Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

Public Art and Aesthetics

edited by
Adam Andrzejewski
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Foreword
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The growing number of various interventions and artistic activities in the public sphere has been gaining momentum in recent years. This state of affairs can be seen in at least two – related – tendencies. Rapid urban development, gentrification, constant tension between the private and public spheres, and the need for sustainable growth provide an opportunity for public art to address issues that have not been addressed to the proper extent before. On the other hand, growing discontent, a sense of injustice and the threat caused by painful economic crises, seem to be the inevitable climate catastrophe, social inequalities and – referring to the very current situation – the Covid-19 pandemic and the unimaginably brutal war in Ukraine, make public art one of the ways of political and social manifesto.

Public art, traditionally associated with urban space, more and more often becomes the domain of other than urban environments. Currently, there is no and should not be an equal sign between urban art and public art, although – undoubtedly – the relationship between the two is still somehow strong as many objects of public art are indeed situated in cities. Notwithstanding, at present we are dealing with numerous artistic interventions that pose a question about the reality of non-urban space, the ways of its reception as well as aesthetic evaluation. Non-urban public art is often a meditation on the way of experiencing common space and the relationship between art, community and aesthetics.

One of the particularly interesting topics is the relationship between works of public art and some epistemic and ontological categories. First of all, public art seems to rise a question of accessibility and illegality of art in public spheres. Is an artwork displayed on private property and yet widely accessible to almost everyone a token of public art? Or, is it always the case for public artworks to be commissioned and legal? What is the nature of (potentially) illegal public artworks and their connection to public space? Second, can we move public artworks from the original site of display into another spacer. That is, are they, and if yes, then to what extent, site-specific?

Another interesting issue is the role that public art plays in creating the (aesthetic) atmospheres of given places. Everyone seems to agree that good public art should refer to and respect the atmosphere of a given place, and if it does not do so, it raises objections from the public. Another question is how public art (understood as something that reconfigures the existing space) is able to influence and potentially contribute to the given atmosphere. Even more importantly, one could see how (good) public art is able to help in transforming a space (as a spatial and primarily geographical notion) into a place (understood as something existential in nature).

This certainly highlights the "public" character of the contemporary work of art, but what is it that makes the artwork public? What functions has public art played in recent years in European and non-European countries? How has it been approached by cultural agents, local policy makers, and experts (critics, art historians, and philosophers)? Also, which appreciative practices related to public art have reached prominence?

Researchers shall tackle questions related to the definition, historical and social context and appreciation of art created, performed and resonating within the public sphere in different heterogeneous and homogeneous areas and sites. Particular attention should be dedicated to the different manifestations of public art (e.g. street art, murals, memorials, sculptures and others) often responsible, at least to a relevant extent, for reshaping and redefining urban and non-urban environments also in light of social and political goals.

This issue of "Aithesis" attempts to cross all these topics by proposing different perspectives. Within this conceptual framework move the essays that make up the monographic part: Adam Andrzejewski and Marta Maliszewska on public art in local communities; Andrea Borghini and Nicola Piras on eating local as public art; Tereza Hadravova and Sabrina Muchová on public art as meditation on public time; Mateusz Salwa on community gardens as public art; Andrea Baldini on The Nanjing Massacre Memorial; Marcello Sessa on the public dimension in Allan Kaprow's theory and Nicola Turrini on the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

A brief focus of three essays (Tamara Tagliacozzo, Nikolaos Tzanakis Papadakis and Attilio Vincenzo Burrone) is devoted to Benjamin and Adorno, while the miscellaneous section closes the issue with papers (Aldo Trucchio, Modesta Di Paola, Saverio Macrì, Nicola Di Stefano) that seek to account for some issues in the current debate.

Adam Andrzejewski, Andrea Mecacci

Public Art in (Local) Communities: Multiple Publics and the Dynamic Between Them

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Abstract. The paper's goal is to investigate the question of the type of public, which serves as a recipient of a particular work of public art. That is, the paper researches the process of how the public is attracted by a given artwork, how this process influences a local community, and what is the actual nature of these publics. As a result, it is argued that some public artworks are intended to have more than one public or, to put it in stronger terms, their task is to bring into play the inner dynamic between numerous publics. Moreover, the possibility of conceptualizing public art not only as a means responsible for facilitating peace but also as revealing the hidden conflicts among the members of the community, to which it is introduced and by whom it is analyzed.

Keywords: Public Art, Local community, Conflict, LGBT+ Rights.

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper aims at analyzing the role of public art in local communities[1]. We shall investigate the issue of what sort of public serves a recipient of a particular work of public art. In particular, we would like to research the process of how the public is gathered by a given artwork, how this process influences a local community, and what is the actual nature of these publics. We shall suggest the following hypothesis: some public artworks are intended to be seen by more than one public or, to put it in stronger terms, their task is to bring into play the inner dynamic between numerous publics. The second objective of the paper is to investigate the possibility of conceptualizing public art not only as a means responsible for facilitating peace (for example, being a bond for a given community) but also as

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[1] For the sake of this paper, we would like to define "local community" as characterized by a relatively small number of inhabitants, communicating in face-to-face interactions, as well a communities of the sense of being known and recognized by fellow citizens.

revealing the hidden conflicts among the members of the community. That is, we would like to argue the suggested hypothesis is valuable as it helps one to understand the reason why some of those works of public art that have elicited contradictory reactions, still do succeed as works of public art. We suppose that revealing these kinds of conflicts is valuable for fruitful discussions within a given community, as it tells something about that community and might function as a possible trigger for real (not only postulated) social and personal change[2].

The paper has the following structure: in §2 public artworks of Daniel Rycharski are presented and discussed. Next, in §3 and §4, respectively, we describe and discuss crucial features of public art as well as the nature of publics that are reached by different artworks. In particular, this section explores the possibility of existence of diverse publics of a given artwork. Section §5 provides an analysis of the earlier established categories in the light of specific examples of Rycharski's artwork in Kurówko *Strachy*, introduced in §2. The paper ends with the summary of the argument (§6).

2. DANIEL RYCHARSKI STRACHY [FEARS] (2018-2019)

Daniel Rycharski, whose artwork *Strachy* [Fears] we analyze in the paper, represents the young generation of Polish artists. In 2016 he won the Paszport Polityki [Polityka's Passport] award, presented by the *Polityka* journal – one of the most prestigious awards in Poland, given to young creators for outstanding debuts in art and culture. In 2019 he was the first living artist to have a solo exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Two years later, a movie about his personal life and artistic practice titled *Wszystkie nasze strachy* [All Our Fears], directed by Łukasz Ronduda and Łukasz Gutt, won the main prize during the 46th Gdynia Film Festival. In his works, Rycharski addresses the issues of LGBTQ+ rights, homopho-

bia in the Polish Catholic Church, as well as more rarely discussed topics of the forgotten heritage of peasants and the challenges of contemporary life in the countryside in Poland (Maliborski [2019]). His artworks are often created in cooperation with people from outside of the artworld, especially with the community of his home village Kurówko. One of many art pieces, which Rycharski has been creating in Kurówko since 2009 (when he returned to live there) is a public art installation titled *Strachy*.

Strachy consists of several wooden, colorful crosses in various shapes referring to different Christian denominations. Each cross is dressed in few pieces of clothing – T-shirts, sweaters, trousers, or even shoes. The clothes were donated to Rycharski by the LGBTQ+ community members who have experienced discrimination. Another element used in the artwork is barbed wire. It entangles the crosses, alluding to a crown of thorns symbolizing suffering in the Christian tradition. However, Rycharski's installation has more than a purely symbolic meaning. It can also function as a scarecrow. Second-hand clothes still have some smell of human bodies that, together with bright, colorful crosses, discourage animals from feeding on the growing crops. The artist intentionally refers to the heritage of rural communities, where scarecrows also function as a bottom-up creative practice, besides serving their practical purpose. In fact, while *Strachy* was exhibited in Kurówko in 2018-2019 it served to protect crops from wild boars.

Kurówko is a small village one hour drive from Warsaw, populated by around 100 people. There are no public institutions there (not even a church or a shop, which one can often find in Polish hamlets) – just one main road, houses, and fields. At the first glance, one may assume that nothing special happens there and the site is just one of many similar rural villages in Poland. Places, which after the political transformation to a free-market economy in 1989 seem godforsaken. For the last three decades their residents have been losing access to basic public services such as public transport and healthcare, not to mention

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[2] For such a possibility see Simoniti (2018).

Photog. Daniel Chrobak. Thanks to Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

Photog. Daniel Chrobak. Thanks to Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

culture (Bukraba-Rylska [2009], Rakowski [2019]). It is, however, precisely with respect to culture that Kurówko stands out. The residents' engagement in Rycharski's work, i.e. their active participation in public culture, makes Kurówko a fitting candidate for a close study of public art "in action". The other reason why we find Rycharski's work especially interesting is that it addresses the problem of homophobia in Poland, while being exhibited in the countryside. Typically, Polish non-urban areas are not associated with political protests. Big cities with their diverse populations and main governmental institutions are rather seen as places of public debate. Nonetheless, Rycharski places *Strachy* in this "apolitical" area, demanding rec-

ognition for the rural community's political voice (Majewska [2019]). Before we start examining what exactly this voice says and what are its repercussions, we would like to get back to the role of public art in political disputes.

3. PUBLIC ART AND ITS PUBLIC(S)

Public art covers plenty of artistic realizations such as sculptures, installations, dance, and theatrical performances, just to name a few. Thus, visually speaking, public art is heterogeneous in nature: what unites this variety is that these pieces are displayed at a public space; however not all of those pieces belong to public art in the proper sense. To resolve this issue, many philosophers and art historians emphasize that public art has a special relation to the *public*, and exactly this relation is responsible for distinguishing this category of art from other kinds. Scholars propose the division between public art and art in public space. "Art in public space" is a term referring to any artwork that happens to be exposed in a public space (Riggle [2010]). "Public art" is a narrower term that refers only to those artworks that can be characterized by a specific kind of influence on their public. Public art «sets out to forge a specific public by means of an aesthetic interaction» (Hein [2006]: 49). What is more, as Baldini writes, it has «[...] the unique potential to encourage a peculiar modality of discourse where individuals share and debate their perspectives on a variety of issues they care about.» (Baldini [2019]: 10).

Recently, Mary Beth Willard has proposed to distinguish two features that are standard for public art: accessibility and site-specificity (Willard [2019]). In her view, these features have to be visually perceptible to the audience (*resp*. public), since exactly these features guide their aesthetic appreciation. Accessibility works in two ways. First, in order for an artwork to be a token of public art it must be physically accessible to the public. This means that the viewers have to easily interact with the artwork, may walk around it and/or be able to closely inspect it (e.g., not from

behind a fence). Being accessible does not automatically mean that the artwork is displayed in a publicly owned place[3]. There might be artworks that are displayed on private property, and yet are accessible to a vast majority of people. Second, accessibility should be understood not only in a physical sense but also in an epistemic one (*Ibid.,* 7). Being epistemologically accessible simply means that potential viewers are able to recognize a given context (in this case – a place) in which an artwork is displayed. Willard uses an example of a violin virtuoso who gave a musical performance near the subway station. According to her, although the performance was physically accessible to pedestrians (everyone could listen to it) it was epistemically inaccessible, since almost no one was expecting a world class musician giving a performance in such a place (not to mention distractions caused by the traffic, being emerged in domestic affairs, commuting to work or school, and the like).

Another feature of public art is their site-specificity. In other words, an artwork has to interact with the surrounding in which it is displayed and has to be created primarily to interact with that specific place. Naturally, being site-specific is a matter of degree: some works of public art are more site-specific, whereas others are less. What is important is that being public art requires fulfilling the condition of site-specificity to a minimal degree. That is, a work of public art has to somehow, and in a non-trivial way, relate to the physical place of its distribution, and this relation needs to impact the artwork's content. Moreover, we would like to see site-specificity as not only limited to geographically defined space, but also as something related to community and social boundaries as well (Kwon [2002]: 100-137).

The existence of the two features of public art immediately raises a question: what is the *proper*

public of public artworks? Is it homogeneous or heterogeneous in nature? Or to put it differently: is there any special public connected with public artworks that is – by definition – site-specific and thus related to a particular community or nation?

In the paper *The Public-Art Publics* (2019) Andrea Baldini presents an argument in favor of *the multiplicity thesis* on public art publics. He shows that a public art public is not universally united and abstract but instead that every artwork creates its own public (Baldini [2019]: 10-11; 20). Thus, we can say that public art in general has many publics, instead of one, of multiple public art realizations. Those publics can be differentiated based on their size or their temporal dimension. For the purpose of the paper, we would like to focus on the first type of the classification.

Baldini distinguishes three different kinds of public art projects and their publics based on scale: local, national, and international. The first one is established by small-scale projects, referring to locally important issues, often political in nature. The national public art public is characterized as a set of individuals occupying a territory of a country where an artwork is installed. The last category, international public art public, refers to a global audience of international projects. Recipients not necessarily appreciate an artwork in person but also find out about it from international mass media coverage. It is important to stress out that, even if the main factor for differentiating these three types of public is their size, they are diverse not only in scale. That becomes clear in comparing local and national public art projects in terms proposed by Baldini. While local ones often expose problems pressing to a local community, national projects underline values common to different social groups. The first one reveals existing conflicts, contrary to the second, and acts to ease them (Baldini [2019]: 14). To develop Baldini's theory and support *the multiplicity thesis*, we would like to pose a further question about the diversity of publics, especially in the case of local public art.

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[3] We concur with Willard that this observation undermines the widespread intuition that public art has to be displayed only in publicly owned places. Rycharski's work *Strachy* is a public artwork that matches all discussed public art's features; yet in Kurówko it was displayed in the field that is privately owned.

4. ANTAGONISTIC VS. AGONISTIC PUBLICS

In our deliberations on public art we want to go a little further than Baldini and formulate the hypothesis that some works of public art address not one (local) public, but multiple (local) publics. We define a public as a group united in sharing a common discourse that enables its members to interpret a work of art in similar terms (even if they disagree with each other's judgments on that work). Naturally, the demarcation line between one group and another is not always sharp or easy to draw. However, we shall claim that if a certain group do share, for example, a similar conception of art, then it is the same public. And this does not automatically presuppose that people inside this group (*resp.* public) have to judge an artwork in a similar way. For example, some might like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, whereas some might not find it valuable. Notwithstanding, such a fact does not render to separate publics. That would be the case, however, when someone else rejects Duchamp work as a proper art (and, thus, uses a very much different conception of art).

One might immediately object that it is highly counterintuitive to say that a public artwork displayed in a local community has multiple, not one, publics. Indeed, in most scenarios local public artworks might have only one public. However, one can imagine that a given work of art, as it were, creates multiple publics. They are not just two groups of supporters and opponents of a work (then we could say that we have one audience that just judges a given object differently). Rather, they are groups that perceive the world in different categories, have different beliefs and interests[4]. We agree on that with Michael Warn-

er, who writes: «There are as many shades of difference among publics as there are in modes of stress, style and space of circulation» (Warner [2005]: 117). Those differences make it impossible for spectators representing diverse publics to look at an artwork in a similar perspective. They vary in their understanding of an artwork and in their responses to it.

Multiple publics are addressed by artworks which serve as a pretext for a discussion on highly polarizing issues; some of the artworks can help to reveal political opinions previously not explicitly expressed to one another by members of a community. When a potentially controversial artwork is displayed, it forces a community living next to it to respond. Reactions to these works may include a variety of responses, such as parsing an art piece and publicly supporting it or signing a petition for its disassembly (or in the most hard-core scenario simply destroying it). Even ignoring an artwork and avoiding expressing one's opinion becomes ostentatious if the rest of the milieu is commenting on it. By taking these actions, members of a community position themselves not only towards an art piece, but also towards the issues it is covering and – what is most important – towards other members of that community. In this process multiple local publics may emerge that interpret the given artwork in different manners. We are not saying that division between publics is abiding and permanent: it is possible to cross the boundaries between distinct groups. It should be also added that each work, if it creates more than one public, does it in a way that is unique for that work. In other words, it is conceivable that another work will "regulate" the division among members of one community in a different way.

