



qualcosa che per essa è radicalmente fuori presa: il nulla impresentabile, ciò che per definizione non può manifestarsi, e senza di cui però non sarebbe possibile alcuna manifestazione. La capacità di una forma d'integrare il vuoto nel suo ritmo fa sì che essa diventi per noi l'indicazione vissuta di un termine – l'«Aperto», l'«insorvegliato» – che non cessa mai di sfuggirci, e che tuttavia, in questo sottrarsi, è la cifra stessa di ogni realtà nella sua alterità inappropriabile.

Non è qui possibile discutere i modi in cui Maldiney spiega tale capacità in riferimento all'idea di una presenza attiva, nella forma, di «vuoti mediani» e di «energie bianche», nozioni tratte da un'assidua frequentazione della teoria orientale della figurazione pittorica<sup>9</sup>. Basterà ricordare che è precisamente in virtù di specifiche soluzioni di continuità, di particolari momenti critici, di precisi vuoti interstiziali che interrompono la compattezza di una forma, che il ritmo mette in comunicazione gli opposti e si fa latore della possibilità di «aprire il nulla».

Ciò su cui gli studiosi che hanno riflettuto sulla nozione di ritmo in Maldiney (tra cui segnalo particolarmente Sauvanet [2014]; Pinotti [2014]; Jacquet [2017]: 85-108) non si sono soffermati quanto sarebbe stato utile fare è il fatto che uno tra gli aspetti più innovativi della prospettiva aperta al riguardo dal filosofo è rappresentato dalla circostanza che nelle sue analisi la realtà del ritmo – mai riducibile ai meri fenomeni fisici che lo fondano, ed esperibile solo grazie a una sorta di attenzione fluttuante, diffusa, omogeneamente ricettiva – si situa *al di là dell'opposizione semplice tra limite e illimitato*, o meglio sottopone a una fortissima tensione questa antilogia topologica, schiudendo la possibilità di pensare altrimenti l'area semantica da essa ritagliata. «La misura introduce il limite nell'illimitato. Ma il destino del

<sup>9</sup> È soprattutto *Ouvrir le rien l'art nu*, l'ultimo libro di Maldiney, a tornare con particolare pregnanza su questo tema, soprattutto negli studi dedicati a *Les Kakis de Mu Ch'i* e a *L'espace du paysage dans la peinture chinoise* (Maldiney [2000]: 67-85 e 89-109). Stimolante e assai utile è in proposito la ricostruzione complessiva offerta da Jiang (2016).

ritmo *si gioca tra questi due estremi*: l'inerzia o la dissipazione lo fanno morire», si legge nell'articolo capitale sull'*Estetica dei ritmi* (Maldiney [1973]: 213-214, mio corsivo). Ciò che caratterizza una forma in quanto è animata da una possibilità ritmica, capace di implicare in essa il sentire, è il suo istituire uno spazio i cui limiti non agiscono in nessun caso come contorni stabilizzati, ma il cui indice d'indeterminatezza non è per questo apportatore di semplice dispersione. Sul piano estetico, grazie al ritmo in quanto captazione del vuoto nel pieno ed esposizione del pieno nel vuoto, una forma in formazione va pensata, piuttosto che nei termini di una struttura esatta, cristallizzata<sup>10</sup>, come un'area dai margini indecisi, una zona di inversioni e scambi continui: un «luogo d'incontro di tensioni antagoniste, aprenti e chiudenti» (Maldiney [1993]: 15).

Certo, va ammesso senza remore che, nella misura in cui le descrizioni del ritmo offerte da Maldiney a partire da specifici prodotti artistici sono rivolte primariamente a trasmettere il senso ultimo del fenomeno indagato, esse talvolta finiscono con l'offuscare la singolarità dell'opera di volta in volta considerata. Nelle pagine del filosofo la focalizzazione dell'argomentazione sulla dinamica precipua dell'evento ritmico è senz'altro foriera di un effetto di livellamento, quando non di eclisse, della particolarità delle forme estetiche prese in esame. Il fatto è che nell'insieme di queste analisi ne va di una questione così dirimente sul piano teorico, e così decisiva su quello esistenziale, che affrontarla richiede senz'altro che «non ci

<sup>10</sup> Nello studio – assai poco letto – dedicato all'amico Georges Duthuit, Maldiney evoca i loro dialoghi, nell'estate del 1950, sui lavori di Alois Riegl e di Wilhelm Worringer, e particolarmente sulla «legge del cristallo», in quanto «legge di organizzazione di tutte le forme tettoniche (piane e volumetriche), la cui regolarità e chiusura assicurano all'essere di cui strutturano l'immagine l'integrità di una "individualità sostanziale chiusa"». Si tratta cioè della «legge» che istituisce la «permanenza» e la «struttura» di una forma, definendola «attraverso la linea avvolgente e direttrice del suo limite» e sottraendola alla contingenza delle «corrosioni della luce, che ovunque altrove rendono incerto il limite tra dentro e fuori» (cfr. Maldiney [2010]: 20-21).

si voti né alla verità, né alla bellezza, queste tirannie gemelle della natura», per dirla con il Georges Duthuit parafrasato da Samuel Beckett in *Three Dialogues* (Beckett [1949]: 98)<sup>11</sup>. In causa è appunto la questione antica, e sempre filosoficamente in istanza, del limite e dell'illimitato. Nella sua discussione del ritmo, Maldiney – oltre a riferirsi all'esempio premetafisico di Anassimandro e alla particolare declinazione, nel suo «detto», del rapporto tra *àpeiron* ed enti finiti<sup>12</sup> – evoca il modo in cui il pensiero stoico ha modulato il concetto di limite, ascrivendolo alle «realtà incorporee» e ponendone energicamente in questione l'identificazione aristotelica con le nozioni di «fine» e di «essenza». In effetti il libro delta di *Metafisica*, istituendo una quasi-sinonimia tra *péras*, da un lato, e *télos* e *ousía*, dall'altro, aveva stabilito che i limiti costituiscono il fine e l'essenza stessa degli esseri, ciò in cui si trova depositata la condizione che essi devono soddisfare per esistere ed essere conosciuti<sup>13</sup>. Gli stoici ricusano una simile definizione, per proporre una assai diversa, di carattere marcatamente dinamico: se un limite determina la forma di un essere, non lo fa perché sarebbe il contorno

costitutivo del suo luogo proprio, della sua perfetta chiusura in sé e della sua sostanza stabilizzata, ma perché rappresenta il punto dello spazio fino al quale giungono a svilupparsi le capacità latenti di un essere, e con ciò quella frangia equivoca, indecisa, dove dentro e fuori, pieno e vuoto, più che fronteggiarsi ed escludersi l'un l'altro, si intricano e rinviano vicendevolmente (cfr. Maldiney [1973]: 269)<sup>14</sup>. L'antefatto stoico suggerisce a Maldiney un rilevante modello teorico per pensare il limite come ciò che la ritmicità di una forma al contempo istituisce e permanentemente supera, rinviando così allo spazio-ambiente in cui essa si presenta e che essa accoglie in sé. Una *Gestaltung*, potremmo dire, è per il sentire il campo di una *decontrazione non dissipativa*, capace d'indicare per le cose e l'esserci la possibilità di una fuoriuscita dalla loro tautologica coincidenza con sé stessi. Così, quando Maldiney annota che «di per sé un ritmo è illimitato», che esso «non può essere compreso tra confini» (Maldiney [1993]: 243), che «esclude ogni limite» (Maldiney [1993]: 111) o che «ritmo e limite sono antinomici» (Maldiney [2000]: 56) occorre restare attenti e contestualizzare queste affermazioni nel quadro della sua polemica antioggettivistica e della sua visione dello statuto critico dell'emergenza dell'indeterminato. Ciò che la possibilità ritmica lascia cadere è, sì, il limite, ma il limite nella sua accezione metafisica, il *péras-ousía* aristotelico, se vogliamo, ovvero il contorno unilaterale che circoscrive la cosa, la contiene e la totalizza: la linea che espelle tutto lo spazio esterno alla forma, collocandola in una perseveranza che ripudia tutte le traversie del divenire sensibile. Ciò che invece il ritmo non esclude, e che anzi a tutti gli effetti promuove, è una limitazione capace per così dire di farsi contaminare dall'illimitato senza per questo lasciare ad esso l'ultima parola. La ritmicità delle forme è il luogo di apparizione di un limite inedito, che si manifesta e agisce attraverso una essenziale, pulsante dinamicità, nella misura in cui si articola grazie