The dynamic between multiple publics often reveals a conflict in a community. As such public art works counter to the dominant neoliberal discourse that hides conflicts in a society and presents them as misunderstandings solvable by means of rational debate. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (2001) stress that the hegemonic discourse is based on a false assumption that all individuals

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[4] We do not claim that those different discourses are ethically or politically valid the same way – especially when we think about public art that often speaks for rights of the marginalized. However, from the perspective of aesthetics experience, one cannot judge that only one of these publics is "the proper public" (even if at the same time agendas that influence their aesthetic experience can be judged as such from moral or social perspective).

share the same political agendas[5]. Moreover, if one agrees that people in a society have diverse political – as well as aesthetic – values and interests, then conflicts cannot be avoided but only silenced (which always happens at a cost for marginalized groups). The neoliberal paradigm of unified society is also a hidden assumption supporting a conviction about only one local public art public. Thus, the thesis about multiple publics rests on the heterogeneity described by Mouffe and Laclau. Based on the previously mentioned understanding of a public as sharing common discourse, we claim that those heterogeneous groups in a community create multiple public art local publics.

In public art theory, but also in its popular understanding, public artworks are often presented as creating a community by positively reinforcing interactions between its members. Contrary to that, we would like to propose a different perspective on public art. We do not claim that public art always aims to reveal conflicts. However, it sometimes does. Some public artworks function as «[…] a social and political stimulus» (Baldini [2016]: 10) that change the dominant visual discourse and represent erased voices (Rancière [2013]). After Mouffe and Laclau, we accept that conflicts are not something that has to be overcome. Rather, they are the root of "radical democracy", as they make it possible to reshape and renegotiate oppressive power relations: «without conflict and division, a pluralist democratic politics would be impossible» (Laclau, Mouffe [2001]: xvii). Following their ideas, we believe that public art reinforces communities not by facilitating peace but by exposing disagreements.

However, one should not forget that revealing conflicts might incite war. Antagonistic sentiments have the power to create a solid division between allies and enemies – between "us" and "them" – and between different publics. Representatives of those opposing groups often deny others their right to a different perspective and try to silence them (at least metaphorically). Instead,

Mouffe proposes to see members of different groups as equal adversaries: «An adversary is a legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy in common» (Mouffe [1999]: 755). She calls this new paradigm «agonistic pluralism» and emphasizes «the importance of distinguishing between two types of political relations: one of *antagonism* between enemies, and one of *agonism* between adversaries. We could say that the aim of democratic politics is to transform an "antagonism" into "agonism"» (Mouffe [1999]: 755). Yet different public art publics often position themselves towards each other in an antagonistic manner. Still, we believe that at least some public artworks may play an important role in a democratic society – and in communities – by transforming antagonism into agonism. One of the factors contributing to it seems to be their scale, which is what we analyze on the example of Rycharski's *Strachy*.

5. THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN MULTIPLE PUBLICS

For a better understanding of *Strachy* one has to see it in the broader political context[6]. Two years in a row, in 2020 and 2021, Poland was the most homophobic country in the EU, according to the ILGA-Europe report[7]. On the other hand,

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[5] In their analysis of Rycharski's work Maliborski (2019) and Müller (2019) also refer to Mouffe concepts.

[6] We would like to stress that we do not have the access to empirical research or even first-hand comments on how *Strachy* was received by Kurówko residents. For what we know, the first does not exist and the second is beyond our competences as philosophers. What we have though, are cultural studies and cultural anthropology papers that address how Rycharski's works are received in his hometown (Kurz [2019], Majewska [2019], Maliborski [2019], Müller [2019], Rakowski [2019]), as well as primarily the artist's own statements. Certainly, a better understanding of *Strachy* would need supplementing our findings with a sociological perspective. However, for the goal of our paper, which focuses primarily on multiple public art publics, we do believe that our methodology is sufficient.

[7] In 2020 and 2021 Poland has taken respectively: the last spot and seventh from the end from all European coun-

there are some great Polish organizations and social movements that fight for LGBTQ+ rights. The conflict between these two visions of the society has been increasing in recent years. It is not hard to imagine that it exists also in Kurówko. However, since homophobia is deeply rooted in the Polish society, it is often invisible for those who do not experience it directly. Thus, this conflict may be not noticed by some members of Kurówko (as well as any other) community. The work *Strachy* – which talks about violence against the LGBTQ+ community – challenges this ignorance. It speaks for the right of the LGBTQ+ people not to live *incognito*, in the shadow of dominant homophobic discourse, but to manifest their social experiences. By giving back visibility to erased voices, Rycharski discloses this conflict to the local community. From now on, its members have to take a stand with respect to those voices, whether they want it or not.

Based on what we just mentioned, we assume that *Strachy* probably had multiple publics in Kurówko, interpreting the art piece differently. One can imagine that for some – especially those who are close with Rycharski and have helped him with creating *Strachy* – it spoke about the openness of the Kurówko community. From this perspective the work also contradicted the often repeated stereotype that homophobia in Poland (as well as any other phobia that we are ashamed of) comes from the lower classes of the society. As this stereotype finds no confirmation in sociological findings, it is criticized by Rycharski as well[8]. On the other hand, for others *Strachy* could be associated with the threat to their vision of the local community as homogeneous and conservative. Despite those imaginable differences, the multiple publics probably lived together in this small community and interacted with each other. Perhaps some members of the second group could even change their mind about LGBTQ+ rights

Photog. Daniel Chrobak. Thanks to Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

thanks to *Strachy* when they have seen the amount of violence and suffering, which homophobia brings. And that it hits not only abstract people, but their next door neighbors as well. Even if that did not happen (after all, our perspective on public art is not utopian) people at least had a pretext to talk with each other about LGBTQ+ issues, instead of just hearing about them from homophobic propaganda on public TV, which replaces multiple voices with nationalistic universalism.

Similar issues to those exposed in *Strachy* are addressed with the public art installation *Tęcza* [Rainbow] by Julita Wójcik. The installation is a huge (9 meters high and 26 meters wide) rainbow arch made of sixteen thousand artificial flowers. Initially Wójcik described her artwork as inspired by aesthetic values of a rainbow and denied understanding it as a political symbol. However that has changed due to the later events. Between 2012 and 2015 *Tęcza* was exhibited in Warsaw at Plac Zbawiciela [Savior Square]. During this short period of time the installation was put on fire seven times. Finally, it was dissembled by City Council who wanted to avoid further acts of vandalism, even though most of Varsovians wanted it to stay[9]. For Polish nationalists it was the most hated piece in Warsaw (probably next to the Palace of Culture

tries in the ILGA-Europe report, which measures the level of equality of LGBTQ+ community in different countries.
[8] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX15rir6vyU&t=43s [20.01.2022].

[9] See: https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,15912695,ponad-60-proc-warszawiakow-za-tecza-jej-niszczenie-oburza.html [20.01.2022].

and Science) and putting the installation on fire became like a ritual for participants of the March of Independence. One of the organizers of this biggest nationalistic yearly parade in Europe commented on the destruction of *Tęcza* by saying: «a symbol of the plague got burned»[10]. Thus, those attacks were directed not only at art, but primarily at the community associated with it. Homophobes burned the installation because they have interpreted it as a symbol of LGBTQ+ community. It is hard to spot an agonistic community in this case – rather a war between archenemies motivated by hatred (at least on the part of homophobes). It seems doubtful that *Tęcza* has helped to renegotiate the conflict and change it into relation between adversaries respecting each other. On the contrary, it has consolidated counter publics who do not know each other in person but mostly through reports from media or social media. Those publics interpreted the work in completely different terms (as «a symbol of the plaque» or as a sign of hope for an open society, as Wójcik called it)[11] and some denied others the right to their voice. As the fate of *Tęcza* shows, changing antagonism into agonism is not easy and public art often gets burned while playing with fire.

We believe that one of the reasons why some public artworks create agonistic publics, while others lead to antagonistic ones, seems to be their scale, as the comparison between *Strachy* and *Tęcza* illustrates. The variance in scale of a realization (in this case local vs. national) results in a different type of contacts between multiple publics. Artworks placed in local communities, like Rycharski's work, engage their publics in face-to-face interactions that can potentially lead to successful political debates. Contrarily mediated contacts between publics that do not know each other in person often accelerate conflicts, as it happened in the case of Wójcik's piece. Following whistle-

blowers from high-tech social media corporations, algorithms managing those platforms are based on information bubbles and increase of hatred between different groups. In fact, as Frances Haugen – a former Facebook employee – testified before the Senate Commerce Committee, those mechanisms of hate speech ensure users' engagement and result in the corporations enormous profits[12]. It shows that the operating principle of social media is the creation of antagonistic communities – ones that are not only diverse in their opinions, but above all see "others" as enemies, whose right to their voice they question[13]. Thus, multiple public art publics that contact each other mainly through social media become antagonized easily. The most disturbing element is that – as with many other cases of hate speech on the Internet – the results of those virtual antagonisms are acts of violence in the real world, as the destruction of *Tęcza* shows. Clearly, it does not mean that face-to-face interactions between multiple publics never repeat antagonistic schemes. Nevertheless, without the algorithms profiting of hatred, it is more likely for members of multiple publics to see each other as advertisers and not as enemies. Especially in the case of local scale communities where it is harder to avoid personal contacts with others, where existence of a whole community often depends on cooperation between all of its residents[14]. It is worth mentioning that the agonistic dynamic between multiple publics in a local community does not result in a universal consent between those publics. Furthermore, crossing the

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[10] See: https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,14933380,lider-narodowcow-o-teczy-splonal-symbol-zarazy.html [20.01.2022].

[11] See: https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/julita-wojcik-tecza# [20.01.2022].

[12] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOnpVQnv5Cw [20.01.2022].

[13] Similar mechanisms of antagonizing society are used currently in Poland by the governmental media, especially by the public television TVP.

[14] Such cooperation is extremely important especially in the face of lacking public institutions, often pressing – as we mentioned in the previous part – residents of Polish rural areas and hamlets. Neighborly favors and mutual aid can supplement shortage of governmental support. An example of such a practice is car sharing on one's way to work and splitting gasoline costs in areas where there is no public transport.

line between different publics «has more of a quality of a conversation than a rational persuasion» (Mouffe [1999]: 755). It is then not impossible, even if it is probably less common than we often imagine it. However – as we have explained in the previous part, after Mouffe and Laclau – universal consent is neither a goal of the radical democracy. Instead, members of those multiple publics discuss – and probably argue – with each other over an artwork and its meaning, however they still do not stop respecting each other in the process.

Finally, we would like to mention that we do not claim that the described factor is the only reason for different dynamics between multiple publics in the case of *Strachy* and *Tęcza*. Neither is it the most important one. To judge that, one would have to take into account various methodological approaches and many differences between those artworks. Nonetheless, we do believe that a better understanding of agonistic and antagonistic relations between multiple public art publics needs considering the scale of a realization and the type of interactions it results in.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay was to analyze the role which public art may play in local communities. We have argued that, at least in some cases, public artworks that are displayed locally are able to address not only one local public, but a greater number of them. That is, using Daniel Rycharski's work *Strachy* located in Kurówko we have shown that the existence of more than one local public is not only possible, but it also helps in defining and discovering the hidden conflicts among the members of a local community. What is more, our analysis can serve as a possible way to explain why some works of public art, which have elicited contradictory reactions, still succeed as works of *public* art. Moreover, the inner dynamics between different local publics was explained and researched by employing the theory of antagonisms[15].

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Eating Local as Public Art

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Abstract. In this paper, we bring together two unrelated strains of recent literature on eating local, which have respectively evidenced its socio-political and artistic values. Our argument contends that eating local can, in some instances, be regarded as a form of public art. Our study improves our understanding and appreciation of the complex web of culinary values linked to eating local, in particular the entanglement between its aesthetic, political, and cultural significance. We first review three extant definitions of eating local (§ 2), which we then employ to discuss the three specific forms of public art that eating local can occasion (§ 3), namely: memorial art, social protest art, and art that enhances. Finally, we present the links between the three approaches to local food and the three forms of public art (§ 4), providing a heuristic framework for both scholars and stakeholders.

Keywords: Local food, Public art, Food and philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION

To celebrate the work and life of the renowned artist Ana Mendieta, the curator Su Wu and the chef Thalios Barrios Garcia organized an exhibition in a new public art space, *La Clínica* in Oaxaca (Mexico), which included a brunch where traditional, seasonal, and local food were served. The guests *wandered* from the exhibition room to the bar, consuming local food while appreciating local art in a public space. The purpose of the convenors was to create a singular exhibition where the work of Mendieta, the environment, and the food by Garcia merged in a unique artistic experience[1].

The exhibition in Oaxaca is one among a seemingly growing number of art events that bestow upon food a key role in the sphere of public art. Jointly taken, these occasions implicitly bring to mind the thesis recently advanced by Borghini and Baldini (2021), which claims that cooking and dining may be regarded, in some instances, as forms of public art. In their work, Borghini and Baldini offer a

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[1] See Furman (2021) for a detailed description of the event.

wide variety of case studies that substantiate their claim, distinguishing three forms of public art that may arguably be realized through cooking and dining: memorial art, social protest art, and art that enhances. Developing Borghini and Baldini's perspective, in this paper we study whether *eating local* (or, equivalently, locavorism, or local food), i.e., the thesis that consuming and producing local food has a value, can be considered, in some instances, as a form of public art.

In recent years, eating local has acquired a relatively prominent role in public and scholarly discussion on the ethics and politics of dieting (e.g., Borghini, Piras, & Serini [2021a]; Enthoven & Van den Broeck [2021]; Kim & Huang [2021]; Noll & Werkheiser [2018]; Pollan [2008]). In particular, since eating local bears special ties to geographical space – as the Oaxaca exhibition witnesses – it can be used as a means to convey site-specifically, intimate, and internal values of specific interest to a community[2].

At the same time, a second unrelated research agenda brought to light the aesthetic worth of eating local. In fact, several examples of haute cuisine – which may be considered as a form of art *per se*, e.g., Trubek [2000] – employ local items (see, *inter alia*, Sammels [2014]). Furthermore, when the aesthetic paradigm does not rely on traditional forms of artistic appreciation, which exclusively looks at fine dining, also more ordinary and widespread instances of eating local may be considered as forms of art (e.g., Matthen [2021]) and, as we will argue, able to elicit culinary values.

Bringing together the two unrelated strains of research, in this paper we argue that eating local can, in some instances, be regarded as a form of public art. Thanks to this conjoinment, the study will improve our understanding and appreciation of the complex web of culinary values linked to eating local, in particular the entanglement between its aesthetic, political, and cultural significance. Using the expression "culinary values"

we mean all the values that may be linked to a food or a food experience, which extend beyond the gustatory aspects, to encompass also political, ethical, broadly aesthetic, and cultural dimensions (see Engisch [2022]).

In the remaining of the paper, we first rehearse three extant definitions of eating local (§2), to then return to the question of whether it can be regarded as a form of public art. We address this question in terms of specific case studies of eating local as memorial art (§3.1), social protest art (§3.2), and art that enhances (§3.3). Finally, we present the conceptual links between the three approaches to eating local and the three forms of public art (§4), delivering nine different typologies of eating local as forms of public art, summarized in a table. We conclude that understanding eating local through the lens of public art can best highlight its culinary value providing a useful tool for policies and strategies aimed at promoting worthwhile instances of this entanglement.

2. EATING LOCAL AND ITS VALUES

Eating local stands for a wide family of views according to which those foods associated to a locality embody a special aesthetic (Adams [2018]), communitarian (Schnell [2013]), nutritional (Caspi et al. [2012]), economic (Feenstra & Campbell [2014]), ethical or political value (Sebo [2018]) and – in recent years – has acquired a key role in public and academic debate on sustainable and more equitable diets (see Noll & Werkheiser [2018] for a systematic review).

However, at the same time, the legal and commercial norms regulating the uses of the term "local" are seldom clearly specified. As a result, "local" is used in a variety of different, sometimes mutually opposing, ways, and can be readily abused, in culinary and business contexts. For illustrating this wide range of different applications of the term, consider when "local" is predicated of renowned Swiss chocolates, in spite of its cocoa beans coming from South America. At the same time, a bread made of ingredients originat-

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[2] See, for instance, Trubek (2008) on the connection between winemaking and local values; Paxson (2012) on the creation of local values through food production.

ed from New Jersey and consumed in New Jersey may be "local" even if it slavishly follows the original Greek recipe of pita bread. Or, an apple grown next to the place of consumption may be "local" regardless of the size of the farm and of the methods of production.

In Borghini, Piras, and Serini (2021a), we provided some conceptual tools to face value-laden discussions of local food and eating local. First of all, we recognize that "local" can be predicated of quite different culinary items. A non-exhaustive list includes: (a) whole food, i.e., determinate edible items that can be consumed alone, e.g., vegetables; (b) ingredients, i.e., the components of a recipes, e.g., the flour used for making up a pasta; (c) recipes, i.e., specific ways of selecting, cooking, combining, and processing the ingredients, e.g., the recipe of Pita; (d) menu, i.e., the structure of meals, e.g., sharing food by placing it on a common flatbread at the center of the table as in the Ethiopian cuisine; (e) diets, i.e., typical consumption patterns, e.g., the Korean Diet.

Second, we suggest that each of the items falling under categories (a)-(e) may be "local" from at least three approaches, which are respectively distance-driven, terroir-driven, and socially-driven. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, but are often mutually alternative, so that a specific item, say a Pita, may be considered local under one of the approaches but not under another[3]. As they are relevant for our analysis of eating local as public art, we shall briefly review them.

According to the distance-driven approach, a food is local if and only if it is consumed at less than some fixed distance (usually between 150 and 400 miles) from its production place. This approach is usually endorsed to foster healthier and more sustainable diets due to its lower rate of pollution (e.g., Pollan [2008]). However, since the distance between producers and consumers

has been arbitrarily decided, there is not a unique standard, thus determining incongruences and struggles (see Borghini, Piras, & Serini [2021b]). Furthermore, different transportation conditions may render shorter distances less sustainable than longer one, e.g., producing tomatoes in Northern Europe is more polluting than transporting tomatoes from Spain to, say, London. This criticism may undermine the sustainability motivations underlying this approach on eating local (Navin [2014]).

According to the terroir-driven approach, eating local should be understood as the edible expression of a given territory, its physical features, as well as its traditions, habits, and lifestyle. Hence, a food is local when it owns specific qualities directly attributable to the specific environment, climate, know-how, and techniques of its original place (e.g., Champagne properties are supposed to be determined by the features of the homonymous French region). However, as we have shown elsewhere, these attributions are theoretically far more complex to substantiate than it may appear at first sight, due to the complex identity of products (Borghini [2014a] and [2012]) and recipes (Borghini [2022], [2015], and [2011]); e.g., the fact that the ingredients of traditional local foods are sometimes produced in distant geographical regions, as it is with Swiss chocolate or Italian coffee. Moreover, several local food stories have been proved to rest on invented traditions (Nowak [2019]; Guy [2003]).

According to the socially-driven approach, eating local is a placeholder for the social and political engagement between the various agents involved in the food chain. Hence, a food is local when those agents hold significant and close links among each other, e.g., they know each other personally, share the same political beliefs or the same concept of public good (for a recent example, see Ho [2020]). However, how to measure, or at least define, these social ties is far from being clear. Moreover, the relation between producers and consumers is at risk of being asymmetrical, as they may not share the same definition or perspective of locality; thus, for instance, a tourist buying food from a city market may perceive it as "local" in

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[3] However, in spite of their wide popularity and established endorsements (see Furrow [2016]: 40), all these three approaches suffer from specific criticisms variously stressed in the literature (see, *inter alia*, Ferguson & Thompson [2021] for a recent review).

terms of kilometric distance, while the farmer may perceive it as non-local based on the social divide between the farmland and the city (for a further discussion, see Borghini, Piras, & Serini [2021a]).

As just showed, each of these three approaches is subject to a specific range of criticisms. Nonetheless, in keeping with our previous works (Borghini, Piras, and Serini ([2021a]; [2021b]), we maintain that eating local can still play a significant role in policies, ethical beliefs, and aesthetic evaluation. To work properly in these contexts, the concept (understood from any of the three just mentioned approaches) should meet four desiderata: (i) gradability, i.e., the concept should come in degrees in order to include foods which are more or less local; (ii) width, i.e., the concept of eating local should cover as many items as possible; (iii) negotiability, i.e., the concept should be negotiated among the various actors involved in the food chain (e.g., producers, consumers, suppliers, vendors, institutions) in order to have a definition shared by the largest group of potential users; (iv) fallibility, i.e., each approach on eating local should be referred to a specific context of utterance and agency relying on theoretical and empirical frameworks without the ambition to be universal. Thus, for instance, a terroir-driven approach may be useful when defending the intellectual property rights of local communities, being gradable (e.g., distinguishing foods more or less traditional), wide (e.g., including recipes of African migrant communities rooted in a new European landscape), negotiable (e.g., by considering the opinions of all stakeholders), and fallible (e.g., being aware of the constitutive contextuality of the locality conditions for a food which may not be suited for a different environment).

Having set the terms for a discussion of eating local, we shall now turn to the question of why eating local can represent a genuine form of public art.

3. LOCAL FOOD AS PUBLIC ART

Our argument that eating local can be a form of public art draws on the analysis of cooking and dining as forms of public art proposed by Borghini and Baldini (2021). Their thesis relies on four major theoretical moves: a deflationary model of art; a social model of artistic appreciation; Hein's three famous conditions for public art; and Wolterstorff's classification of the different forms of public art. Let us briefly review each of them as a way to introduce our discussion.

Piggybacking on Lopes (2014), Borghini and Baldini endorse a deflationary model of art, which breaks down the traditional artistic boundaries, including those between major and minor arts and those between art and artisanship. Such a model has been employed to date to analyze multiple forms of artistic expression that generally dwell at the outskirts of the main art scene, such as street art and social protest art (see, *inter alia*, Baldini [2019], [2018]; Riggle [2010]; Korza, Bacon, & Assafeds [2005]). Accordingly, Borghini and Baldini's stance – in line with that of other authors who have examined the aesthetic worth of food (see, for instance, Saito [2008] and Perullo [2016]) – employed this model for enlarging the boundaries of public art to include fine and ordinary forms of cooking and dining.

Second, when it comes to food, the received scholarship has typically adopted an "individualistic model of appreciation," which underestimates the role of food within the public sphere. Instead, Borghini and Baldini endorse a social model of appreciation, arguing that food constitutively underlies and builds upon social networks as an object of interaction and discussion, contributing to shaping (and sometimes challenging) the received social categories (e.g., gender, race, or class).

Third, Borghini and Baldini's argument relies on the three conditions for public art laid down by Hein (1996), namely: *accessibility*, i.e., a public artwork should be accessible as one of its constitutive properties, at least in principle[4], even if not for

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[4] "Accessibility" is not by itself synonymous of "inclusive," but it is limited to providing the possibility of access to every one, in principle. Targeted policies for improving inclusivity should arguably be discussed along with accessibility, as the literature on public art museums demonstrates (for a start, see Sharp et al. [2005]).

free, e.g., museums or restaurants; *having a public theme*, i.e., a public artwork has to be about public meanings, concerns, or institutions proper to a given community (e.g., a statue against the war or a performance which memorializes a past foundational event); *eliciting a public response*, i.e., the public should be engaged in a way that contributes to the construction of its collective identity (e.g., the collective emotion caused by the celebration of a nefarious event)[5].

Fourth, Borghini and Baldini suggest that cooking and dining fit at least three distinct types of art (see also Wolterstorff [2015]: 55): memorial art, social protest art, and art that enhances. Borghini and Baldini provide an ample number of instances of dining and cooking occasions that meet the conditions of each of those types, but they do not pay close attention to eating local. Nevertheless, as we stressed in the introduction, the social and political role exerted by eating local in the past few years, along with its communitarian nature (e.g, Nabhan [2002]) as well as its celebrated aesthetic dimension (e.g., Bertolli & Waters [1995]; Petrini [2001]), make it an ideal candidate as a putative form of public art. Elaborating on these considerations, in the following three subsections we argue that specific instances of eating local can be regarded as forms of memorial art, social protest art, and art that enhance. In the last two sections, drawing on these discussions, we will argue that seeing eating local under the interpretative lens of public art could be a good viaticum for consolidating its culinary values as well as its role as a political tool.

Most of our examples will be based on Italian case studies since this study is carried out by an Italian research unit within the context of a consortium funded by the European Union (4EU+ Project). However, as long as we think that our framework can be used even beyond the Italian

borders, in section 4 we offer other examples that span across different countries and contexts.

3.1 Eating Local as Memorial Art

The first form of public art taken into account by Borghini and Baldini is memorial art, namely – following Danto (1998) and Wolterstorff (2015) – artistic ways to publicly celebrate, honor, or enable persons, groups, or events which played a significant role for the collective memory of a specific community. Borghini and Baldini put forward an essential overview of different typologies of cooking and dining as forms of memorial art, which ranges from banquets to honor retired colleagues to entire national or regional culinary traditions, convivial occasions, and restaurants which, they argue, are able to shape collective memory. All these typologies are characterized by the aim to keep alive a link with the past (e.g., the career of the colleague) by honoring this memory in a public sphere (e.g., the banquet which is open to the old and new colleagues of the retiree).

A paradigmatic case in point of local convivial occasions which essentially involve local community and, at the same time, shape and display its identity, memory, and tradition through food are the Italian *sagre paesane* (folk food festivals). These festivals are popular events held in many Italian cities and villages organized by local institutions or organizations (e.g., *Pro Loco*, namely, local agencies appointed to defend and promote the local cultural heritage). *Sagre paesane* are usually set along permanent or temporary pedestrian zones where assorted food trucks or stands can show and sell local products to tourists and residents. In some cases, private residences or reserved zones of commercial activities are open to the public and featuring performances held by local producers and cooks who show and teach local ways of cooking and dining to the visitors (e.g., the Italian national event *Cantine Aperte* where wineries are open to the visitors for tasting local wines)[6].

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[5] It should be said that Borghini and Baldini acknowledge that such an account may have shortcomings and that each condition needs to be carefully understood in order to fit deflationary approaches to art. Our discussion of local food aims to highlight some possible amendments and adjustments.

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[6] See the official website of the national organization <http://www.movimentoturismovino.it/en/home/>.

The local ways of cooking and dining as forms of memorial art at the core of *sagre paesane* play a multifarious role in relation with collective memory and identity: they can revitalize a common background, celebrate an enchanted and mythical past or heroic individuals, shape a public imagine to be offered to the outsiders, set the local communities apart from nearby towns, other Italians, and foreigners (see Di Giovine [2014] for an thorough analysis of the case of Pietrelcina in Campania).

To better appreciate the role of *sagre paesane* as forms of memorial art, consider the case of *Cortes Apertas* annual local festivals which have taken place in up to 31 villages in Barbagia, the innermost region of Sardinia, each Autumn since 1996. On these occasions the courtyards of private homes are open to the public for exhibiting how to make, consume, and enjoy traditional local foods. The activities of making and eating local food performed by residents become a way for proudly presenting to the others their own identity and traditions in curated and, sometimes, fictional forms. In fact, as Mannia (2008) argued in his anthropological analysis of the phenomenon, the wide visibility and reach of *Cortes Apertas* have led local communities to re-create their identities in order to match exotic and fictional representations which can best meet the taste and the expectations of tourists. However, *Cortes Apertas* have given a way to local Sardinian communities for deciding what of their cultural heritage must be preserved and how to display it to the outsiders. In fact, *sagre paesane* in general, and *Cortes Apertas* in particular, represent a privileged way for fostering local control over traditional ways of cooking and dining by conferring to local communities the power to showcase or recreate their own gastronomic and cultural identity, celebrating, time to time, say, the conditions of the first agro-pastoral communities, or the worship of local saints linked to fertility, or the celebration of *balentes*, i.e., local heroes. This explicit attempt to construct a tribute to the past by means of cooking and dining – even at the cost of *artificially* making them more fascinating and palatable – in order to keep alive and build a shared memory,

makes *Cortes Apertas* suitable to be considered as forms of memorial art.

3.2 Eating local as social protest art

In their work, Borghini and Baldini (2021) follow Wolterstorff (2015) in defining social protest artworks as those which represent unjust states of affairs, shifting the empathy of the audience from targeting victims in a fictional situation to those who suffer in the real world. They provide a number of examples of forms of cooking and dining, which enable the onlookers or the diners to experience feelings and emotions that should push them into embracing the struggle of the people that the artwork is about. Specific instances of eating local may well take on this role involving the diners in a specific process of critically reviewing the current food system or letting them feel empathy for people caught up in tough situations.

A worthwhile illustration of eating local which promotes this kind of goal is the community garden and social agriculture project *Semino-Alimentare Positivo* in Bologna[7]. The project is carried out by non-European immigrants who grow some of their typical vegetables (e.g., okra, daikon, turmeric, cowpea) near the city of Bologna selling them through an e-commerce platform[8].

The project aims to use food as a proxy for achieving two social changes: (i) using food products for making Bologna people more aware of cultures and traditions of immigrants who have now become permanent residents of the city. In fact, the consumers may acquire new knowledge on how immigrants live in Italy and how they can be integrated in the Italian food and economic system by buying and consuming the vegetables from Semino, sharing flavors, narratives, and gaining insight into histories and traditions; (ii) endorse a specific and more encompassing approach on local food that includes products

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[7] <https://www.semino.org>.
[8] The platform's name is Local to You and it can be retried at the following link <https://localtoyou.it> (last accessed February 21, 2022).

originally from foreing countries which, nevertheless, may become local due to the proximity between production and consumption places and the role played by the producers within the host society.

Through the daily interactions of its participants involved in a political agenda of integration, the *Semino-Alimentare Positivo* project enables processes that may be seen as a form of social protest art, where consumers choose to take part in economic and culinary performances.

3.3 Eating local as art that enhances

Sometimes, art is a means to elevate an activity, often an undesirable one, enhancing the condition of its participants. The repertoire of work songs that are linked to the origins of blues is a famous case in point, as they were born out of the hard toils of plantation work. In their analysis of cooking and dining as forms of public art, Borghini and Baldini offer the example of homemade pasta as a form of art that enhances.[9] While pasta preparation serves the basic need of feeding someone, in certain instances it also leads to an act of creativity and craftsmanship. The toils of women preparing food for their families are enhanced by the beauty of the final product as well as by the possibility of sharing stories. The display of dexterity confers dignity to the workers; it also renders the final product unique and recognizable, bestowing upon the pasta a symbolic value of distinction. The artisticity embodied in the pasta, and in the pasta making, enhances, thus, both the producers as well as the consumers.

As we shall show, also some local ways of cooking and eating can provide interesting instances of how artistic value enhances either producers or consumers while holding a specific link with a locality. To illustrate we will set forth two kinds of examples: recipes and specific dining places.

The first kind of examples includes all those recipes whose invention or realization require a

link to a place and which are able to enhance the creativity, the moral status, or the existential conditions of producers or consumers. For instance, the chef Massimo Bottura (2017), assembled recipes conceived by renowned chefs and that use bread leftovers. This use of local and poor ingredients – oftentime the only ones available in that specific place – prepared and cooked for making them more palatable and enjoyable is common to many different culinary traditions. A nice case in point is *spaghetti alle vongole fujute* (literally: spaghetti with clams that have fled from the dish), a typical Napoletan recipe made with sea stones which should season the pasta *evoking* the flavor of clams. This recipe, made up with miserable and non edible ingredients, enhances its makers, who obtain the best from just a few stones, and its consumers, who can experience a nice flavor in spite of their economic condition.

The second kind of examples regards those places where the gastronomic experience happens. Some of those places are able to improve the diners' experience in virtue of their specific design or way of dining. For instance, consuming *Venetian's cicchetti* – small typical dishes traditionally served to accompany a glass of white wine – in *Bacari* – typical Venetian places to eat and drink – is an occasion for locals to experience simple dishes of the "low" table in a setting that facilitates social and communitarian exchanges and, at the same time, enables non-locals to encounter local forms of consumption and tastes while enjoying the company of Venetian people.

4. PUBLIC ART, EATING LOCAL, AND ITS CULINARY VALUES

To knit together the different arguments we have laid out, it is useful to offer a brief recap. In §2, we have shown that eating local, in all the three readings of the concept – the distance-driven approach, the terroir-driven approach, and the socially-driven approach – and in spite of their critical respects, can still foster political, cultural, social, and ecological values. Then, in §3, we argued that eating local can fall under three dif-

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[9] Borghini and Baldini make the specific example of Pasta Grannies (<https://www.pastagrannies.com/>).

ferent forms of public art – memorial art, social protest art, and art that enhances. In this section, we bridge these two results showing that considering, promoting, and valuing eating local as a form of public art offers a missing frame that is pivotal in promoting the political, cultural, social, and ecological values proper to each of the three approaches. More specifically, the intersection of the three approaches to "local" with the three forms of public art delivers nine typologies of eating local as public art, which we sum up in a schematic form in Table 1. Disentangling these typologies – we argue – is a first step in advancing extant policies and analyses of the value of eating local. We demonstrate the viability of this claim by offering real-world examples.