<sup>11</sup> Ricordo che il breve e denso testo di Beckett, scritto in forma di conversazione tra «B» e «D», riflette liberamente, a tratti in modo assai comico, i colloqui che lo scrittore ebbe con Duthuit (all'epoca direttore della rivista parigina in lingua inglese *transition*, e molto prossimo a Maldiney, come si è ricordato). Le conversazioni vertevano in generale sullo statuto delle arti visive, ma anche su alcuni pittori in particolare, tra i quali Pierre Tal Coat, che è uno dei maggiori riferimenti del filosofo per le sue analisi sul ritmo – e al quale le parole citate si riferiscono. Chrétien riferisce di «incontenibili matte risate» di Maldiney alla lettura di «una pagina di Beckett» (Chrétien [2012]: 11). Nulla vieta di pensare che si trattasse dell'articolo in questione.

<sup>12</sup> Il riferimento ad Anassimandro è assai frequente nei testi di Maldiney: per un esempio di particolare forza teoretica vedi Maldiney (2000: 413 sgg). Importanti in proposito sono le osservazioni ricapitolative di Brunel (2002 e 2016).

<sup>13</sup> «Limite è detto il fine (*télos*) di ciascuna cosa»; «limite è detta anche la sostanza e l'essenza (*éneka kai hè ousía*) di ciascuna cosa: questa è infatti limite della conoscenza e se è limite della conoscenza lo è anche della cosa» (*Metaph.* 1022a 7-10).

<sup>14</sup> Maldiney fa qui leva sulle analisi del filosofo e storico del pensiero antico Bréhier (1928), di cui aveva seguito i corsi alla Sorbona negli anni trenta.

a «punti d'appoggio transitori» (Maldiney [1993]: 205), a uno specifico battito o respiro, capace d'integrare faglie, intervalli, spaziature. Una limitazione attiva, espansiva, che, annodando in un intermezzo peculiare misura e smisurato, non smette di rendere simultanee determinazione e indeterminazione, finito e infinito, sospendendo il loro antagonismo.

Per Maldiney, nell'incontro con la vibrante ritmicità di una forma, la nostra oscillazione tra opposti si apre alla possibilità di abitare l'unità onnipresente dello spazio, permettendoci così di esistere senza misconoscere la sorpresa vitale del reale.

#### BIBLIOGRAFIA

- Becker, O., 1929: *Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers*, in *Festschrift: Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag*, Max Niemeyer, Halle a.d. Saale. Trad. it. di V. Pinto, *Della caducità del bello e della natura avventurosa dell'artista*, Guida, Napoli, 1998.
- Beckett, S., 1949: *Three Dialogues. Tal Coat – Nasson – Van Velde*, “transition Forty-Nine” 2 (5), pp. 97-103.
- Benveniste, É., 1966: *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Gallimard, Paris. Trad. it. a cura di M.V. Giuliani, *Problemi di linguistica generale*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 2010.
- Boissière, A., 2018: *Henri Maldiney et l'art: une pensée intempestive. L'oeuvre d'art en présence*, “Philopsis. Revue numérique”, 5 octobre, pp. 1-20.
- Bréhier, E., 1928: *La théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme*, Vrin, Paris. Trad. it. di F. Fogliotti, *La teoria degli incorporei nello stoicismo antico*, Edizioni Cronopio, Napoli, 2020.
- Brunel S., 2002: *L'instant sans date*, in Meitinger S. (a cura di): *Henri Maldiney: une phénoménologie à l'impossible*, Le Cercle Hermémeutique, Puteaux, pp. 121-141.
- Brunel S., 2012: *Henri Maldiney: La crise, un appel à exister ?*, “Études” 7 (8), pp. 53-62.
- Brunel S., 2016: *Le statut et la signification de l'a-peiron, la limite et le sans-limite dans la pensée de Maldiney*, in Younès, C., Freror, O. (a cura di), *A l'épreuve d'exister avec Henri Maldiney. Philosophie, art, psychiatrie*, Hermann, Paris, pp. 87-98.
- Cazal, R., 2016: *L'héritage de la conception riegrélienne de la forme et du rythme dans l'esthétique phénoménologique d'Henri Maldiney*, “Philosophie” 130 (2), pp. 40-57.
- Coste, B. (a cura di), 2018: *Penser l'art du paysage avec Henri Maldiney*, Eud, Dijon.
- Frohoff, S., 2018: *Symbole, Gestaltungswerte und Rhythmus. Hans Prinzhorn und Henri Maldiney*, in Boehlke, E., Sollberger, D. (a cura di), *Impuls Prinzhorn*, Pabst, Lengerich, pp. 114-127.
- Ghitti, J.-M., 2016: *Maldiney, du chaos à l'espace*, in Younès, C., Freror, O. (a cura di), *A l'épreuve d'exister avec Henri Maldiney. Philosophie, art, psychiatrie*, Hermann, Paris, pp. 243-258.
- Jacquet, F., 2017: *La Transpassibilité et l'événement. Essai sur la philosophie de Maldiney*, Garnier, Paris.
- Jiang D., 2016: *La révélation du vide. Henri Maldiney et la pensée chinoise*, in Younès, C., Freror, O. (a cura di), *A l'épreuve d'exister avec Henri Maldiney. Philosophie, art, psychiatrie*, Hermann, Paris, pp. 389-408.
- Klee, P., 1969: *Das bilderische Denken*, Schwabe, Basel.
- Maldiney, H., 1973: *Regard Parole Espace*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2012.
- Maldiney, H., 1991: *De la transpassibilité*, in Id., *Penser l'homme et la folie*, Millon, Grenoble. Trad. it. a cura di F. Leoni, *Della transpassibilità*, Mimesis, Milano, 2004.
- Maldiney, H., 1993: *L'art, l'éclair de l'être. Traversées*, Comp'Act, Seyssel, 2003.
- Maldiney, H., 2000: *Ouvrir le rien l'art nu*, Éditions Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2010.
- Maldiney, H., 2001: *Sens de l'art-thérapie*, “Empan” 42, pp. 94-123.
- Maldiney, H., 2002: *Existence: crise et création*, Encre marine, Paris. Trad. it. e cura di M. Dalla Chiara, *Esistenza: crisi e creazione*, Mimesis, Milano, 2012.