The spatial-driven approach assigns the status of local food to all those foods that are consumed at less than some fixed distance to their production place. Considering eating local under this view as the expression of a social protest art can more clearly bring to light one of its political meanings. In fact, many local food systems aim to set up and reinforce the social protest against the neoliberal and capitalistic societies by means of short distance, fresh, tasty, and healthy food sold directly to customers while, at the same time, promoting virtuous models of civic agriculture (e.g., DeLind [2002]), questioning established bias and discrimination, and fighting inequalities to food access (Alkon & Agyeman [2011]). A clear example is offered by the framework of Community Food Security (CFS) adopted by 125 organizations (Morales [2011]) which uses forms of eating local as tools for bringing together the community – including also marginalized black sub-groups – for collectively addressing hunger and malnutrition. In fact, a local community can learn more about itself and embrace shared goals while rejoining in the pleasures that ably prepared local foods can provide to them. Mastering the art of cooking local foods, in cases like this, provides thus a means to achieve and perfect forms of social protest.

Furthermore, some other specific instances of eating local framed by CFS, as outlined by

Morales (2011), can also be considered as forms of memorial art. For instance, Tohono O'odham Community Action's "Traditional Food Project" in Sells, Arizona, which has rehearsed the consumption of local wild food and the exploitation of monsoon rains for farming (see Hoover 2014). CFS frameworks like this comply with our understanding of eating local as a form of memorial art promoting food products meant to connect the diners to their cultural roots through the rediscovery of a flavor which should commemorate their ancestors in the context of their authentic land[10].

Furthermore, certain local foods systems endorsing the spatial-driven approach well represent forms of art that enhance. For instance, sometimes the production of local food is also tied to the farming and development of specific botanic species whose consumption may increase and improve community health. Thus, this conjunction (local food and the growing of specific kinds of plants) can enhance producers (who play a quasi-medical role in the community) as well as consumers who can benefit from the consumption of those plants (see Lucan [2019]).

The second approach considers as local food all those foods which enjoy a special link (historical, cultural, ecological) with their production places, regardless where and when they are consumed. Their explicit connection with a tradition rooted in a specific place make them best suited to be forms of memorial art. Consider, for instance, *Fiambre*, a traditional Guatemala salad which is prepared and consumed each year for collectively celebrating the Day of the Dead and the All Saints Day. This dish enables and solemnizes a special day for worshiping the dead, even when it is consumed far away from its original location, e.g., by migrant communities, playing the role of public memorial artwork for the Guatemalan people across the world.

This second approach seems to paradigmatically include those forms of eating local which

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[10] Note that what authenticity means in relation to food is questionable and we are not taking any stance to its meaning. For an analysis, see Borghini (2014b).

play the role of social protest art, as in the case of those communities which use the defense of some specific local food against the market requirements, emphasizing their role as vehicles for delivering values "rooted in the territory" which cannot be exploited for serving non-local goals. For instance, *Vignaioli Resistenti* (resistant winemakers) is an organized group of winemakers in Perugia who started fighting against the privatization of Perugia's covered market for then advancing differentiated forms of food activism. Their aim is to promote ethical winemaking and marketing, through the rhetoric and narratives of terroir which, according to them, should embody sustainable practices as intrinsic values in order to protect traditional knowledge as well as the work of the insiders (Ascione et al. [2020]). In fact, arguably, while non-sustainable farming methods may squander the local cultural heritage, appreciating and preserving the aesthetic qualities of local products can be a feasible way for defending and fostering collective patrimony .

In addition, some foods linked to terroir well represent clear examples of art that enhances. For instance, making and sharing the traditional Indonesian dish Tumpeng, a bunch of finely cone-shaped rice served with other side dishes, conveys religious and philosophical meanings, thus enhancing a proper sense of terrestrial as well as spiritual community. The shape of the rice in the dish, in fact, represents the verticality of God, while the wide variety of side dishes stand for the different Indonesian communities as well as natural elements (e.g., chili represents fire). Hence, sharing this dish enhances the diners going beyond mere nourishment insofar as it involves them in a religious, communitarian, and philosophical ritual (see Radix [2014]).

Finally, the third approach deems as local food all the products resulting from production and distribution methods meant to shorten the social distance between the various actors involved in a food chain. Also here, the lens of public art can enable scholars and stakeholders to appreciate local political goals. For instance, consider the newly established series of restaurants in the USA

– such as Dooky Chase's in New Orlean (Harris [2011]) – which are trying to recollect and revive the African American cuisine undercovering its roots that trace back before the deportation from Africa. These restaurants can be seen as forms of memorial art entangled with a socially-driven approach to eating local. In fact, of course, the new chefs cannot rely on the same ingredients of the first African Americans. Yet their recipes and dishes may be considered as local since they create, and sometimes recreate, a strong link between different generations of African Americans as well as members of other ethnic groups, building shared memories, strong sense of community, and future common goals. That is, under this approach, some dishes are able to memorialize the past by fostering novel links between younger and older generations.

A socially-driven approach to eating local may also be better appreciated when seen as a form of art that enhances. For instance, the restaurant *Orient Experience* in Venice offers dishes from different Eastern culinary traditions with the goal of spreading the common knowledge of non-Western cultures as well as telling the individual stories of migrants who came to Italy in quest for a better future. What is crucial here is the epistemic transfer of knowledge that takes place in the restaurant through the sharing of recipes and their stories, enhancing learning as well as facilitating inclusiveness.

Finally, on some occasions, this approach may be understood as a form of social protest art. For instance, the whole local food movement in Hong-Kong should be understood as «a cultural critique to neoliberalism, developmentalism, and consumerism in a costly city» (Ho [2020]: 2). The food prepared, delivered, and sold by the members of this movement in Hong-Kong is local only in virtue of the relation between the various – often international – actors since it is sometimes produced far away from Hong-Kong: it, nevertheless, delivers and conveys local values, such as friendship, loyalty, and social proximity explicitly criticizing a process of compulsory financialization and globalization of local food chains.

Table 1. Nine typologies of eating local as public art.

	Distance-driven approach	Terroir-driven approach	Socially-driven approach
Memorial art	Tohono O'odham Community Action's "Traditional Food Project"	Fiambre, traditional Guatemala dish	Dooky Chase's in New Orleans
Social protest art	Community Food Security	Vignaioli Resistenti, Perugia	Hong-Kong activists
Art that enhances	Medical local food	Tumpeng, traditional Indonesian dish	Orient Experience, Venice

5. CONCLUSION

In our paper, we have accomplished a twofold goal: first, we have argued that eating local *is* public art, in some instances, and, second, we have offered a framework for distinguishing nine different typologies of eating local as public art. Such a framework advances the scholarly discussion on the values of eating local by pointing out an unnoticed entanglement with studies of public art. Moreover, the framework provides a handy tool for stakeholders, including policy-makers, artists, chefs, and the public, opening new avenues for thinking strategies to adjoin food and art policies and discourses.

The potential impact of our claim that eating local is sometimes a form of public art are numerous and we cannot review them all here. We limit ourselves to list three areas of implementation. First, our study suggests that strategies for promoting local eating in a region, municipality, or neighborhood are *de facto* also strategies for supporting forms of public art. Not only the two strategies should be seen as going together; but, based on the nine typologies we offered, stakeholders could assess such strategies based on the types of eating local that they are willing to promote. Thus, for example, Bonotti and Barnhill (2022) contend – through the case of Eaton Mall in the suburb of Oakeigh, Melbourne – that eating local can sometimes play an important role

in promoting zoning policies; our paper suggests an elaboration of Bonotti and Barnhill's study, according to which zoning policies should be seen, in suitable instances, also as policies promoting public art in a neighborhood.

A second area of implementation is offered by policies promoting eating local for attracting tourists in a given region, municipality, or neighborhood: our study suggests that they can be viewed, in suitable instances, as policies promoting public art. For instance, during the Kimchi Festival in Seoul, residents and tourists are involved in a collective effort for the preparation of an enormous amount of kimchi (around 165 tons) – the so-called "kimjang," which is part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As reported by ABC news, a non-resident festival-goer said «it is a meaningful event because people gathered here to make kimchi not for themselves but for those who cannot afford to make kimchi (...) I would like to try making kimchi when I go back to my own country as well». Our study suggests that such collective forms of local eating and cooking together, while fostering tourism as well as other forms of soft powers related to food, can also bolster shared public artistic endeavors helping in memorializing ancient traditions and disseminating their existence[11].

A third area of implementation concerns strategies for supporting eating local as a form of cultural heritage in a given region, municipality, or neighborhood: seeing selected local eating venues as access points for experiences of public art can open up new avenues for supporting these two seemingly unrelated and important aspects of civic life. A useful example is represented by "Soul Food Pavilion," an artistic event which took place in Chicago in 2012, which was a sequence of five public meals inspired by the African American tradition of soul food, led by the artist Theaster Gates. The main idea of this happening was to reflect on and celebrate the culinary tradition of the African

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[11] On this event, see <https://abcnews.go.com/International/165-tons-kimchi-made-annual-seoul-festival/story?id=58918912> (last accessed February 28, 2022).

American community in Chicago, spreading its still underrepresented richness and meaningfulness to new generations while trying to create new links and stress its artistic value[12]. Our study may be useful for better grasping the artistic as well as social and political role of the shared heritage delivered through local forms of eating and cooking[13].

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Aisthesis

Public art as meditation on public time[1]

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Abstract. In this paper, we draw attention to temporal aspects of works of art displayed, performed, or held in public spaces, generally designated as public art. We argue that the debate on public art has been biased towards discussing the spatial. We focus on the "temporariness" of public art, the primary temporal feature that has been under scrutiny in recent philosophical literature on public art. We explore arguments it has been woven into. In particular, we discuss and reject using temporariness as the mark dissecting the realm of public art into two different artforms and argue that it is just one of many temporal properties public artworks have and can use to bear meanings. We outline other ways works of public art bear temporal features and interact with temporal properties of spaces they occupy, and argue that those too are, potentially, aesthetically significant. We illustrate some of these with an example of a particular public artistic site, the open-air art gallery «ArtWall» located in Prague, the Czech Republic.

Keywords: Public art, Memorials, Street art, Ephemerality, Temporality.

In her latest book, Nomi Claire Lazar argues that time, however natural it feels, is always constructed, mediated by marks and measures, and endlessly malleable. All experienced time is, Lazar says, shaped time. There are different ways to construe it: *via* calendars and clocks, but also by noticing a change of seasons, for example, or patterns of traffic. In Lazar's view, the latter also qualifies as technology, for «any reasonably regular event series can be used to measure time» (Lazar [2019]: 18). Time technologies that we experience time

through are thus either found (e.g., sunrise), or constructed mechanically (e.g., clocks). In either case, however, time is also shaped conceptually (e.g., *via* a concept of progress): clocks can be taken to measure the time flying away, or its endless return and repetition. Although time technologies help us to experience the shape of time, they do not, by themselves, impose a shape on it[2].

In this paper, we propose the idea that works of public art often aim to reflect on a shape of time and suggest that, in addition to conceptual re-shaping, time is also malleable aesthetically. The paper proceeds as follows. We begin by arguing that the debate on public art in aesthetics has been biased towards discussing the spatial, rather than temporal aspects of the artworks in question. We then focus on a primary temporal aspect of public art that is often noted, its temporariness (or ephemerality), and investigate the roles it plays in recent philosophical literature. We argue that temporariness has been given two roles: it has been considered as a somewhat prominent aesthetic feature of contemporary public art, and it has been understood as a standard feature of a newly coined category of contemporary public art. While we defend the former approach, we argue that works of public art have also recruited other temporal properties to pursue their aesthetic aim. Working with an example of an open-air art exhibition space located in Prague, we explain how a better understanding of the temporality of works of public art may help us to see why these works are valuable as works of public art.

«Public art» has been a contested category in recent literature. In practice, the label usually covers works of art displayed, performed, or held in public spaces – memorials and public sculptures as well as outdoor performances and art interventions; in theory, its scope has been disputed and new labels have been coined to designate some

out-of-the-museum-door artistic practices as different from a narrower class of «public art». While we argue against one way of dissecting the scope of public art into discrete units later, we concur with those who have emphasized a critical, or, as we prefer to say, reflective function of public art regarding the idea of the public and the common in a broad sense (Phillips [1989], Hein [1996]), i.e., of what has been in political discourse often called «the common good» and which relates to our «public lives» (Hussain [2018]). In this sense, the aim of public art as public art, in most general terms, is an aesthetic reflection of the public. As we show in the following part, this aim has been mostly understood in terms of public space.

I.

The aesthetics of public art has, understandably enough, devoted much space to the relationship between works of art and public space[3]. Two of the conditions that a work is supposed to meet to be classified as public art are related to its spatiality: its accessibility and site-specificity. Public art should be freely and readily accessible to everyone. Public art is also supposed to interact with its environment in some way or another. Both conditions are currently being debated in literature[4]. Some scholars argue that accessibility should

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[2] In her book, Lazar argues that it is a common mistake to conceive mechanically measured time, as introduced by clocks, as the time shaped in a particular way, e.g., as modern, non-cyclical and, allegedly, non-natural time. (Lazar [2019]: 32f).

[3] In the mother tongue of the authors, which shapes their pre-philosophical intuitions, the collocation «public art» is relatively infrequent, being usually substituted by the equivalent of «art in public space».

[4] We confine the discussion to these two features. These are not, however, the only ones being discussed in the literature. For example, Sondra Bacharach, who wishes to distinguish «public art» and «street art», claims that public art is officially sanctioned, institutionally supported, and usually subsidized by tax money (Bacharach [2015]). We do not agree that that the boundary can be drawn in line with the type of the artworks' sponsorship or commissioner – the network of agentive relations surrounding each artwork (its initiators, creators, owners, institutions, and publics) is too complex, unstable, and messy to help one 00create neat categories. We do not think, moreover, that there is a need to strictly separate the two

be understood not only in physical terms, but also in social, epistemic, and aesthetic terms (Adamu, Castello, Cukuier [2019], Willard [2019]). Similarly, the environment that the public work of art is supposed to interact with has been reconceived in non-physical terms (Hein [1996], Kwon [1997]).

Mary Beth Willard offers an interesting shift in the debate. She considers the two conditions as evaluative properties. She argues that both accessibility and site-specificity are gradable properties (the work can be more or less accessible and/ or site-specific) and the higher a work scores on both, the more valuable it is. When talking about site-specificity, she argues that to be site-specific means that the work in question achieves its artistic or aesthetic aims at least partly via «its precise location» (Willard [2019]: 7); site-specific works are, she says, «embodied meditation of the use of public space» (Willard [2019]: 8). To be accessible, on the other hand, the work needs to be sufficiently pretty, aesthetically satisfactory to everyone[5].

Let us focus on the first feature Willard singles out. Other things being equal, the work of public art is more successful as public art, the more site-specificity it achieves. This explains why we find works that can be placed anywhere less valuable – be it *Forever Marilyn*, a giant sculpture of Monroe by Seward Johnson, which has traveled the world (Willard's own example), or any of numerous examples of «plop art», a derogatory term (coined by Rachel Whiteread) signifying

public art that can be dropped anywhere (Knight [2014]). Site-specificity, however, is too general a term, covering many different relationships between a work and its environs, and it seems that not all site-specific works would pass what Willard understands as site-specificity in relation to public art. Miwon Kwon, for example, distinguishes between interruptive and assimilative site-specificity[6]; the former, and not the latter, seems closer to the way Willard understands the concept. What does site-specificity mean with respect to public art then? As a work of public art, the work should be related to the site in a specific way: to meditate, as Willard herself has it, on the use of public space, that is on the way a particular site works as a public space. A highly site-specific public artwork thus often brings about a disruptive experience, «forcing commuters to interact with it, and forcing them to think about how they» normally use the specific place (Willard [2019]: 7-8). The above-mentioned works possibly fail, as works of public art, because they did not manage to rephrase the idea of public space by means of their locations.

We thus suggest a revision of Willard's argument. We argue that site-specificity is not a desideratum of public art *per se*, but because it is a potent way to achieve public art's aim, which is a reflection of the common good. This aim can be (and has been) realized in many ways. Since «public space» has been so important for our society and its understanding of the common good, site-specificity – as a dialogue with a site in terms of its use as public space – is a likely candidate for the critical function works of public art perform; it is not, however, the only property works of public art have that can be recruited in this way. In the following discussion on temporality of public art, we offer reconsideration of another noted feature of works (their temporariness) in terms of its potential to perform a critical or "meditative" function that public art is supposed to hold as public art. We propose that it does so by helping

categories, «public art» and «street art»: many artists she refers to would find it confusing that they are classified as «street artists» and not as «public artists». *Pace* Bacharach as well as Riggle (as discussed later) and Andrzejewski (2017), in this essay we do not distinguish «street art» from «public art».

[5] Accessibility is, for Willard, a multivocal word. An important subtype of it is what we call «aesthetic accessibility», (Willard calls it «epistemic accessibility»), which she defines as an «ease of aesthetic appreciation». Willard further argues that there is an inner tension between the two desiderata, i.e., the more satisfying the work is with respect to one of them, the less it is, necessarily, with respect to the other. A perfect balance between them is a delicate matter and, as witnessed by a relatively low number of successful public works of art, it is rare to achieve.

[6] Kwon follows Rosalyn Deutsche in this respect. See (Kwon [1997]: 85 and 3n).

us to shape another potent dimension of public lives, public time.

II.

Although «physical space» in the debate has been gradually replaced by «social space» or «social sphere», which is, arguably, as much a temporal category as a spatial one, temporal aspects of public art have not been sufficiently explored[7] – with an important exception. The life cycle of contemporary works of public art is described as relatively short, and their authors, as well as recipients, expect them to «die», either naturally, as the works are made from non-lasting materials and exposed to forces of nature, or intentionally, by the artist's decision, an act of vandalism, power, or under layers of overlapping commentaries[8]. The temporal dimension of contemporary works of public art has thus been considered mainly in terms of their temporariness or ephemerality.

Patricia Phillips, who published an essay titled *Temporality in Public Art* in «Art Journal» in 1989, argues that public art needs to be «committed to the temporary»[9]. She reviews several successful public art projects taking place in New York City in the period of early 1970's to late 1980's and notices that all of them were deliberately short-lived. This feature, she argues, is a part of their meaning structure. In reference to Alfredo Jaar's *Rushes* (1986), a poster installation held for barely a month at a New York subway platform, she claims that the temporary character of the

exhibition «accentuates the urgency of the ideas» it expresses (Phillips [1989]: 335). The fact that works of contemporary public art are short-lived also, she says, underscores their experimental character and their ability to give space to actual topics and issues. At some places of her essay, though, she seems to be implying more: temporariness of public art is not only a matter of emphasis. By being temporary, these works are *about* time: about the relationship between the permanent and the unstable, which was, according to her, so acutely needed. Contemporary public art is, for her, «a forum of investigation, articulation, and constructive reappraisal» of the idea of time itself (Phillips [1989]: 331).

Time is also built into the very idea of public art for W.J.T. Mitchell, who speaks about «a certain fragility of temporariness in public artworks themselves» (Mitchell [1990]: 885). By being destroyable and frequently destroyed, they, as he claims, establish «new relations between the traditional «timeless» work of art and the transient generations, the "publics", that are addressed by it» (Mitchell [1990]: 885). A fitting example of this strategy, though understandably not mentioned by Mitchell in 1990, is *The Skoghall Konsthall* (2000), a more recent work by Alfredo Jaar. The artist was invited to create a work of public art by a small Swedish town, which was hoping to get on the map of contemporary art in the country. He designed a light building made of wood and paper which was set on fire the night after it was open to the public – a gesture of destruction particularly poignant at the backdrop of the town officials' hope for eternity. As phrased by Claire Doherty, who selected this work as the paradigmatic case of contemporary public art, the work «unsettles the lifespan of public art by demonstrating that the fleeting moment might be more valuable than the permanent, static public sculpture» (Doherty [2015]: 11-12).

Phillips and Mitchell thus concur that works of public art serve as a critical device designed to question a conception of time associated with art and the values it represents. By emphasizing their own transience, these works change the shape

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[7] Curtis L. Carter, for example, literally finishes his essay on sculpture by claiming: «The temporal dimension is of particular significance in public sculpture, as it can involve history as well as thought and actions in real time» (Carter [2005]: 653). He does not, unfortunately, elaborate on this further.

[8] Commentaries surrounding and even overlapping the work are considered by Adam Andrzejewski as an indicator of the work's success in the context of street art. See Andrzejewski (2017).

[9] «Public art requires a more passionate commitment to the temporary – to the information culled from the short-lived project» (Phillips [1989]: 331).

of time as it is imposed by the concept of art. It is because these works fail to meet the temporal expectations evoked by the idea of an artwork – its endurance, eternality of its message, and, as the phrase goes, its testability by time[10] – that they may be read as speaking about a different kind of time, the uncertain, accelerating, and fragmentary time of our age. The fact that those works are temporary becomes a part of their meaning structure and turns into an aesthetic evaluative property, i.e., a property relevant to the appreciation of an artwork as public art, because it initiates a dialogue with a conception of public time.[11] By being temporary, these works initiate a dialogue with a particular conception of public time, the one presented by most works of public art of the past (e.g., memorials).

What Mitchell and Phillips do is thus analogous to a theoretical move described above in relation to Willard: a particular property (temporariness and site-specificity, respectively) is understood in terms of its role in appraisal of the work as a work of public art (reflecting the common good, e.g., public space and public time, respectively). Although temporariness has played an important role in public art recently, it is worth emphasizing that not all temporary works single out temporariness as their evaluative property. Only if temporariness is thematized by the artist (Deprez [2020]) may it turn out to be a significant, or even pivotal, aspect that underlies the work's evaluation as a work of public art. Moreover, not all works that are temporary significantly call for their interpretation in the scope of public time as presented by the concept of art (as both Mitchell and Phillips suggest). For instance, Olafur

Eliasson and Minik Rosing's *Ice Watch* – twenty-four blocks of ice transported from Greenland and installed in front of the Tate Modern in December 2018 (discussed by Deprez) – accentuated temporariness by literally melting away in front of the public. Their temporariness, however, should be interpreted not as a critique of the art's alleged eternality, but the one of nature.

We would like to distinguish the view that considers temporariness as a relatively common meaning-bearing property of works of public art from a different one which also concerns temporariness, but uses it to achieve a different theoretical goal. Some scholars have written about temporariness of public art not in terms of its potential for evaluation, but as the criterion dissecting the category of public art into two essentially different artforms.

It is wrong, those scholars say, to think about contemporary public art practices as belonging to the same artform as memorials and public statues: the latter, it is claimed, aim at eternity, while the former exemplify the lack of it. Nicholas Riggle, for one, distinguishes «street art» and «public art» using a criterion of ephemerality (Riggle [2010]). In his terminology, it is «street art» which is necessarily temporary, «committed to temporality», while «public art» aims at permanency. Other labels – such as «new genre public art» – have been used to touch the same distinction between «old» and «new» artistic practices performed in the public space and mark it by their contrasting temporal features.

However, if the aim is to create a new category of art, then relying on temporariness does not seem to be the best strategy. First, the aim itself is questionable: maintaining one category for both types of public art, i.e., (allegedly) the traditional as well as the recent one, seems to be more desirable for the sake of philosophical (or art-historical) parsimony and it is also, arguably, more accordant with the common practice. Second, although some works happen to be temporary, they could also be otherwise (and *vice versa*): being temporary is an accidental property for many of the works in question. And finally, coining a new artform, be

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[10] For Anthony Savile, great works are those that pass the test of time; hence, the works which are temporary are not even eligible for this kind of aesthetic value (Savile [1982]).

[11] Our concept of aesthetic evaluative property is close to what Eleen M. Deprez calls «meaning-bearing properties», i.e., «features or aspects of a work (visible or invisible) that are imbued with significance» (Deprez [2020]). We argue that some works of public art thematize the concept of time by being temporary.

it «new genre public art» or «street art», based on the work's inherent impermanence, would make it difficult to understand those works for which temporariness *is* significant. Let me elaborate on the third reason.

Vigorously temporary artworks, such as *The Skoghall Konsthall*, seem to work only against the backdrop of a category that does incorporate permanent works. Because the expectation of permanence is called forth, burning the *Konsthall* down is such a powerful gesture. If there was a special category of new public art which is, standardly, short-lived, its ephemerality would tend to, aesthetically, disappear[12]. Put differently, if ephemerality is a constitutive feature of (new) public art, then these works are no longer «about» time, at least not by virtue of their being temporary or ephemeral.

While temporariness fails as a standard feature of (new) public art, it is a good candidate for a property that, if it happens to be a part of the meaning of the work in question, enables understanding of how the reflective or critical function works of public art are supposed to perform can run. By questioning temporal expectations generated by the concept of art, it contributes to a critical debate on public time as it is shaped by art, its practices, and institutions.

III.

At the beginning of this essay, we referred to the book by Lazar, who discusses «time» in terms of different «temporalities», i.e., appearances of time as shaped. She emphasizes that there are many ways to lay out time experience and that

we are capable of switching from one shape to the other depending on circumstances and aims. The time of a mother-to-be, who experiences it «analogously», via her own body, flows differently, more densely in a way, than time experienced next to a newly born child, which jumps from one snapshot to the other[13]. But the shape of time can also be changed on a more general level. The time of our great grandmothers, we believe, moved differently than our owns.

Although our lives may be embedded in several different temporalities, among which we can easily switch under relevant circumstances, some of them can seem to be more natural than other ones – reinforced by being «standardized» and shared with other members of society. Lazar traces shapes of time made visible during times of upheavals or regime changes, via acts and words of those in power, but many sociologists of time have focused on the way time is filtered and molded by the sciences, technologies, institutions, and businesses. Each age seems to have its own time and ours has been discussed mainly in terms of acceleration and consequent desynchronization, i.e., the «tension between the accelerative pace of modern social structures and the increasing inability to accommodate this pace by individuals and social institutions» (Vostal [2015]: 72)[14].

In this essay, we have occasionally referred to «public time» to express the idea of a time shape being imposed on our experience in politically or socially effective ways. Public time is the time that we live in and share as members of society, a time-frame (or timeframes) imposed on our lives. If we are right that the aim of public art is to reflect on the idea of the public and the common, then public time is as good a candidate for aesthetic reconsideration as public space. Works of public art may help us to reflect on the shape of public time and question a claim on its universal availability,

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[12] Although Walton argues, in his essay, that standard properties are not always aesthetically ineffective, they primarily «serve to determine what *kind* of a representation the work is»; their aesthetic force, if any, tends to be always relegated to the backdrop of aesthetic evaluation which is, primarily, focused on variable properties (Walton [1970]: 346). In my opinion, Willard (2019), who builds her theory on Walton, misses this point when she requires that site-specificity and accessibility be both standard and *primary* aesthetic evaluative features of public art.

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[13] This is our own formulation, not Lazar's one. Lazar mentions, however, that «a nursing mother's day may be marked by the baby's sleeping, waking, and feeding, regardless of the clock» (Lazar [2019]: 28).

[14] He is referring here to Hartmut Rosa's influential concepts and analyses.

as well as track and emphasize some of the available alternatives.

Some authors have noticed that in the age of acceleration, museums of art have played the role of «oases of deceleration»[15], and thus, by giving an alleged relief from the pressure, fit into a temporal landscape of the 21st century all too well[16] – another grist for the mill of those who speak about public art's commitment to the temporary and understand it, primarily, as a critique oriented towards the shape of time imposed by the concept of art. We are sympathetic to this argument; yet we believe that there are other temporal properties that works of public art have and by means of which they can perform their function as works of public art.

It seems that time has always been at the forefront of public art. Take monuments and memorials. The very material that many memorials use – stone – can accrue temporal meaning and become part of their meaning structure, charging the subject of their representation with the aura of permanence[17]. As reminders of historical events, they often arouse – to use the term coined by Derek Turner (Turner [2019]: 7) – «stereotemporal» experience, helping us to see how history has changed the site they are displayed at: the shape of time thus becomes literally visible for us to explore. Monuments are, to be sure, often politically commissioned: as reminders of either the great or the terrible, they form our relationship to the past and the way we understand it as related

to our present. And finally, the gesture of erecting a memorial is as time-shaping as the gesture of its removal: although the latter is often motivated by specific political or social reasons, it may also signal the need to change the temporal horizon, to reshape public time. In our reading, both acts are part and parcel of what memorials are.

With respect to the last aspect of a memorial's temporality, it is worth noting that their erection and removals are not the only gestures that are regularly connected to them. Most memorials and public sculptures are surrounded by a variety of public acts, from laying state representatives wreaths, to serving as meeting places for demonstrations, to diverse interventions by (mostly anonymous) artists[18]. Understanding memorials as foci of performative events may help us see them as similarly «living» and in need of being actualized, as some of their more temporary counterparts.

By «stereotemporalizing» our experience, a memorial can inject temporality into a place. Sometimes, however, the place is already explicitly temporal: it exhibits a specific shape of time, although on our daily errands we might not be in a position to reflect on it. By its name, Jaar's *Rushes* emphasizes a certain conception of time that is supposedly held both by subjects depicted in the photographs – desperate fortune seekers participating in a questionable gold rush in Serra Pelada in Brazil, as well as by those who might see the photos while rushing to work in the Financial District of Manhattan. For Phillips this work is «about» time because it reconceives the temporal expectations associated with the concept of art. By using advertising displays on a subway platform, Jaar however distances himself from the concept of art and the expectations it elicits. He rather refers to time as it is experienced by commuters during

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[15] «Oasis of deceleration» is another term coined by Hartmut Rosa, see (Vostal [2015]: 74).

[16] Verhagen, for example, notices that «social acceleration has revitalized the image of the museum as a pole of resistance to the quickening dynamics of contemporary existence» (131); he, however, criticizes such image of the museum as false. To be resistant, it does not suffice that the work is exhibited in the «slow» museum; it needs to create «a dialogue with its temporal environment» (135). That, as Verhagen richly illustrates, may lead to uncovering the time of the museum as composed of different time-zones and realizing that some of those are as accelerated as our public lives (Verhagen [2020]).

[17] Higgins (2019) says that stones are «ready symbols for permanence» (12).

[18] See, for example, a statue by Skule Waksvik, located at a shopping mall owned space, called *Lady at the Dock* with an added shopping plastic bag to her hand (discussed by Bengtsen [2013]) or the *Duke of Wellington* statue by Carlo Marochetti, erected in 1844 in at Royal Exchange Square in Glasgow, whose head is since the 1980s regularly decorated by a traffic cone.

rush hour and helps us to see that this temporality, imposed by the capitalist system of which they are a part, may have disastrous consequences.

Commuting zones, such as the subway station platform that Jaar used, have now become established as an art space. It is surprising because they do not provide what has traditionally been considered ideal conditions for artwork reception: they do not sustain undisturbed, contemplative observation. The reason why they seem to be so suitable for exhibiting works of public art might have to do with the fact that these locations palpably incorporate the most obvious shape of our public time, its acceleration. Similarly to those works that are, as Willard said, «embodied meditation of the use of public space», works displayed at transport and commuting zones might seek to become embodied meditation of the use on public time.

IV.

In the closing part, we present an example of public art exhibited in a «speed zone», coming from our geographical region, the Czech Republic. We expect, however, that the readers may have experienced similar art locations in their own geographical contexts. In fact, the work by Alfredo Jaar referred to above, might fit into the setting quite well.

The ArtWall is an open-air contemporary art gallery situated alongside one of the busiest speed roads in Prague's city center. The gallery consists of seven large panels placed in the niches of the wall, which is located at the foot of a hill called «Letná». As a gallery of public art, the Art-Wall was established in 2005[19]. Since 2013, Lenka

Kukurová and Zuzana Štefková have worked as the ArtWall principal curators. The artists' projects exhibited in the seven panels are selected by the curators based on how they fit the ArtWall's mission criteria, i.e., primarily their potential to address and express important social and political issues. In an interview, the curators emphasized that they seek to present works that manage to balance somewhat direct visual impact, partly dictated by the unusual viewing conditions, and communication of complicated political and/or social issues[20]. Each exhibition takes approximately two months.

The spatio-temporal context of the ArtWall location is worth pausing at. At the top of the hill, there used to tower a controversial Stalin monument, at the time the world's largest representation of Stalin[21]. It was erected in 1955 and meant to endure «for eternity», but was destroyed seven years after its unveiling[22]. After 1989, the year of the Velvet Revolution ending communist rule in the country, the empty pedestal was reappropriated by a huge kinetic sculpture created by Vratislav Karel Novák and titled *Time Machine* by the artist[23]. The sculpture was originally designed as

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[19] The gallery was closed in 2008 and reopened in 2011. Its closing, or rather withdrawing from the lease contract by the City of Prague Municipality, was accompanied by a public scandal. At the time, the gallery exhibited a project by Guma Guar, a group of Czech artists, named «Collective Identity». The project was a criticism of the municipal advertising campaign for hosting the Olympic Games in Prague. «Collective Identity» offered a satirical commentary on the campaign by exhibiting photos of the Czech financiers, who gained their property by

illegal means and via political connections, and were in many cases accused, accompanied with the official motto «We are all in the national team». As the current curators claim, this is a rare case of political censorship of art after the year 1989.