- Maldiney, H., 2010: *Une voix, un visage*, "Louvert" 3, pp. 11-39; prima pubblicazione in *Georges Duthuit*, s. l., 1976.
- Messori, R., 2014: *Henri Maldiney et l'esthétique du paysage*, in Benoist, J. (a cura di), *Henri Maldiney. Une singulière présence*, Encre marine, Paris, 2014, pp. 133-150.
- Pinotti, A., 2014: *Style, rythme, souffle. Maldiney et la Kunstwissenschaft*, in Charcosset, J.-P., Peron, J.P. (a cura di): *Parole tenue. Colloque du centenaire Maldiney à Lyon du 12 octobre 2012*, Mimésis, Milano, pp. 49-59.
- Popa, D., 2011: *Vers quelle phénoménologie de l'image ? Maldiney lecteur de Husserl*, "Archives de Philosophie" 3 (3), pp. 439-456.
- Prinzhorn, H., 1922: *Bildneri der Geisteskranken*, Springer, Berlin. Trad. it. e cura di C. Di Carlo, *L'arte dei folli. L'attività plastica dei malati mentali*, Mimesis, Milano, 2004.
- Sauvanet, P., 2014: *La question du rythme dans l'œuvre d'Henri Maldiney. Approche et discussion*, in Benoist, J. (a cura di): *Henri Maldiney. Une singulière présence*, Encre marine, Paris, 2014, pp. 169-188.
- Serban, C., 2016: *Du possible au transposable*, "Philosophie" 130 (2), pp. 58-71.
- Straus, E., 1930: *Die Formen des Räumlichen*, in Id. (a cura di), *Psychologie der Menschlichen Welt*, Springer, Berlin, 1960, pp. 141-178.
- Straus, E., 1935: *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, Springer Verlag, Berlin, 1956.
- Weizsäcker V. von, 1940: *Der Gestaltkreis*, in Id., 1997: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 4, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. Trad. it. e cura di P.A. Masullo, *La struttura ciclomorfa*, ESI, Napoli, 1995.





**Citation:** AA.VV. (2021) Note e recensioni. *Aisthesis* 14(2): 181-190. doi: 10.36253/Aisthesis-13340

**Copyright:** ©2021 AA.VV. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

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

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

## Note e recensioni

### Il *quiet sound* delle periferie urbane. Nota sulla mostra di Pino Musi *Polyphōnia* (Salerno, Tempio di Pomona 10/7 - 5/9 2021, a cura di Stefania Zuliani)

È stato Kant a mostrare come «l'immaginazione esplica una grande potenza nella creazione di un'altra natura tratta dalla natura reale». Sicché, se pure «prendiamo a prestito la materia dalla natura, possiamo però elaborarla in vista di qualcos'altro, cioè di ciò che trascende la natura» (Kant [1790]: 287). E, trascendendola, quanto di questa rimaneva possibilità inespressa, eccedenza compressa, afonia irremovibile si anima e dispiega la sua potenza. Se, poi, sarà nell'immagine che il *di più* rappreso nelle cose troverà espressione, ciò non vorrà dire che l'immagine debba tradurlo in figura piena, né che debba rischiare le opacità o placarne le irrequietezze. Piuttosto, l'immagine ne darà conto sostituendo al gesto del *rappresentare* quello del *presentare*, essa sarà, cioè, *presentazione* dei movimenti sulfurei del reale, nel loro accadere imprevedibile e disordinato, senza operarne alcuna bonifica. Da qui l'operare paradossale dell'immagine: mostra il non mostrabile senza renderlo mostrabile. È, però, tale paradossalità a consentirle di testimoniare, senza violarlo, il temerario esperire i coni d'ombra del mondo, il calcarne le pieghe più riposte e a continuare farlo anche quando ci si spinge fino a dove non vi è che «Colore o Luce» (Deleuze [1981]: 69). È così, procedendo di azzardo in azzardo, che l'immagine offre *viel zu denken*, ossia offre da pensare al pensiero ciò che sfugge alle maglie troppo rigide del concetto e si accalca impensato ai suoi bordi, ciò che mai è giunto alla presenza o è soltanto annuncio indeciso di quanto sta maturando nelle fibre del reale.

Di un simile azzardare dicono pure le fotografie di Pino Musi nella mostra *Polyphōnia* (Salerno, Tempio di Pomona 10/7 - 5/9 2021, a cura di Stefania Zuliani) ed è perpetrando l'azzardo di opera in opera che esse fanno proprio il gesto kantiano e offrono al pensiero segmenti di impensato. In questo caso a essere impensato è quanto si aggruma pesante negli interstizi delle periferie metropolitane, quanto rimane muto delle vite senza vita che vi trascorrono, quanto

scorre nelle anonimità ostentate e nella levigatezza delle architetture.

Nella mostra le fotografie delle periferie urbane si susseguono secondo un ordine calcolato, ma è ordine il cui rigore non è volto a disegnare itinerari né a dar luogo a una narrazione organica e compatta. A impedirlo è l'assenza di un nome e di un indizio che identifichi i luoghi ritratti – le fotografie sono volutamente prive di didascalie – giacché ogni nome e indicazione di luogo sarebbero superflui per quella che a Musi appare l'unica, infinita periferia del *mondo città*. Ciò fa sì che le fotografie, pur nella loro autonomia, finiscano per comporsi in un'unica opera che, alla maniera di un affresco, prende man mano forma. Un affresco che non si fonde, però, mai con lo spazio che lo ospita, piuttosto da questo ricava la spinta a esibire la propria estraneità e a opporre al *carico di storia* del Tempio di Pomona il proprio *senza storia*. Se è questa una divergenza che non trova composizione, se intransitive si rivelano le reciproche differenze, sarà proprio l'impossibilità di un piano convergere a farsi relazione e relazione capace di inquietare ciascuna parte – la mostra e il luogo che la ospita – e di ciascuna, per mano dell'altra, far emergere quanto è taciuto. Da questa complessa relazione, dai mobili effetti prodotti dal loro discordare, il visitatore è segnato ed è segno che, impedendogli di abbandonarsi al godimento smemorato di una pacificata contemplazione, lo apre a un pensoso interrogare, a un turbamento che rende acuto e indagante lo sguardo.

E lo sguardo così allertato incomincia a interrogare lo stesso luogo che ospita la mostra chiedendosi se la *storia alta* che vi si respira non ne sia *tutta* la storia. A rendere sospettoso lo sguardo è proprio lo stridente contrasto di colonne e archi con l'anonimità delle periferie urbane, le quali, esponendosi, sembrano spingere un'altra anonimità assai più remota a farsi presente e uscire dal suo mutismo. È questa l'anonimità di antiche fatiche e dolori quotidiani, di sentimenti e accadimenti che non hanno lasciato traccia e che nessun monumento celebra. Ma, nel momento in cui ciò accade, la non storia appena affiorata induce a sospettare della *perfetta* geometria esibita dalle periferie urba-

ne e l'occhio del visitatore, così sollecitato, si chiede se nel nitido tracciarsi di linee e forme, esaltate dal ricorso alla dualità del bianco e nero, non si taccia l'*imperfetto* trascorrere di un tempo che si consuma nel succedersi vertiginoso di *fatti* che mai giungono a provocare «un mutamento nel modo in cui la realtà ci appare», né, tantomeno, mai riescono a essere «una trasformazione sconvolgente della realtà stessa» (cfr. Žižek [2014]: 14-15).