[20] The interview with Lenka Kukurová and Zuzana Štefková, made for this paper, took place online in June 2021. The authors would like to thank the curators for making themselves available.

[21] The statue was made by a Czech sculptor Otakar Svec (1892 – 1955). It was a group statue representing a giant Stalin followed by a cohort of slightly smaller, Soviet and Czechoslovak citizens.

[22] A competition for the monument was announced in 1949, but construction of the colossal statue was finished no sooner than in 1955. Its inauguration two years after Stalin's death, in the period later labeled as de-Stalinization, was ill-timed. For an intricate narrative related to the statue's construction, demolition, and its aftermath, see Pichova (2008).

[23] *Stroj času* (Time Machine) by Vratislav K. Novák (1942-2014) is better known as «The Metronome». For more information regarding the kinetic sculpture

a temporary work created for the Czechoslovak General Exhibition in 1991 but it has not been taken down to date. Interestingly, these two works occupying the same location at different times, provide fitting examples of an *accidently* temporary work of public art on the one hand and *accidently* permanent work on the other. Moreover, both works are «about» time, but not in terms of their being permanent or temporary, but rather by means of their emphasized monumentalism and by being a representation of a metronome[24], respectively.

The gallery focuses on generally avoided, globally resonant issues, such as questions of feminism, LGBTQ, racism, homophobia, homelessness, sexual violence, xenophobia, or arms trade, as well as some Czech-specific topics, such as controversial parts of the national history. For example, in the 2013 exhibition «The Art of Killing»[25] Lukáš Houdek reflected on the topic of the violence committed by Czech people on German inhabitants after the Second World War. Houdek created a series of black and white photos of Barbie and Ken dolls depicting re-enactments of real events of displacement of Czech Germans taking place at the borders of post-war Czechoslovakia. The images are highly disturbing, not only due to the level of violence displayed, but also by the eerie and uncomfortable feeling caused by the empty faces and the smiles of the dolls. To this day, Czech public opinion has not been united on the topic, nor reconciled with the historical events,

despite this topic gaining more attention lately in other artworks[26]. Houdek's exhibition provoked considerable discussion in the media in the Czech Republic and beyond, as well as directly in the public[27].

Houdek's exhibition is described here as an example of the gallery's artistic focus on politically and socially engaging public art; in the paper, we are interested in the relation between artistic projects of this kind (and not in any specific exhibition) and the venue they are presented at. Let us now elaborate on the venue's features. Since ArtWall is not a gallery one has to go to deliberately, but usually passes by on daily errands, literally anyone can see the artworks, even those people who usually would not go to a gallery, especially not a gallery of contemporary art. The ArtWall thus at least partially avoids the problem of «preaching to the saved», i.e., opening potentially controversial or problematic topics to typical recipients of contemporary art who are already aware of the issue in question. Moreover, as the curators of the wall emphasized in the interview, the viewer's experience is not to be exhausted by the actual exposure to the works installed in the space of those seven wall niches; they expect view-

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and its location, see https://praguepeacetrail.org/time-machine-instead-of-stalin. For more information about the artist, see https://www.artlist.cz/en/vratislav-karel-novak-100875/.

[24] «Despite the high winds and financial problems that occasionally cause it to miss a beat, the metronome's steady ticking calls attention to the inevitability of time's passage, as well as to the city's musical history» (Píchová [2008]: 615)

[25] The exhibition was held simultaneously in the National Technical Library and at the ArtWall. For more information on the exhibition as well as the artist, see press release at https://www.artwallgallery.cz/sites/default/files/exhibition/downloads/2019-07/PR_houdek_eng.pdf and the artist's website at https://www.houdeklukas.com/killing.

[26] A theatre play *An Eyewitness* (Očitý svědek, dir. Jiří Havelka), which premiered recently on an «online stage» of the Czech National Theatre, is based on real events from 1945 when more than two hundred civilians, including women and children, were murdered. Another example may be the recent film by a Czech director Bohdan Sláma *Shadow Country* (Krajina ve stínu, 2020), which also deals with the aggression of Czech people towards German neighbors at the end of the Second World War.

[27] Lukáš Houdek said that, while the exhibition was on, he received emails from the public daily. «Some of them were upset, outraged, even mad. I was called a national traitor; some authors have even desired my death. I decided that I would answer each of them, but discussion was unfortunately only possible in some cases. There were positive reactions as well, a huge support for me». The author's words are quoted in Magdalena Wagner: Verschwommene Vergangenheit Ein Fotoprojekt über die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen. *JÁDU*, February 2014, https://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/kul/de12369331.htm.

ers to go beyond the works' display, seek further information and join the events and discussion held in the neighborhood or online.

This feature is characteristic for a new genre public art; as Suzanne Lacy noticed, its expected manner of reception is «conversation rather than visual experience» (Lacy [2010]: 22). We believe, however, that – in addition to exhibiting «conversational» artworks – the ArtWall exemplifies this characteristic by its unusually restrictive viewing conditions, and thus increases not only their political but also their aesthetic impact. Most of the public sees the works exhibited on the ArtWall while commuting to and from work; as one of the curators said: «The tram number 17 is the best one to take, if you want to see our exhibition». The hostility to prolonged contemplation, that the location embodies, a constant move in one or the other direction, and short but repeated, usually twice-a-day exposures to the works, inspire a more inquisitive look with an erotetic structure[28] and provoke an active search for information beyond the actual placement of the exhibition. The display of politically engaged, provocative works under these unstable, accelerated conditions seems to us aesthetically successful because the challenge these works pose by their often de-stabilizing message is mirrored in the missing viewpoint this open-air gallery features.

The temporal features of the gallery's location at the «ticking» hill of Letná, crowned by the kinetic Metronome sculpture and surrounded by a constant movement of means of transport provide suitable aesthetic counterparts to the political artworks of the present day. Without the aspect of temporality, the effect of artworks at ArtWall gallery and their social impact could not be fully explained. It is present in the aspect of their being perceived in glimpses and quick succession, in the aspect of bringing forward (generally avoided and unmoving) social or political issues, and in the aspect of emphasizing the changing forms of time construction we connect with the issues presented by the exhibited artworks. It may help us to realize that while our time seems to be moving forward quickly and aimfully, there are groups of people and sets of problems for which time has a different pace, texture, and shape.

V.

In this article, we have argued that public art focuses on meditating on public features of our lives, primarily in terms of their places and times. We have criticized the tendency to put a sole emphasis on the relation between public art and public space. As other scholars, we have noted that a temporal dimension of works of public art has been made prominent recently, we but have nevertheless rejected that it is reducible to works' being temporary (or ephemeral). We have also argued against using these two characteristics as standard features of two different artforms, such as «street art» and «public art», respectively. To flesh out the idea of public art as meditating on public time, we speculated on temporal features of art exhibitions taking place at commuting zones. We have suggested that the art spaces that occupy commuting zones, such as the ArtWall gallery in Prague, may be aesthetically effective, partly due to their embeddedness in the environment that wears seemingly universally shared public time of our society on its sleeve. We have speculated that a temporally specific environment, such as this one, may become a part of the meaning of those works that seek to compare and contrast the accelerated, progressive public time with the unmoving or decelerating pace of those issues and subjects occupying less prominent political and social areas.

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[28] We are using the term that Noël Carroll discusses in the context of narrative. See, for example, Carroll (2007).

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Community gardens as public art

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to discuss community gardens as works of public art. Even if artistic status of gardens has been widely recognized, it is usually taken into account when historic gardens and parks or works of contemporary landscapes architects are concerned. However, there are good reasons to approach community gardens as artworks, as well. First, aligning community gardens with contemporary art is honorific, in the sense that it shows that they may be considered in another way than seeing them only as vernacular art, significant because of its social and political dimension. Second, in spite of their allegedly edenic character, community gardens are very often contested spaces, while the conflicts may be sparked by, among other things, the community garden aesthetics. In order to recognize community gardens as art it is useful to refer to new genre public art and not to "paradigmatic arts" such as architecture or painting.

Keywords: art, community gardens, public art, new genre public art.

> *It doesn't have to look like public art*
> *Don't make it for a community.*
> *Create a community.*
> *Don't waste time on definitions.*
> *(New Rules of Public Art, 2013)*

1. INTRODUCTION: CITIES, GARDENS AND ART

The garden is one of the most influential *topoi* in Western culture. Rich in edenic connotations (Fagiolo, Giusti Cazzato [1999]; Fenner [2022]), it has been used in various cultural and historical contexts throughout the ages to think of utopic spaces where different, sometimes even contradictory qualities were supposed to meet. As such, it has been also conceived of as a sort of ideal landscape, be it natural or man-made. Thus, it has also served as a useful metaphor desribing the whole world as bountiful and harmonious, a world where people live in peace and enjoy the fruits of their labor, and where at the same time nature is allowed to flourish (Pietro-

grande [1996]). As a result, gardening, understood as planning a garden as well as cultivating it, has been recognised as a model of how landscapes should be designed and managed. Since one of the 18th-century landscape architects was said to have leapt the fence and seen that the whole world was a garden (Hunt, Willis [1988]: 313), gardening has been frequently pointed at as a reference for landscape architecture. Even if in its origins the reference was mainly aesthetic, it has nowadays aquired mainly environmental tones. Let's turn our planet into a garden! – such is an adage that is often offered as an indication how people should approach the environment in the Anthropocene. In fact, it seems that the concept of Anthropocene has reinvigorated the old idea (Di Paola [2017]; Diogo et al. [2019]). It is then no wonder that the garden metaphor has been used with regard to cities (Spirn [1984]), and cityplanning has been discussed in terms of gardening (Berleant [1992]).

At the same time, however, garden may be interpreted as a *topos* in a fully material sense, i.e. as a material space that has, in fact, been designed and cultivated in line with the meanings and values associated with the idea of the garden. Gardens may be conceived of as effective utopias or heterotopias (Foucault [1986]). This holds equally true for medieval herbal gardens, early modern gardens, as well as for private back yards, allotments or community gardens.

The fact that all gardens are inevitably *topoi* in the metaphorical, as well as literal sense of the term – their design and maintenance require as much theory as down-to-earth practice – is their strenght and weakness at the same time, since it makes them desirable on the one hand and threatening the "non-gardenesque" *status quo* on the other. An illustration of this tension may be found in the words of Rudolf Giuliani, former mayor of New York City. During a debate on the future of urban gardens in the city, he claimed that «if you live in an unrealistic world, then you can say everything should be a community garden» (quoted in: Light [2000]).

Even if one may be skeptical about turning cities into community gardens, the beneficial role of urban green spaces is beyond discussion. No matter whether they are historic gardens, public parks, squares, allotment gardens or community gardens, they have important cultural, social, political and environmental functions. Even if the idea of a garden-city is nowadays mainly a historical concept, it is hard to imagine a contemporary city – no matter how large – without green spaces of one sort or another, or without urban green programmes. It is then understandable why much attention has recently been paid to these issues by the academics who quite unanimously appreciate green spaces, including community garderns, as determinants of city dwellers' physical and mental well-being.

It is noteworthy, however, that it is this perspective precisely that defines how contemporary urban gardens are usually interpreted and appreciated. If gardens of the past – from Renaissance villas and Baroque formal gardens to English landscape gardens and 19th-century city parks – are seen as having various cultural, social and political functions, as well as aeshetic or artistic values, today's private yards, gardening allotments and community gardens, playing similar roles, seem largely devoid of aesthetic qualities or lacking any conspicous aesthetic qualities. Even if, philosophically speaking, the idea that gardens are art works is debatable (Leddy [1988]; Miller [1993]; Ross [1998], Salwa [2014]), it is widely acknowledged within garden studies that they are. Nonetheless, this belief is largely limited to grand historic gardens and sophisticated contemporary landscape designs. It is as if it did not make any sense to think of urban gardens, that is, gardens belonging to and cared for by ordinary people, in terms of works of art. In order for a garden to be considered a contemporary artwork it has to be either designed by a professional landscape designer (historically speaking, landscape architecture evolved from the art of gardening), or an element of an artistic agenda realized by a professional artist or an art institution. In fact, it is land art that is mentioned as the offspring of the gardening art (Ross [1998]). One could also here add ecological art, since many "ecoventions" (Spaid [2002],

[2017]) are based on gardening practices. If modest urban gardens are approached as art, they are tentatively analyzed as vernacular artworks, that is, vernacular works whose artistic qualities still have to be reckognized and acknowledged. (Hunt [1993]; Sheehy [1998]).

There are at least two inter-related reasons for the reluctance to think in artistic terms of gardens that are neither noteworthy works of landscape designers nor planned and cultivated by artists themselves. First, gardens, if approached as works of art, are compared to works of "paradigmatic arts" (Saito [2007]: 18-28) such as painting, sculpture, architecture, sometimes poetry and music (Hunt [1998], [2000]; Miller [1998]) and analyzed accordingly, that is, in terms of form (style) and content (meaning). What is more, approaching them as art is less of a classificatory act and more of a qualificatory one – certain gardens are thought to be artworks because of their excellence (Assunto [1988]). Second, aesthetic qualities of gardens are thought to be analogous to those one can find in paradigmatic arts, beauty being the most desired one, which implies, among other things, a contemplative mode of aesthetic experience. Hence, there may be little doubt that ordinary or vernacular gardens – sites less of contemplation than physical labor – more often than not do not meet the abovementioned artistic or aesthetic criteria. In other words, allotment and community gardens fall prey to what may be termed art-centeredness.[1]

At the same time, it is difficult not to agree with Michel Conan who writes:

Why does contemporary Garden Art receive so little attention from art critics, even less than Land Art, Earthworks or Landscape Design? This is somewhat extraordinary since gardens have been more numerous an ubiquitous in contemporary western cities over the last fifty years than at any previous time in their history […]. One may say that gardening is one of the very few arts that has been practiced on a large scale by amateurs, as opposed to painting, sculpture, or any of the new visual arts during the last forty years, and sometimes with a degree of success that earned their authors local or even world-wide recognition. (Conan [2007]: 3).

One way to introduce gardens into the field of art and to approach them in terms of works of art that Conan has in mind is to change the artistic references. It is not painting, sculpture or architecture that one should take into consideration, but public art. This holds especially true for community gardens. And there are good reasons to make this move.

Above all, it may be claimed that all gardens, even private ones, are at least partly public, since «the garden is an interface between the privacy of the house and the civic property of the street. It is a space onto which others can look, examine and judge» (Taylor [2008]: 6). However, there may be little doubt that certain gardens are more public than others, and this is the case not only of historic gardens or city parks, but also of community gardens.

Just as paradigmatic arts may seem to be the evident context in which one should place gardens of the past – statues and buildings were frequent in gardens, whereas paintings offered iconographical and compositional motifs used in them – so is contemporary public art for urban gardens, even if for reasons other than iconography or style, 20th and 21st century city parks are public spaces *par excellence*, so it is quite self-evident that they should be considered in the context of public art. Yet, analyses have hitherto mainly focused on them either as works of landscape architecture that have an inherently public character (the public character, though, has been usually analyzed as having nothing to do with their artistic qualities) or as spaces where monuments or statues («cannons in the park» (Baca [1995]: 131)) are placed. Undisputedly, such a view is justified and may be fruitful, but it does not quite apply to community gardens because they differ so much from other urban public green areas in their looks and functions. A closer context for community gardens

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[1] In this respect they share the fate of nature (Carlson, Berleant 2004; Carlson 2009) and the everyday (Leddy 2012; Saito 2007, 2017).

may be found in the already mentioned land-art or ecological art, both public genres, too, and ones that have tried in one way or another to overcome the paradigmatic arts, and in doing so have raised issues that are crucial also for community gardens (e.g. the relationship between people and nature). There is, however, another form of public art, with which it is possible to juxtapose community gardens and what seems to be the closest artistic framework they may be put in. Namely, new genre public art.

What follows, then, will be a sort of analogical reasoning that is supposed to lay foundations for acknowledging that community gardens are public art. Lucy Lippard once stated that «the park is probably the most effective public art form there is – the park itself as an ongoing process, the domain where society and nature meet» (quoted in Hergreaves [1983]: 63). It seems that it is possible to make an analogous statement about community gardens.

2. NEW GENRE PUBLIC ART: FROM SITE-SPECIFICITY TO COMMUNITY-SPECIFICITY

Public art is an ambigous concept. On the one hand, it may be said that «no art is "private"» (Hein [1996]: 1) and that «no one asked for art to privatized. It has always been part of our collective commons, the means by which the fruits of imagination are plowed back into shared experience. […] There is no such thing as "public art." Either it's art or it's not» (Gormley [2016]: 30). On the other hand, the concept of public art may be limited to a family of art forms that emerged in the second half of the 20th century and have «conceptual links with such traditional art forms as the medieval cathedral and the mural and temple ruins of ancient Mexican and Latin American civilizations» (Hein [1996]: 1), as well as statues or gardens, but which at the same time differ from them in some respects.

However, even in this narrower sense, public art is hard to characterize in terms of form and content. As Patricia Philips claimed «though public art in the late 20th century has emerged as a full-blown discipline, it is a field without clear definitions, without a constructive theory, and without coherent objectives» (Philips [1998]) and so «public art can take any form or mode of encounter» (The New Rules of Public Art [2013]). As a result,

a clear definition is elusive because public art is simply difficult to define. Under the vast umbrella of public art one finds permanent works, temporary works, political activism, service art, performance, earthworks, community projects, street furniture, monuments, memorials, and—let us not forget —"plunk" and "plop" art. Temporary works can be site-specific and memorials can exist as interventions; the practice of public art weaves in and around itself, existing in layers. Public art can incorporate a single object or an entire streetscape. (Cartiere [2008]: 9)

Notwithstanding these reservations, it is possible for Cameron Cartiere to define public art. It is to be located «1. in a place accessible or visible to the public: *in public;* 2. concerned with or affecting the community or individuals: *public interest;* 3. maintained for or used by the community or individuals: *public place;* 4. paid for by the public: *publicly funded*» (Ibidem: 15). In other words, the public character of art stems as much from the place it is to be found in, as «from the nature of its engagement with the congested, cacophonous intersections of personal interests, collective values, social issues, political events, and wider cultural patterns that mark out our civic life» (Philips [1988]). Public art, then, is public insofar as it is located in a public space, but more importantly, it it becomes public «when it is intended to engage or address the public» or «it becomes public through the public's engagement with it» (Palmer [2016]: 210). As such it may be «site-specific, i.e. a product of artistic creativity designed and intended for a specific, publicly owned location […] It may also be place-specific, a creative product resulting from collaboration between artists and a community» (Fisher [1996]: 43).

In the history of the 20th-century public art, it is possible to distinguish three models, which

Miwon Kwon termed phenomenological, social (institutional), and discursive, as well as three "paradigms": art-in-public-places, art-as-public-spaces, art-in-the-public-interest (Kwon [2002]). Even if, she claims, these models or paradigms are not historical phases in the evolution of public art, it is possible to notice a significant shift that took place over the years. Site-specificity, understood as a relationship between a work of art and its location has been replaced by community-specificity (Kwon [2002]: 112). As a result, the "publicness" of public art is not so much rooted in the fact that is located in a public space, as in its relations to «the sphere we share in common», a sphere based on «individual consciousness and perception» (Philips [1998]). Public art, then, has become more focused on relations, and

since relations exist in the eye of the beholder, the audience (before it too was eliminated) became a necessary ingredient in the work of art, rendering it public in a new and non-ceremonial sense. Public art became vernacular, having to do not with a spirit that magnifies as it collectivizes, but with ordinary, unmythicized people in ordinary places and with the ordinary events of their mundane lives. At the same time that it became more abstract, public art also became more explicitly communitarian. The audience no longer figured as passive onlooker but as participant, actively implicated in the constitution of the work of art. (Hein [1996]: 3)

The result of the abovementioned shift was what Suzanne Lacy famously called "new genre public art". She wrote:

for the past three or so decades visual artists of varying backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time—toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity—a group of visual artists has developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. The source of these artworks' structure is not exclusively visual or political information, but rather an internal necessity perceived by the

artist in collaboration with his or her audience. (Lacy [1995]: 19)

The art Lacy has in mind is also denoted by other terms: community art, dialogical art, littoral art, participatory art, socially engaged art. Concepts like relational aesthetics, connective aesthetics are also applied.

It will not be a gross oversimplification to state that new genre public art – as difficult to define as public art – is a form of art that addresses a wide range of cultural, economic, social and environmental issues specific for a certain community, that is, issues that are experienced as important by members of a particular group. In this sense, it is public in a very local way (Baldini 2019). In doing this, this kind of art is based on collaboration with the people to whom it is directed in the first place, thanks to which they participate in making it. New genre public art – contrary to art-in-public-spaces or art-as-public-spaces – is rooted in the "collaborative turn" (Lind [2010]: 177-204) and it willingly employs the do-it-yourself, do-it-together, or use-it-together strategies (Lowndes [2016]).

As far as the aims of new genre public art are concerned, it is very often seen as a means to create a social change by, among other things, empowering people, creating communities or enhancing those that already exist, offering people a possibility and tools to express themselves and represent what is important or problematic from their point of view. To put it differently, art is understood as a form of a "social practice" based on "social interaction" (Helguera [2011]). Despite that new genre public art may be seen as resulting in alleviating social or political tensions or in creating harmonious relations among people, such "ecumenical intentions" (Philips [1998]) are not indispensable. Quite the contrary, they may be unwelcome, since they imply an unrealistic and dangerous vision of a community free from antagonisms. As Patricia Philips states in the context of American public art,

it is important to consider that the most public and civic space […] was the common. The common represented the site, the concept, and the enactment of

democratic process. This public area, used for everything from the grazing of livestock to the drilling of militia, was the forum where information was shared and public debate occurred: a charged, dynamic coalescence. The common was not a place of absolute conformity, predictability, or acquiescence, but of spirited disagreement, of conflict, of only modest compromises—and of controversy. (Ibidem)

If new genre public art is equated with community art, it is possibile to follow Patricia Philip's claims that «public art is about the idea of the commons», while «the space of the commons» was once meant to «articulate and not diminish the dialectic between common purpose and individual free wills» (Philips [1989]: 333). In other words, what makes new genre of public art new and public is the fact that it adresses and engages in the common understood as a space – real or imagined – where various meanings and values converge or conflict and so do particular experiences of the people who are engaged in an artistic activity.

Not only does new genre public art redefine site-specificity by accentuating the fact that public space may be understood as a sphere where various individual experiences meet, but it also changes the way in which the temporal dimension of public art is understood. On the one hand, it rejects the perpetual character of art in public space as epitomized by monuments or other art works that are supposed to be immutable and permanent. On the other, it is far from being ephemeral because in order to effectively cause the desired social change, it has to last as a social practice. In this respect, new genre public art is meant to „express and explore the dynamic, temporal conditions of the collective" (Ibidem: 332).

3. GARDENS AS ART AND NON-ART

Even if, as it has been noticed above, every garden may be regarded as at least partly public, some of them are undoubtedly public in the sense that they are by definition open to general public. In the light of what has been said in the previous section, they may be seen as art-as-public space. They fulfill Cartiere's criteria – they are "in public", "of public interest", "public space" and "publicly funded" – and are regarded as art in the sense that they share certain characteristics of such artworks as architecture, paintings, or sculptures: they are skilfully designed, have certain aesthetic qualities and carry meanings. This is how historic gardens, city parks or botanical gardens are usually thought of and presented in general historic accounts, manuals, coffee table books or tourist guides. Yet, there are other urban public gardens, which are public in the same sense of the word and to the same extent, but are not regarded as art: allotments and community gardens.

The reason of such an approach lies not in these gardens themselves – in many aspects they do not differ at all from gardens recognizded as art – but in the way art is conceived of. Indeed, they hardly trigger associations similar to those one may have in a historic garden or a city park appreciated for its style, overall message or historic significance. Such a view seems to be largely characteristic of not only amateur gardeners or garden lovers but also of garden scholars.

Garden studies, combining perspectives of various disciplines, art history, anthropology, sociology, biology, ecology etc., cover all sorts of gardens. Despite that in its beginnings it focused on historic gardens, it gradually included other green spaces that could be labelled gardens. In fact, it is now assumed that the garden is an open concept, because «the range of places that can be envisaged within this category is enormous and various, and it changes from place to place, and from time to time» (Hunt, Leslie [2013]: XII). It is, however, equally important that «this diversity does not wholly inhibit us from knowing what it is we want to discuss whe we speak of the garden» (Ibidem). In other words, «there are many definitions of gardens [but] there seems to be a kind of agreement about the term "garden"» (Gröning [1997]: 221). John Dixon Hunt cunningly suggests a pragmatic criterion, useful in establishing whether a green space is a garden or not: «you know a garden or garden-like space when you see one or enter into

it» (Hunt [2015]). Yet, at the same time, he offers a very useful definition of a garden:

a garden will normally be out-of-doors, a relatively small space of ground. The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set; by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (the genius loci). The garden will thus be distinguished in various ways from the adjacent territories in which it is set (Hunt [2000]: 14).

It goes without saying that a garden is 'made of' natural materials: plants, stones, water and the like, which are usually, but not necessarily, combined with various artifacts. Hunt underlines that the reasons why gardens are created are «practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic – all of which will be explicit or implicit expressions or performances of their local culture» (Ibidem: 15). Interestingly, he also adds that a garden is a physical site, as well as «a place experienced by a subject» (Ibidem).

The above definition works very well not only for historic or botanical gardens and city parks, but also for gardening allotments and community gardens. It is due to the fact that no reference to art is made in it. Yet, when Hunt or other scholars discuss gardens or garden-like spaces, they very often place them in the context of art by approaching them in a manner very similar to that in which they would analyze and interpret visual arts or architecture. As a result, gardens are seen as works that are based on a complex, well-thought design created by a skillful professional who had a clear intention and consequently, as works that have a particular style, convey a particular message and have particular functions. In other words, gardens are treated as 'cultural objects' that represent meanings and values that can also be found in literary works, paintings, sculptures and buildings. What makes them different is their medium, partly consisting of animate and inanimate elements of nature. Seen in this way, gardens are

to be appreciated in the way works of other arts are appreciated. Their appreciation requires from their owners or visitors not only certain cultural capacities but also an ability and possibility to experience them in a distanced, disengaged way, even if such an experience takes place only when one has already entered the garden.

Such an approach necessarily privileges gardens that were and are meant to serve representative functions and/or are or were pleasure grounds. As a result, utilitarian gardens, e.g. kitchen gardens, that is, gardens requiring physical labor and agrarian skills, seem to be devoid of artistic or aesthetic qualities because these cannot be possessed by a garden that is not supposed to be contemplated and interpreted but only used a place where plants are cultivated. If these gardens are cultural objects, it is not because they are fruits of cultivated soul (*cultura animi*) meant to cultivate or please other spirits but because they are sites where cultivation is practiced in the most literal and down-to-earth manner (*agricultura*) [2].

The same holds true for allotments and community gardens, which are, to a large extent, utilitarian, even if they are also sites of amusement. Given the social and political significance of the former and growing social interest in the latter, they have been quite extensively studied. Particular attention has been paid to the history of allotment gardens (Bell et al. [2016]; McKay [2011]; Nilsen [2014]). They have been discussed mainly from the point of view of cultural studies and sociology, that is, perspectives that recognize them as sites rich in practical functions (e.g. providing fresh food for working-class families, fighting shortages of food during times of war), as well as social and political meanings (e.g. empowering workers, creating worker's associations as stakeholders). If the aesthetic values of allotment gardens have been taken into account, they have

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[2] It may be useful to introduce here the concept of artification (Andrzejewski [2015], *Contemporary Aesthetics* [2012]) and to state that some gardens are approached as art, some are artified, i.e. seen as if they were artworks or were similar to artworks, while some are definitely treated as non-art.

been usually thought of as accessory and expressing a longing for beautification according to the class tastes. So, if it is possible to speak of "the art of the allotments" (Crouch [2003]), it is more of a honorific gesture aimed at recognizing the value of these modest utilitarian gardens as places towards which people feel affection, than a fully-fledged recognition that they may be interpreted as artworks.

Allotment gardens are often juxtaposed with contemporary community gardens. Community gardens are usually urban gardens cultivated by a group of people who do it individually, being responsible for a plot assigned to them, or collectively, sharing duties. The space where communities gardens are created may be either appointed by the local authorities or be occupied illegally or semi-legaly by the gardeners. Community gardens may also vary in terms of their functions (food production, creating a good neighbour community, setting a space for local cultural activities, improving urban environment, teaching lessons to children, expressing people's identity, resisting neoliberal economy, etc.), all of which are not exclusive and, more often than not, overlap. «Community gardeners garden in community. […] People come out of their private dwellings to create and tend the gardens in common» (Nettle [2014]), which requires co-operation, self-help, applying for financial resources, looking for support on behalf of the city authorities. Even if community gardens belong in one way or another to people who take care of them, they are usually also open to visitors from the outside, even more – they tend to be organized as enclosed spaces inviting visitors to enter them and take advantage of their functions.

In fact, gardeners, as well as scholars and local policy makers who run urban green programmes tend to see community gardens as contemporary embodiments of the edenic idea of the garden, as sites where various city-dwellers' needs may be negiotated and satisfied, while gardening as a practice which is «a labor of love that combines the best of environmental ethics, social activism, and personal expression» and thanks to

which «one learns not only practical skills associated with gardening – the steps necessary to nurture seed to fruit – but also the civic mindedness» (Lawson [2005]: 301).

Contrary to other public gardens, whose paradisiac aspect is closely linked to their artistic qualities, community gardens are approached as urban paradises that are too earthly, too common, to be considered works of art.

4. COMMUNITY GARDENS AS COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC ARTWORKS

As *topoi*, community gardens do not differ from other public gardens or other garden-like spaces. They are heterotopias: clearly defined spaces, created and maintained according to an ideal, but at the same time reflecting relations, hierarchies and tensions typical of the surrounding environment. The factors that make them different is their collective character, as well as persons who create and grow them, and ideas, aspirations and needs these people have. It is mainly the latter that give these gardens their vernacular character and make the idea of associating them with art seem almost preposterous.

However, if we compare the agenda of new genre public art and the agenda of community gardens, the similarities are strikingly obvious. In both cases the stake is acting in a public space conceived of as a site, as well as a sphere where different experiences cross, and offering an occasion and means to make it accessible to those who otherwise may be excluded or dominated. Such an action is supposed to be based on co-operation and dialogue involving audience to whom it is addressed and who play an active part in it. As a result, either the members of a community may find an adequate expression of their identities, or a new community centred on shared meanings and values is created. What is more, if such an action is to be effective, it has to be sustained in such a way as to avoid ephemereality and, at the same time, leave room for dynamic changes and conflicts. In fact, seen in this light, community gardening turns

out to be a genre of new genre public art, whose specificity lies in the fact that it is based on cultivating nature, which is both a social and environmental action. It is then no wonder that some artists and art institutions create community gardens.

The abovementioned similarities make it possible to think of community gardens that have nothing do with the artworld as public art. Indeed, the only difference between them and the artworld-run community gardens lies in the fact that they are not created by an artist and, thusly, are not a part of an artistic agenda. However, given that lots of new genre public art projects are social actions that are supposed to bring about a social change and that the artist often acts as «an individual whose specialty includes working with society in a professional capacity» (Helguera [2011]: 3), their artistic status is purely institutional. Setting the institutional umbrella aside, a community-garden-as-art may be perfectly like a 'mere real' community garden. In fact, it is, since it is a community garden after all. So why not think that a community garden may be like an art work? Or that is an art work? If an artist may be someone who initiates a community garden, then someone who creates a community garden may be seen as an artist, even if a non-professional one.

There are at least two reasons why approaching community gardens as new genre public art may be fruitful. First, aligning community gardens with contemporary art is honorific, in the sense that it shows that they may be considered in another way than seeing them only as vernacular art, significant because of its social and political dimension, but at the same time shaped by the uncultivated tastes of the gardeners who crave for a nice environment. Regarding community gardens as new genre public art allows one to approach them as fully-fledged artworks, whose vernacular character is decisive for their aesthetic qualities, which cannot be subsumed under the label "beautification", as they are much more than that. In other words, one may notice that community gardens have various aesthetic qualities resulting from what these gardens are, namely sites created and maintained thanks to a collec-

tive effort based on a constant collaboration and dialogue, not always peaceful and harmonious, that are the reactions to people's everyday needs (Moraitis [2020]).