Stare dentro l'irrisolutezza del confronto che continuamente s'inscena fra le fotografie e il luogo che le ospita, accogliere ed elaborare gli effetti del discordare delle loro lingue, diviene il compito a cui la mostra chiama il visitatore. Un compito certo arduo, ma assolutamente necessario giacché è al visitatore che spetta ogni volta, e sempre di nuovo, completare il lavoro intrapreso dall'occhio-obiettivo di Musi. E completarlo significa fare dell'opera di Musi l'"occasione a pensare" a *come* noi abitiamo un *mondo città*, *come* il nostro sia divenuto un abitare senza appartenenza e *come* ciò, anziché una mancanza, possa essere l'"occasione a pensare" una nuova etica dell'abitare che all'appartenenza fusionale sostituisce la relazione che sa alimentarsi del contrasto e delle differenze, che all'identità che è fissazione e ripetizione del medesimo sostituisce l'affluenza agonica dei molti.

Se a una tale responsabilità richiama la mostra, è responsabilità che si è già assunta l'occhio-obiettivo di Musi e lo ha fatto plasmandolo e decidendo della postura stessa che lo sguardo doveva assumere e, quindi, di *come* guardare. Da guardare era il corpo-città, un corpo così simile, ha detto *da scrittore* Murakami, a quello di un "gigantesco animale" che si distende e si dilata compatto ed eterogeneo, unico e multiplo. Su questo "gigantesco animale", sulla sua vivezza sfrenata, Musi è intervenuto da fotografo-chirurgo e ha estratto dal «confuso agglomerato (...) di organi avvinghiati l'uno all'altro» (Murakami [2004]: 3) parti ben definite delle periferie urbane. Parti che, una volta emerse, sono state sezionate e disarticolate in maniera che il minimo e l'inessenziale assumessero un'imprevista evidenza. Bordi, angoli, spigoli degli edifici o di ponti e fontane sono stati poi sottoposti a un lavoro di riduzione fino

a farli giungere alla purezza geometrica di linee e forme che, tracciandosi con nettezza, ostentano la loro guadagnata autonomia da qualsiasi referente. In tal modo Musi sembra accogliere con virtuosa infedeltà modalità della *poesia pura* e restituire nell'estrema rarefazione di configurazioni geometriche elementi urbani. Linee e tratti finiscono così per adempiere allo stesso compito che la *poesia pura* affidava ai movimenti arbitrari del significante ed è agendo alla maniera del significante che essi si fanno produzione *interminabile* del senso plurale e mai definitivo del *di più* rappreso nelle periferie urbane. È a questo punto che l'occhio-obiettivo fa suo quanto *da poeta* Rilke chiedeva alla parola poetica e mostra «casa, ponte, fontana, porta, (...) finestra» come neanche «intimamente mai credertero d'essere» (Rilke [1923]: 97).

Perché un simile mostrare fosse possibile è stato necessario che l'occhio-obiettivo mantenesse una distanza frontale rispetto alle cose. Tale postura ha consentito, infatti, di non subire il contagio emotivo degli umori e della pressione del “gigantesco animale” e, quindi, di non intrattenere alcun rapporto empatico con luoghi e situazioni poiché solo raggiungendo l'assoluta neutralità l'occhio-obiettivo poteva restituire le cose come esse stesse “mai credertero d'essere”. Per raggiungere tale neutralità l'occhio-obiettivo ha dovuto sottoporsi a un duro esercizio di svuotamento e proseguire questo esercizio fino a essere *occhio spropriato*, occhio, cioè, di *nessuno*. Lo scatto fotografico diviene allora quello di «un io senza me, una puntualità non personale oscillante fra nessuno e qualcuno» (Blanchot [1977]: 96) e può esserlo perché *guardare* ha smesso di essere il gesto che s'impone della cosa e la impregna del proprio sentire e volere ed è divenuto un *ospitare* che esclude l'appropriazione e non pretende assimilazione alla propria storia. È a questo punto che la neutralità del *guardare* si carica di valenze etico-politiche e diviene atto di responsabilità verso l'alterità della cosa, modo di affermarne l'intransitività e, quindi, di rispondere alla sua «profonda estraneità, inerzia, irregolarità» (*ibidem*).

In ciò l'esercizio di *spropriazione* intrapreso dall'occhio-obiettivo rivela come sullo sfondo

abbiano agito momenti essenziali della storia personale di Musi: la ricerca di suoni smarriti della tradizione popolare campana, l'attenzione per le culture marginali e, accanto a questo, la sperimentazione teatrale e l'intensa frequentazione dell'arte e dell'architettura contemporanea. Se tutto ciò è presente è, però, presenza mai ingombrante giacché anch'essa sottoposta a un severo lavoro di riduzione in cui le tecnologie giocano un ruolo cruciale. Esse penetrano, e di sé irrorano, saperi e linguaggi sgravandoli del proprio peso e consegnandoli e a una levità inedita. L'occhio-obiettivo può essere così sgombro e attrezzato, vuoto ed esperto ed essere attrezzato ed esperto con una consapevolezza libera dallo proprio stesso ingombro.

In questo complesso lavoro di riduzione e svuotamento era però necessario che non fosse coinvolto solo il vedere, ma alla medesima *spropriazione* doveva giungere l'intera sfera del sensorio. Bisognava, cioè, che da *spropriati* ogni senso e tutti i sensi insieme si attivassero, fra loro si scambiassero e infiltrassero fino a essere ciascuno multiplo e plurale. Per simile sinestesia *spropriata* il vedere arriva ad acquisire la stessa impalpabilità dell'udito e ad agire *come* l'udito cosicché quello dell'occhio-obiettivo sarà *anche* udire. E viste-udite saranno le parti accuratamente sezionate delle periferie che, come tali, imprimono il loro segno nell'occhio-orecchio. Se questo le restituisce in forme geometriche, sono geometrie che ora rivelano appieno la loro natura: trascrizione dell'atto sinestetico compiuto dall'occhio-orecchio. Ma qui, ancora una volta, il lavoro di Musi sembra incrociare, e creativamente elaborare, gli esiti più estremi della poesia del '900. Se Rilke *da poeta* scriveva che il «volo piatto» dell'uccello lo «sguardo traversa, / e scrive l'immagine lunga del suo grido isolato» (Rilke [1923]: 103), le periferie *scrivono* il loro “grido isolato” nell'occhio-obiettivo.

Questo “grido” che si *de-scrive* in estenuate figure geometriche è, però, fortemente connotato: è il suono delle composizioni di Morton Feldman<sup>1</sup>. Un suono che interviene nel lavoro di Musi

<sup>1</sup> Va osservato che Feldman iniziò a studiare pianoforte con Vera Maurina-Press allieva di Ferruccio Busoni. E



scandendo e imprimendogli il suo andamento che si distende in superficie in un movimento unico, lento, prolungato. Se questo è il suono che di opera in opera si *de-scrive*, *polyphōnia* è allora il fluire del molteplice, è pluralità di *presenze* condotte all'estrema riduzione, è la loro distanza come relazione senza unità. E ancora *polyphōnia* è la discordante co-esistenza di più tempi storici - il *carico di storia* e il *senza storia* - come delle anonimità che a ciascun tempo appartengono e di cui colonne e volte austere, linee e figure geometriche *de-scrivono* il *quiet sound*.

(di Pina De Luca)

*Riferimenti bibliografici:*

- Kant, I., 1790: *Critica del giudizio*, a cura A. Bosi, UTET, Torino, 1993.
- Deleuze, G., 1981: *Francis Bacon. Logica della sensazione*, trad. it. di S. Verdicchio, Quodlibet, Macerata, 1995.
- Žižek, S., 2014: *Evento*, trad. it. di E. Acotto, UTET, Torino 2014.
- Murakami, H., 2004: *After dark*, trad. it. di A. Pastore, Einaudi, Torino, 2008..
- Rilke, R.M., 1923: *Elegie duinesi*, in *Poesie*, vol. II, a cura di G. Baioni, Einaudi, Torino, 1995.
- Blanchot, M., 1977: *L'infinito intrattenimento. Scritti sull'insensato gioco di scrivere*, trad. it. di R. Ferrara, Einaudi, Torino.

**Marc de Launay, *Peinture et philosophie*, Paris, Cerf, «Passages», 2021.**

On entre dans *Peinture et philosophie* de Marc de Launay comme dans la galerie de tableaux de Philostrate; sans doute en aimant la peinture autant que la vérité, mais en accordant aussi au peintre ce que l'auteur des *Eikones* appelait du

nom si puissamment philosophique de *sophia* - sagesse serait trop dire, mais en tout cas savoir, connaissance, et finalement pensée. La philosophie de la peinture, pleine des malentendus qui ont fini par se confondre avec son histoire, nous avait habitués à plus grande prudence. Bien sûr, le plaisir de la *mimèsis* n'était pas tout à fait étranger, chez Aristote, à celui de la connaissance, mais le vieil anathème platonicien - complexe et capable d'encourager bien après lui d'innombrables théories de l'art - avait aussi contribué à entériner, même chez les mieux disposés à l'égard de l'image, un certain *habitus* philosophique consistant à vouloir penser la peinture sans les tableaux ou, avec eux, sans les créditer de la moindre pensée propre et, en fait, picturale, en leur attribuant donc de la pensée comme malgré eux, c'est-à-dire, une nouvelle fois, *sans eux*. Même Philostrate n'échapperait peut-être pas, d'ailleurs, à ce dernier écueil, tant la reconnaissance de la *sophia* du peintre participait de l'exercice immanquablement rhétorique et quelquefois complaisant d'une *ekphrasis* dont la tradition, un peu après Goethe, a progressivement découvert la part fictive.

En échappant à cette double méprise, le livre de Marc de Launay reprend ainsi l'antique question des rapports entre peinture et philosophie là où la philosophie l'a, pour ainsi dire, presque toujours laissée : à ce point de la générosité philosophique qui, au lieu de considérer ce que le tableau pense, croit devoir penser pour lui. La critique périodiquement réactivée de ce trop-plein, de cette extériorité de la réflexion philosophique, aurait quelque chose d'un vœu pieux si la galerie de Marc de Launay (huit tableaux principaux, de 1470 à 1653) ne nous conduisait pas, on voudrait dire *pour une fois*, à philosopher dans le tableau, non pour porter l'image au niveau d'un concept, mais pour voir de quelle manière la peinture, pour reprendre les mots de l'auteur, « intervient » en philosophie. La possibilité d'une telle intervention dépend, à cet égard, de la disposition même du philosophe à ne pas penser avant d'avoir vu, et pour tout dire attentivement contemplé, jusqu'à ne plus laisser de prérogative qu'aux différents tableaux qui, chose très rare en philosophie,

---

allieva di Busoni era anche stata Magda von Hattimberg con cui Rilke intrattene un intenso epistolario sulla musica.

constituent l'objet premier – le « motif » – de chacun des six chapitres de l'ouvrage.

La grandeur et l'originalité d'une telle entreprise philosophique viennent donc précisément de ce que le tableau, reconnu pour sa réflexion propre, exerce sur la pensée une certaine *contrainte*, à laquelle échappent paradoxalement certaines des méthodes les plus apparemment susceptibles de rendre justice à l'œuvre d'art. La voie tracée ici par Marc de Launay évite, en ce sens, ce que l'on pourrait appeler l'illusion de la correspondance, que partagent à divers degrés des approches aussi franchement opposées que le contextualisme historique, la description phénoménologique ou encore l'herméneutique. En nous transportant dans le « milieu naturel » du tableau, en nous rappelant aux nécessités de sa tradition et de son époque, l'œil strictement historien sacrifie aussi la singularité de l'œuvre, que jamais le contexte ne saurait définir tout simplement. Pour décrire et comparer des tableaux que seule une information même minimalement historique rend descriptibles et comparables, le discours phénoménologique perd, dans l'effacement de l'histoire, le sens réel des valeurs esthétiques qu'elle se propose de manifester pourtant. Et dans l'audace herméneutique, enfin, le tableau ne parle plus qu'avec la voix de la philosophie, qui l'oblige à penser, non seulement ce qu'il ne pense pas, mais qui lui refuse même jusqu'à la possibilité de pouvoir penser quelque chose sans elle, comme si le silence de la peinture devait justifier que l'on parlât à sa place. En chacune de ces trois méthodes, donc, une même illusion nous persuade d'avoir affaire au tableau lui-même au moment où nous nous en détachons le plus.

La distribution de ces différentes critiques tout au long du livre confère, en ce sens, une certaine urgence à la question de savoir ce que signifie, exactement, que d'atteindre un tableau. Car la subtile polyphonie méthodologique de l'ouvrage réinvestit paradoxalement les approches qui, considérées en elles-mêmes, constituent d'authentiques impasses. On comprendra ainsi pourquoi l'un des gestes les plus ostensiblement philosophiques de Marc de Launay consiste à réunir, dans la synthèse d'un regard, des méthodes individuellement

insuffisantes, pour que celles-ci réalisent ce pour quoi elles sont justement faites : nous faire accéder à l'œuvre. Une telle synthèse du regard retrouvera ainsi l'effort d'une enquête contextuelle (mais sans y noyer la singularité), la patience d'une description phénoménologique (mais solidaire de l'histoire), et la nécessité d'une herméneutique (mais attentive à la pensée *du* tableau). Quelques résonances iconographiques lumineuses permettent, par ailleurs, de documenter, mais par simples touches fonctionnant comme autant d'indices, le processus historique à l'intérieur duquel la peinture intervient, et qui permet, en dernière instance, de saisir la force philosophique de la peinture.

On se demandera ainsi ce que peut signifier l'affirmation d'une intervention de la peinture en philosophie, et ce que Marc de Launay entend précisément par là. Sans discours ni concept, la peinture ne peut intervenir en philosophie que sur un tout autre terrain qu'elle, et la reconstitution des intentions subjectives du peintre ne suffirait jamais à accomplir un tel programme. À cet égard, même les « formes de l'intention (*patterns of intention*) » de Michael Baxandall – aussi prudentes qu'elles soient à l'égard d'une subjectivisation des intentions artistiques – ne parviendraient pas à rendre compte précisément de cette intervention, pour la simple raison qu'elles éliminent dès l'entrée la question du sens. Marc de Launay part de là tout au contraire, en se donnant les moyens de ressaisir le sens que le tableau contribue à faire surgir et grâce auquel il peut intervenir en philosophie.

Le sens des huit tableaux analysés est donc celui qui, dans le seul élément de la peinture, constitue une forme de réponse à certaines questions qu'une tradition rend pressantes à tous et au sujet desquelles le peintre peut, lui aussi, avoir quelque chose à dire, ou plus exactement à montrer. On voit ainsi chacun des tableaux répondre à des questions que la philosophie se pose elle-même, quoique tout autrement: dans une singulière profanisation de l'épisode sacré du Christ chez Marthe et Marie, Aertsen révèle quelque chose de l'inachèvement propre à la contemplation; les citrons amers de Heda figurent par l'image l'absence de toute présence réelle; la des-

cente du Christ dans les limbes que del Piombo nous représente de face, en une vision «subjective», participe de l'entrée progressive de l'histoire dans la quête individuelle du salut, que les déceptions de l'an mille rendent théologiquement nécessaire; dans le regard d'Homère, aveugle quoiqu'ironiquement porté vers l'avenir, l'Aristote de Rembrandt enregistre non sans quelque nostalgie le destin conceptuel et scientifique de la philosophie, désormais détachée de la poésie; la présence atopique et transhistorique de Dürer au beau milieu du martyr des dix mille chrétiens du mont Ararat ébauche une réflexion sur les conditions de la représentation et de sa temporalité propre; la fureur de la Procnè de Rubens, enfin, dévoile, dans le port anormal de la thyrses de sa sœur Philomèle, quelque chose d'un non-dit de la vengeance et de la cruauté mythologiques.

L'intervention philosophique de la peinture, solidaire de la progressive autonomisation de l'artiste – dont le couronnement de Pétrarque au Capitole constitue l'acte symboliquement fondateur – ne peut donc s'imposer à l'évidence qu'en reprenant pour soi-même, à l'image de la méditation cartésienne, cette synthèse du regard dont Marc de Launay nous livre ici le modèle, offrant à la philosophie de la peinture, mais à la philosophie tout court, si l'on veut savoir à la fin ce que c'est que regarder, l'un de ses meilleurs accomplissements.

Table des matières: Avant-propos; La contemplation réfléchiée en peinture; Le citron des «vanités»; Les limbes. Historicité d'une image; L'«Aristote» de Rembrandt. Une intervention de la peinture en philosophie; Passation de témoins; Métamorphoses de la fureur.

Marc de Launay est philosophe et traducteur. Chercheur au CNRS (Archives Husserl, Paris, ENS-Ulm), il est l'auteur de plusieurs ouvrages dont *Qu'est-ce que traduire* (Paris, Vrin, 2006) et *Nietzsche et la race* (Paris, Seuil, 2019) ainsi que de très nombreuses traductions de philosophes et de poètes de langue allemande.

(par Quentin Gailhac)

**Ramón Andrés, *Il mondo nell'orecchio*, trad. it. M. Nicola, Adelphi, Milano 2021**

Dobbiamo al lavoro di Maria Nicola la traduzione italiana, uscita presso Adelphi nel settembre del 2021, del testo di Ramón Andrés, *Il mondo nell'orecchio*. Il testo originale, pubblicato in spagnolo nel 2008, è apparso presso la casa editrice Quaederns Crema (Acantilado), Barcellona.

L'indice annuncia una ricognizione dei *modi*, dei *simboli*, delle *figure*, attraverso le quali le principali civiltà antiche hanno pensato l'essenza e le forme della musica. «Antiche» qui significa «originarie». Il testo è attraversato dalla consapevolezza che il primo passo, per comprendere *essenzialmente* la musica (e le specifiche forme che la incarnano), consiste nell'attingere alla potenza dell'origine, alla *potissima pars* che genera l'accadere storico del fatto musicale. «La nascita della musica nella cultura»: così suona il sottotitolo del libro. Per Andrés, si tratta dunque di indagare non tanto la «musica» *in abstracto*, ricostruendone semplicemente le declinazioni nelle antiche civiltà, ma di indagare una *nascita*, un *punto di insorgenza*, un *arché* del fatto musicale *in quanto tale*. Il testo ratifica l'evidenza che la «musica dell'origine» coincide in ogni punto con l'«origine della musica», ed è solo comprendendo questa reversibilità concettuale, che si potrà attingere qualcosa di essenziale nella determinazione della musica. «Esattamente come il silenzio, la musica è un frammento delle nostre origini» (p. 29). Qui, «musica» non va intesa primariamente come «artefatto» umano, ma come il «luogo spirituale», nel quale gli esseri umani fanno *conoscenza uditiva* del mondo (il primo paragrafo del testo si intitola «Orecchio e conoscenza», pp. 21-31). La musica traccia dunque lo spazio ideale, nel quale l'universo viene *appropriato e ricostruito* nel dominio dell'udibile, nel dominio dell'ascolto (il testo, ricco di immagini, riproduce un'opera di William Blake, il quale, nella sua *Scala di Giacobbe* [ca. 1800], ha dato la forma di un orecchio, la forma di una sorta di «coclea spirituale», a quella «spirale senza fine che conduce all'Ultimo Cielo», p. 47). La musica rappresenta dunque la *rinascita del mondo nell'orecchio*, e tale

“rinascita”, tale “ricostituzione”, è possibile, perché il mondo, *per sua natura*, è *essenzialmente* musicale. Come scrive Andrés, «l’identificazione della musica con le origini del cosmo, la sua associazione con la genesi del mondo, giunse nella cultura greca a un grado fino allora sconosciuto. Pensare la musica era riflettere sulle origini, riconoscere il ritmo della terra, ascoltare ciò che solo agli eletti viene rivelato. La musica, come l’intero pianeta, è azione, è luce» (p. 382). Il fatto musicale non è altro che la risposta umana alla natura *essenzialmente musicale* dell’universo. A dispetto del videocentrismo della tradizione filosofico-scientifica dell’Europa, qui si rivendica il fatto che anche l’oracolo “pensa” – e *conosce*.

Mentre i primi due capitoli, «Il suono delle origini» e «L’evocazione del grido», cercano una «musica che precede sé stessa» (p. 41), i successivi capitoli sono dedicati a specifiche declinazioni culturali di questa musica “essenziale”: il capitolo terzo è dedicato alla civiltà musicale della Mesopotamia, il quarto a Israele, il quinto all’Egitto. Il sesto capitolo, dedicato alla Grecia, apre la ricognizione “archeologica” della *nostra* civiltà musicale, approfondita poi nel capitolo settimo, dedicato al «corpo musicale dell’universo» e, più specificatamente alla figura di Orfeo (e dunque alla determinazione “orfica” dell’esperienza musicale del mondo). L’ottavo e ultimo capitolo, «Nessuno tocchi la casa di Pindaro», richiama in modo più esplicito l’intreccio *strutturale* di musica e filosofia (il primo paragrafo si intitola «Dell’amore dei filosofi per la musica») nello spazio della civiltà europea.

È riduttivo guardare a questo testo come a una sorta di contributo alla “storia dell’idea di musica”. Qui vi è in gioco qualcosa di più essenziale. Ramón Andrés non si sottrae alla sfida di fornire alcune generalissime definizioni di musica, e per farlo non può che ascoltare l’origine della parola, il timbro del suo etimo: «*Mousiké* è, per l’appunto, l’arte delle Muse, la tecnica combinatoria dei suoni che permette di costruire uno spazio confacente alle necessità spirituali e fisiche dell’uomo» (p. 252). Ma la musica non è solo conoscenza dello spazio cosmico attraverso l’udito, è anche formazione dell’umano, pedagogia dell’invisibile: «la

*mousiké* abbracciava tutto quanto noi oggi definiremmo “formazione umanistica”» (p. 252). Tuttavia, queste definizioni, questa ricerca di una formula essenziale, che comprende il nucleo centrale del fatto musicale e dell’esperienza acustica del mondo, non si chiudono in una semplice equazione concettuale. Tali definizioni, con un gesto teoreticamente sorprendente, si “aprono” a tal punto, da coincidere con la vastità storica dell’accadere musicale. La ricerca di un’essenza della musica non mira a rinvenire tale *arché* in qualche momento storico della cultura (l’antichità classica, il rinascimento, il contemporaneo...), ma tale “*principio*” rappresenta una sorta di *perdurante esigenza* dell’accadere musicale di rimanere fedele a sé stesso, di rimanere “presso di sé”, di rimanere in relazione al fuoco centrale da cui si irradiano le diverse forme del suo fare e del suo darsi. Ciò che colpisce del testo non è tanto lo squadernamento di un’erudizione notevole (che tuttavia non impressiona il lettore colto), ma il *senso di continuità* e di *coerenza* dell’accadere, nello sviluppo della sua storia, di un’idea *alta* di musica, di un’idea di “musica essenziale”, che fa del rapporto tra composizione, forme della produzione sonora e speculazione filosofica un’insopprimibile *esigenza interna* del fare musica. Il rapporto tra musica e filosofia acquista dunque un’inedita profondità: non si tratta di un mero interesse speculativo della filosofia nei confronti dell’*oggetto* musicale, ma di un’esigenza speculativa che sta al *cuore* del fare musicale. Tale criterio di esigenza speculativa fornisce all’autore un timone per attraversare l’intero arco della nostra tradizione musicale e speculativa con forza e precisione. Si ottiene dunque un sorprendente effetto di *continuità storica* del fatto musicale. La ricerca di una definizione di musica è funzionale alla comprensione che tale definizione essenziale non è altro che un *principio eternamente in opera* nel fare musicale, e che, più che chiudersi in un punto di intensità storicamente o concettualmente localizzato, determina la musica come un “campo di esperienza”, la cui durata, i cui confini, le cui regioni interne, le cui articolazioni, i cui modi, le cui forme, coincidono letteralmente con la *totalità* della nostra tradizione musicale. A

dispetto della diversità di codici, di modi espressivi, di strumenti, di esigenze semantiche, il lettore si trova “a casa” *in ogni luogo* della storia musicale, perché sente di appartenere ad uno *spazio musicale comune*, di un *Zeitraum*, di una vicenda artistica, storica, concettuale, estetica, acustica, che dagli inizi più remoti, giunge fino a noi – *includendoci*. La musica, così intesa, è la *spaziatura* del suo accadere nella storia, ma che ci fa sentire a casa, nella misura in cui il suo accadere si tiene presso l'intensità assoluta della sua definizione essenziale.

Adorno, Agostino, Dante, Anassimandro, Archita di Taranto, Aristosseno, Aristotele, Boezio, Borges, Cacciari, Marziano Capella, Cicerone, Clemente Alessandrino, Damone, Democrito, Mircea Eliade, Empedocle, Esiodo, Eulero, Euripide, Marsilio Ficino, Filosseno, Robert Fludd, Goethe, Herder, Jankélévich, Jung, Keplero, Athanasius Kircher, Leibniz, Macrobio, Marin Marsenne, Milton, Nietzsche, Novalis, Pindaro, Pitagora, Platone, Plutarco, Porfirio, Proclo, Rilke, Marius Schneider, Scoto Eriugena, Shakespeare, Simonide di Ceo, Carlo Sini, George Steiner, Terpandro, Tolomeo, Virgilio, Paul Valéry, Zarlino (tutti nomi citati rigorosamente nel testo), costituiscono un ideale *pantheon* speculativo, che pensa il nesso essenziale tra indagine filosofica e indagine musicale. Fare musica consiste dunque, per l'autore, nel porre in essere la relazione fondamentale tra la dimensione “oggettiva” della consistenza acustico-musicale del mondo, e la dimensione “soggettiva” dell'esperienza umana di questa stessa consistenza: «la musica fu intesa come un ponte di concordia tra l'esterno e l'interno dell'uomo» (p. 257). Quello che oggi chiamiamo “musica”, «frutto di un'osmosi acustica fra interno ed esterno, e risultato dell'osservazione di come la materia sonora, dotata o meno di forma strutturata, divent[*a*] una modalità di relazione e organizzazione umana, una messa in comune dell'inesplicabile» (p. 28). Attingere alla dimensione “arcaica” dell'esperienza musicale significa iscrivere tale esperienza in un'origine *inesplicabile*: per questo, quegli “inizi”, sacri e misteriosi, sono tutti iscritti sotto il nome di alcune “divinità” tutelari: Giove, Apollo, Ermete Trismegisto, Lino, Orfeo, Dioniso, Iside, Iubal, persino Omero, e il suo Uli-

se. A dispetto di ogni “astratta” distinzione storica, o di ogni radicale cesura nella trasmissione di alcune esperienze fondamentali del fenomeno musicale, la presenza di Orfeo costituisce il nesso essenziale tra l'arcaico e il contemporaneo, tra l'*antichissimo* e il *novissimo*. Gli inni omerici e le tavolette d'oro orfiche, gli inni orfici e Giamblico, Pitagora e Macrobio, Ovidio e Virgilio, risalgono la china del tempo, fino a raggiungere – in una continuità doviziosamente descritta da Andrés – fino a Monteverdi, a Stravinskij, a Rilke, Campana, Brodskij e oltre (qui si potrebbero aggiungere i nomi di Salvatore Sciarrino, con la sua “nuova Euridice”, e il romanzo *Orfeo* di Richard Powers).

Allo stesso modo, la tradizione musicale è attraversata da Andrés con analogo “metodo”: il testo raggiunge una felicissima comprensione *lineare* del fatto musicale, e vede – a dispetto della varietà di codici, di forme, di occasioni, di pratiche – la coerenza nella trasmissione di un *sapere* musicale, di quello che Marius Schneider chiamava il «pensiero acustico» (p. 23). Nessuna fuorviante attenzione a specifiche regioni della tradizione musicale (Berio le avrebbe chiamate le «stanze della storia della musica»), astrattamente innalzate a paradigmi normativi. Il testo fa percepire l'esaltante qualità estetica di *tutta* la tradizione musicale, purché essa sia frequentata *in excelsis*, purché vengano frequentate solo le atmosfere più alte e rarefatte della speculazione e della composizione musicale. Nessuna astratta contrapposizione fra la tradizione musicale e le regioni più estreme delle avanguardie contemporanee, tra lo stile osservato e lo stile classico, tra il canto piano e lo *stylus luxurians* – e anzi: il testo è tutto innervato di analogie, prossimità, recuperi, citazioni, riusi, che costituiscono il carattere di *concordia in varietate* della nostra tradizione musicale. Come suggerisce Andrés, «la musica è la più sorprendente essenza comune a coloro che hanno la prerogativa di ascoltare il passato come se avvenisse ora, trasformandolo in presente» (p. 31). Nelle pagine del testo si allineano, con perfetta coerenza e continuità, i nomi di Bach e di Palestrina, di Lully e di Orlando di Lasso, di Binchois e di Lachenmann, di Schumann e di Boulez, di Bartók e di Du Fay,

di Mozart e di Messiaen, di Pérotin e di Takemitsu. La visione matematica della musica, che si estende *coerentemente* da Pitagora fino al contemporaneo, implica che vengano citati, dopo Platone, Aristotele e Boezio, i nomi di Babbitt, Feldman, Nono, Crumb, Lachenmann, Berio, Xenakis, Boulez, Ligeti (cfr. p. 346).

Ma si comprende ancora poco della musica, se non si sottolinea, come fa Andrés, che essa non soltanto *costituisce* un sapere, e non soltanto *implica* un sapere, ma essa *costituisce* la matrice strutturale della nostra stessa *enciclopedia*. Nella musica, convergono i saperi più diversi, senza la quale essi perdono il loro carattere speculativo “analogico” e “relazionale” («la musica è tutta relativa», dice Dante in un famoso passo del *Convivio*). Tale indagine “archeologica” ha necessariamente bisogno della storia, ed essa diventa così storia della musica – e storia *per* la musica. Per comprendere le sue “ragioni”, la storia della musica implica necessariamente l'estetica. La presenza delle immagini (e della riflessione su di esse) implica *in nuce* una specifica torsione *musicale* dei *Visual Studies*. Le scienze dell'antichità intrecciano musicalmente la storia della civiltà, e l'ominazione viene declinata *musicalmente* all'interno di un'antropologia che, per comprendersi, *necessita* del dato musicale (se, negli strati della terra, vi è un flauto d'osso, lì c'è l'umano). La mitologia si trova accanto alla matematica, la fisica alla metafisica, la botanica all'organologia. Nel testo si rivendica che non si comprendono la poesia e la retorica, fintantoché non si pensano i *numeri*, ovvero le relazioni fra “quantità” e “qualità” *musicali*, che presiedono alla strutturazione dei versi, della sintassi, del linguaggio (“*logos*”, il monogramma stesso della filosofia, significa “linguaggio”, “ragione”, ma significa anche – e *soprattutto* – “rapporto”, “relazione”, “calcolo”). «L'oratoria non avrebbe potuto raggiungere il suo pieno sviluppo senza l'arte della musica. Il ritmo, il metro, la melodia, costituivano la più salda impalcatura del discorso» (p. 408).

È solo la musica che può far esperire i *numeri*, le *relazioni*, i *rapporti*, le *analogie*, che sussistono fra le strutture del cosmo, le strutture del *logos*, e le strutture della “mente” che ne contem-

pla la relazione. È la musica che ci fa addentrare nei misteri dello spazio e del tempo. È utile pensare che la musica costituisca il modello esplicativo più potente che abbiamo, per pensare, come suggeriva Stravinskij nella sua *Poetica della musica*, la relazione dell'uomo con la temporalità. Ma la dimensione spaziale non è meno importante. I “numeri” platonici regolano – in Vitruvio, e in tutta la tradizione “classica” dell'architettura europea – gli spazi e le proporzioni musicali degli edifici. Andrés rivendica come la relazione della musica con lo spazio e con l'architettura sia *strutturale*, e fiorisca in particolari momenti di sublime concordanza tra i due saperi, tra le due forme del fare: «E che dire degli esperimenti condotti dai maestri veneziani a San Marco, partendo da Adrian Willaert e Giovanni Gabrieli, fino a Claudio Monteverdi e a Tarquinio Merula? Come si può raggiungere un equilibrio straordinario come quello di certe pagine di Jacob Obrecht senza una piena conoscenza acustico-spaziale? Che dire della sua splendida *Missa Sicut spina rosam* e delle risonanti nervature che scaturiscono dalla *Missa Sub tuum praesidium?*» (pp. 57-58). (Si potrebbero anche aggiungere le straordinarie costruzioni acustico-spaziali della *Missa Si dederò* e della *Missa De Sancto Donatiano*.)

In conclusione, la musica, secondo una nobile tradizione filosofica, evoca e potenzia la pulsione metafisica nascosta nel cuore umano: la «presenza di una realtà musicale [è qui] legata alla pulsione metafisica» (p. 34). A questo proposito, vengono fatti i nomi di Leo Frobenius, di Arthur Schopenhauer, di Henri Bergson. E prova più intensa di questa pulsione metafisica legata alla musica è l'esigenza di totalità («*Meléte to Pan*», «abbiate cura della totalità», suggeriva già Periandro di Corinto). La “voce” che la filosofia dell'origine evocava era «la voce [che] consentiva all'uomo di inoltrarsi in un cosmo inteso come totalità» (p. 62). Se, come suggerisce Daniel Barenboim, «la musica è un tutto», dove «*everything is connected*», potremmo dedurre che *tutto è musica*. Tutto, se musicalmente sollecitato, ha la capacità di “risuonare”, facendo vibrare la sua voce nascosta. Come ricorda Andrés, «la musica nasce dalla spiritualizzazione

della materia» (p. 362). Così intesa, la musica è l'armonica vibrazione di tutto ciò che *concorde-mente* "freme", per dissolversi, platonicamente e hegelianamente, nell'oceano della bellezza, nelle qualità invisibili del puro spirito.

Indice:

I. IL SUONO DELLE ORIGINI: Orecchio e conoscenza; Ascoltare prima della storia; L'eco e la sua immagine; Una musica che precede sé stessa; Spazio, fiato, soffio originario; La fecondità; La voce o la determinazione di un destino; Rapsodi, «cucitori». II. L'EVOCAZIONE DEL GRIDO: Giri prodigiosi; La possessione del dio, il ritmo, il gesto; Piante sacre, suoni degli dèi; Un tamburo per il cielo occulto; Gli strumenti della musica; Un liuto che racchiude tutte le melodie; La spirale della conchiglia; Il suono infernale della Gorgone; L'evocazione del grido. III. MESOPOTAMIA: Ritualità; Musicisti, intermediari celesti; Inni e lamentazioni; Strumenti musicali nei corredi funerari; Un'alleanza con Marduk; Il paese della porpora. IV. ISRAELE: Iubal rivelato; Un uomo abile a suonare la cetra; Della stirpe di Levi; Un salmo di morte e di nascita; Strumenti d'ambra per il cielo; I Terapeuti o la musica nella comunità; *Synagōgē*. V. EGITTO: La melodia del Nilo; Invocazione a Manero; «Morite Ballando per me»; Cantare con le mani sacre di Meret; I musicisti ciechi e l'affronto di Seth; Gli strumenti di Tutankhamon. VI. GRECIA: La musica come epifania del mondo; L'idea di novità; Contro la musica nuova; Il ritratto della vanità; Musica e vecchiaia. VII. IL CORPO MUSICALE DELL'UNIVERSO: Orfeo, l'accigliato; Due musicisti dell'universo: Orfeo e Cristo; Morire fuori dell'inno; Pitagora. L'armonia dispari; Sinfonia e memoria. Il luogo dell'antiterra; L'abisso della matematica; Corde siderali; La musica come chiave universale. VIII. NESSUNO TOCCHI LA CASA DI PINDARO: Dell'amore dei filosofi per la musica; I poeti musicisti; Il giusto prezzo per una corsa di mule; Per incerti cammini; Lesbo; L'oratoria e la cetra; Lo Stato e la musica.

Ramón Andrés, musicista professionista e specialista di musica medievale e del repertorio rina-

scimentale, ha insegnato all'Università di Napoli e attualmente collabora con l'Università di Barcellona. Tra le sue pubblicazioni, *Filosofía y consuelo de la música* (2020), *Claudio Monteverdi. Lamento della Ninfa* (2017), *El luthier de Delft. Música, pintura y ciencia en tiempos de Vermeer y Spinoza* (2013, 4ª), *Johann Sebastian Bach. Los días, las ideas y los libros* (2005, 5ª), *Mozart. Su vida y su obra* (2006).

(di Pier Alberto Porceddu Cilione)