Just as new genre public art questioned many assumptions as to what art – or good art – should be like or what aesthetic qualities it should have as art, community gardens undermine numerous common beliefs about what a garden as a public space should look like and what purposes it should serve. The lesson we may learn from community gardens is that contrary to what someone aquainted with historic gardens and public parks may think, a garden does not have to have the qualities that paradigmatic artworks have. Community gardens may be said to "deactivate aesthetic function" (Wright [2014]: 19), so pivotal for paradigmatic arts, in the sense that they promote a sort of "asthetics of engagement" (Berleant [1997]), that is, a way of experiencing them which does not consist of contemplating them, but of being fully immersed in them and physically active. In other words, the approach suggested here may help one discover the aesthetic qualities of community gardens as qualities similar to those which are characteristic of new genre public art, and which are not those traditionally associated with art. Only when the aesthetic function is deactivated is it possible to notice that the be-together-work-together-use-together policy may produce distinct aesthetic qualities that are the vehicles of social or political meanings and values.

The other reason why the suggested approach may be useful is the fact that in spite of their allegedly edenic character, community gardens are very often contested spaces. Inevitably, there are tensions among gardeners, as well as between gardening groups and other residents who are not interested in participating in their activities, or between gardeners and decision makers in city councils. Such conflicts may be sparked by, among other things, the community garden aesthetics that – as has been said above – does not necessarily fit the general expectations as to what public space, be it a garden or not, should look like and what functions it should have.

Similar controversies are often present within new genre public art, which may be easily accused of being "unaesthetic". There may be little doubt that applying the criteria used in paradigmatic arts to it is useless. This, however, raises the question of how to appreciate this genre of public art. Following Vid Simoniti, one can state that new genre public art is not an autonomous form of art, that is, it is not to be «evaluated by its own standards», but heteronomous, that is, it has to «be evaluated by standards of other fields, such as politics, religion, ethics, and knowledge» because in it, «artistic activity [is aligned] with political action to a level virtually without precedent» (Simoniti [2018]: 74). This means that the artistic value of this kind of works of art lies in their impact on people and they should be appreciated accordingly. In other words, what makes this public art so new is the fact that it does not have any qualities that it would not share with non-artistic actions. As a consequence, these artworks need to be compared to non-artistic actions that had or have a similar impact – a good work of new genre public art is one that brings the desired social change in a manner that cannot be attained by non-artistic actions and that is responsible for its effectiveness (Ibidem: 80-81).

What, then, makes a new genre public art work a good one is the fact that in all its heteronomy, it cannot be replaced, since it is unique not because of what it achieves – after all, it serves extra-artistic purposes that may be realized in other ways, too – but because of how it achieves it. In order to be able to evaluate the artistic value of such artworks, one may ask the following questions:

Is it good work, according to its type: art, urban design, or community project? 2) Does it improve or energize its site in some way—by providing an aesthetic experience or seating (or both) or prompting conversation and perhaps social awareness? 3) Is there evidence of relevant or appropriate public engagement or use? (Senie [2003])

Harriet F. Senie, who suggested the above questions as leading to a "responsible criticism",

believes that «successful public art has to score on all three [standards] or it isn't» (Ibidem). A good work of new genre public art has to meet these three standards, for it is their combination that makes it irreplaceable.

The perspective sketched here on where and how to look for artistic qualities in new genre public art is useful when community gardens are concerned. When applied to community gardens, it allows one to appreciate them as works that have certain qualities that can be recognized and evaluated when one thinks of these gardens not in terms of their visual attractiveness, environmental impact, food production efficiency etc. but in terms of their social and political effectiveness, that is, in terms of how a community is created and sustained in them. This is the perspective from which other qualities, such as the abovementioned ones, are to be judged.

It seems that successfull community gardens are sites or environments that cannot be substituted by anything else, just as community gardening is an action that may achieve social and political goals in such a way that cannot be found in any other actions. And yet, it is all about gardening in the most down-to-earth sense of the word, a sense that has nothing to do with art, unless we think of it as new genre public art.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is an old concept that has been widely used in landscape architecture, namely "genius loci", the spirit of the place (Hunt, Willis [1988]; Nollman [2005]). Originally, it referred to natural conditions of a site where a garden was supposed to be set up. Today, it denotes also and above all the character of a place built out of values and meanings associated with it by the people who live in it (Jackson [1994]; Relph [1976]). It seems that what makes community gardens so particular as gardens is their genius loci, resulting from their publicness. One way to recognize and appreciate it is to treat community gardens as works of new genre public art. Only then can one see that com-

munity gardens – together with their harmonies and dysharmonies – may create a social reality in a manner that cannot be encountered elsewhere. And this makes them like the gardens whose artistic status has never been questioned. At the same time, their edenic character is rooted in different aesthetic qualities and this is why they may offer «the emancipation, assertion, and gratification of sensuous or aesthetic needs that are qualitatively different than those available in the established order» (Nun [2013]: 664). At the same time, the emancipation, assertion, and gratification of these needs «are both a means and an end of social transformation» (Ibidem).

Suzi Gablik opts for what she terms "connective aesthetics". According to her «we need to cultivate the compassionate, relational self» and «to go beyond our culture of separation—the gender, class, and racial hierarchies of an elite Western tradition that has evolved through a process of exclusion and negation» (Gablik [1995]: 86). In terms of art, this amounts to making art that is based on «the reciprocity we find at play in an ecosystem» and entails «the old specializations of artist and audience, creative and uncreative, professional and unprofessional—distinctions between who is and who is not an artist—begin to blur» (Ibidem).

Of course, connective aesthetics may be promoted in many ways and in many places, but it is hard to think of any that would be more effective and more fitting than community gardening and community gardens.

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The Nanjing Massacre Memorial and Angelus Novus: Ephemera, Trauma, and Reparation in Contemporary Chinese Public Art

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Abstract. What is the nature of memorials? Traditionally, memorials have been conceptualized as lasting entities preserving memories of our shared pasts. This paper challenges this view. My aim is to retheorize our practices of memorialization by examining the role that ephemerality plays in experiential memorials. Rather than fixed structures of meaning, experiential memorials are unstable careers whose significance depends on viewers' performative engagement. I provide evidence for my thesis by developing a critical interpretation of Qi Kang's *Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall* (NMMH) as an example of experiential memorial. The fragmented nature of the here and now frees visitors' experiences. Like the wind propelling Benjamin's Angelus Novus into future and progress, the ephemerality of NMMH's experience unchains its significance from the constriction of dominant narratives of vengeance and resentment. If liberated temporally, the experience of memorials may help us not only to never forget, but also to find reconciliation.

Keywords: Public art, Memory, Monument, Trauma, Reparation.

INTRODUCTION

In a famous article, Arthur Danto wrote that we «build memorials so that we shall never forget» (Danto [1998]: 153). Memorials in effect play a special role in shaping and reshaping our collective memories and histories. If monuments celebrate triumphs and heroes, memorials often pay a tribute to those who have fallen under tragic circumstances. «The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the [defeated] dead» (Danto [1998]: 153). A place of remembering, memorials are somber respites from daily concerns where we contemplate sacrifices, wounds, and tragedies influencing our identities as a nation or a community.

For Danto, memorials and ephemera appear to be irreconcilable entities. As artifacts designed to prevent stories from fading

away, memorials need to be durable: their structures and messages must be able to survive the passing of time to serve as beacons of the past. On the contrary, ephemera such as flyers, menus, and postcards are short-lived entities. They are not intended or expected to outlast the *here and now*. If there is a connection between memorials and ephemera, it seems merely one of the opposing variety.

However, such an understanding of ephemerality and memorialization overlooks the temporal possibilities unleashed by experiential memorials. This variety of memorials emphasizes viewers' engagement as a key moment of meaning-making. Through the performative interaction between structural elements and visitors, experiential memorials acquire an unstable significance, which is constantly re-described in response to the evolving historical and contextual circumstances of reception. Rather than fixed structures of meaning, experiential memorials are unstable careers – an assembly of snapshots, if you wish – whose overall significance importantly depends on viewers' performative engagement. Seen under this light, there is a closer connection between ephemera and memorials that one could anticipate.

My main objective in this paper is then to re-theorize practices of memorialization and the role of ephemerality in them. I argue that experiential memorials are better understood as (collections of) ephemera. I provide evidence for my thesis by developing a critical interpretation of a Chinese example of experiential memorial: Qi Kang's *Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall* (NMMH). The fragmented nature of the *here and now* frees visitors' experiences. Like the wind propelling Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* into the future and progress, the ephemerality of NMMH's experience unchains its significance from the constriction of dominant narratives of vengeance and resentment. This in turn opens up possibilities for healing from the social trauma that the 1937 massacre inflicted upon the Chinese, while remodeling memories of the Japanese invasion. These possibilities are *inclusive*, and may help Chinese and Japanese people

reimagine new ways of «being-together» (Nancy [2000]). If liberated temporally, the experience of memorials may help us not only to never forget, as Danto points out, but also to find reconciliation, forgiveness, and mutual regard. In the following section, I offer a vivid description of NMMH, providing historical details of the context of its construction, which are relevant to this discussion. Then, I argue that NMMH – as well as other experiential memorials – is a collection of ephemera. In developing my argument, I also show how the ephemeral nature of NMMH promotes healing. Finally, the paper addresses issues of reconciliation and reparation in Sino-Japanese relationship.

2. CELEBRATING THE DEAD: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE *NANJING MASSACRE MEMORIAL HALL*

In August 1985, Chinese authorities inaugurated NMMH[1]. Designed by Qi Kang, a Nanjing-based architect, NMMH is dedicated to the memory of the victims who suffered and died during the Japanese occupation of Nanjing. For six weeks from 13 December 1937, Japanese militaries inflicted terrible violence and destruction on Chinese civilians. At least 20,000 women were raped and between 200,000 and 300,000 people were murdered (Pritchard, Zaide [1981]: 49604–05).

The construction of NMMH decades after those tragic events was a response to two interrelated factors. First, China's rapid economic, social, and cultural transformation was challenging its identity (Qian [2008]; Denton [2014]). Remembering the tragedies that the Chinese people suffered by the hand of the Japanese – a discourse labelled as «never forgetting National humiliation» (*wu wang guochi* 勿忘國恥) – offered a powerful narrative fostering identity-bonding (Callahan [2004]). Second, the 1980s saw the rise of Japanese negationism. This culminated in an infamous epi-

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[1] On the Memorial's website, the Chinese name is translated as «The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders» (http://www.nj1937.org).

sode: in 1982, the Japanese Ministry of Education started to control how history textbooks depicted Japan's role in WWII. Its aim was to downplay Japan's occupation of parts of Asia during the war, including China (Qian [2008]; Yoshida [2006]; Yoshida [2000]). In this sense, desires of renewing Chinese national identity and counteracting Japanese negationism are at the root of the construction of NMMH.

NMMH has been built on the site of a mass graveyard located in area of *Jiangdongmen* (江东门), a suburb west of Nanjing. According to records, *Jiangdomen* was one of the 13 sites where most Chinese civilians were murdered and buried (Qian [2008]: 23). Authorities organized intensive research to pinpoint the position of this mass graveyard whose exact position had faded from collective memory (Zhu [2002]). Soon after the discovery of the burial site in *Jiangdongmen*, the construction of NMMH started.

NMMH's 1985 original structure included an exhibition hall and sheltered «graveyard grounds» encapsulated in church-like architectonic structures. It underwent significant modifications during the last two decades. In 1995, a new L-shaped entranceway and several impressive sculptures were added. For commemorating the 70th anniversary of the massacre in 2007, a new exhibition hall, a grand new entryway, and a peace garden also became part of the construction (Kingston [2008]).

The complex and articulated design is crucial for understanding the identity of NMMH as an experiential memorial, and its possibilities in renegotiating trauma and promoting inclusive alternatives of being together. In the remainder of this section, I offer a close description of NMMH[2]. In the following section, I then use this vivid account to explain why NMMH is experiential and ephemeral. Thanks to the temporariness of its evolving interpretations, as we shall see, in spite of the circumstances of resentment and growing nationalism within which it was envisioned and

built, NMMH offers us an effective way to forgive and reconcile.

Visitors' engagement with this memorial begins even before entering its gate. Along one of the exterior walls of the exhibition hall, we encounter statues representing scenes from the horrors of those terrible days in Nanjing. A towering figure of a crying mother holding her dying baby makes clear who are those here memorialized: they are the innocents, children, women, elderly, and helpless civilians, who lost their lives in a war that they were not supposed to be fighting.

Walking along the L-shaped entrance, we reach the entrance of NMMH. The gateway to this place of memory is a monumental stone. Dark in color and with low reliefs depicting scenes from those tragic days, it is cracked in the middle. Such a crack allows visitors to walk through it, suggesting a feeling as if one is passing through a small hole in a graveyard. Through this opening, we enter the emotional space that Qi Kang wanted to create with his memorial (Denton [2014]: 144).

The «Memorial Square» then opens. The main element, opposite to the entrance, is a gray stone wall, carved with the name of NMMH and the number 300,000, the estimate of victims. At its sides, we find one of the most impressive sections of the memorial: «Disaster in the Ancient City». A head is lying on the ground, severed from the victim's body that stays half-buried in the sand. It has been cut by a Japanese knife, whose menacing silhouette can still be seen looming over the dead body. Behind, a wall that looks ancient carries the marks of a battle: holes and cracks from bullets and bombs.

Turning to their right, visitors can access the exhibition hall, which includes several documents, including photographs and testimonies, speaking of the tragedies of those days. To enter this building, one needs to go down several stairs, an action which reinforces the feeling of figuratively stepping into a grave (Denton [2014], Qi [1999]). Amongst the many artifacts from the war, explanations of what happened, and the reconstructions of tragic moments of the massacre, one can find a moving installation placed towards the end of the

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[2] The description here presented follows from recurrent visits to NNMH between 2014 and 2018.

exhibition: a pool where every 12 seconds a drop of water falls. This is a symbolically powerful way to represent the Japanese killing spree: 1 victim every 12 seconds.

NMMH's structure continues to unfold through an interesting path, which seems often neglected by visitors[3]. This path can be accessed through the «Bridge of History», which cuts across the wall of the «Disaster in the Ancient City». The bridge takes us to a courtyard where we find sculptural group called *The Footprints of Witnesses to History*. It includes casts in bronze of the footprints of 222 survivors of the massacre and a few representational sculptures depicting dramatic scenes from the days of the Japanese invasion.

This path takes us through a heterogenous array of spaces and hallways. We walk through gardens whose walls are engraved with bas-reliefs telling stories of the massacre. We pass by the «Remembrance Wall», which carries 10,615 names of victims. Progressing through this path, we encounter the sheltered graveyards, an emotionally moving experience that leaves many in tears[4]. Before the exit, we walk through three other significant places. The «Sacrificial Square» is a small opening right next to the main path. With a minimalistic design and muted grey palette, it hosts an eternal flame that burns to celebrate the memory of the Nanjing massacre's victims. The «Meditation Hall» hosts a shallow pool and candle lights, which are the only illumination in this suggestive space. When we open through the exit door of this last hall, the «Peace Garden» welcomes us. A luminous space thanks to its uncovered ceiling, it engenders in visitors a feeling of openness, which is enhanced by its steer contrast with the atmosphere of the «Meditation Hall».

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[3] Guided tours of NMMH seem to focus primarily on visiting the exhibition hall. In the three guided tours that I have joined during the years, I was always showed just the exhibition hall. Through the years, I have also gathered further evidence that most visitors quickly pass through the outside path of NMMH.

[4] In my repeated visits to NMMH, many of my companions, both Chinese and foreigners, broke into tears while visiting the sheltered graveyards.

Walking through the garden's entrance door, a 30m sculpture in neoclassical style becomes the visual focus of one's attention. It carries the word, both in Chinese and English, «PEACE» (*heping* 和平). This place, whose profound symbolism I will discuss more specifically in section 5, powerfully embodies the healing aim of NMMH and its possibilities of reparation: it shows us a tomorrow where conflicts have been set aside. In the following section, by drawing on the description here offered, I argue that NMMH, and experiential memorials more generally, are collections of ephemera.

3. NMMH, EXPERIENTIAL MEMORIALS, AND EPHEMERA

The complex structure of NMMH, which unfolds through a long path traversing a heterogenous arrangement of spaces and artefacts, engages visitors in ways that importantly differ from how viewers respond to more traditional memorials. Consider for example the *Lincoln Memorial* in Washington DC or the *Tomb of the Unknow Soldier* ("Altare della Patria") in Rome. Visitors generally approach these memorials with a contemplative attitude. They look at those artifacts from afar, examining their forms, shapes, and all those details that constitute their structure. For their monumental scale and imposing nature, memorials of that kind (intend to) put visitors at a distance. Set outside our daily experience, traditional memorials ask viewers to bracket their daily concerns, desires, and states of mind, and tell them something about (a version of) the past.

Rather than encouraging contemplative attitude, experiential memorials such as NMMH promote participatory engagement. Maya Lin's conception of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* lays the foundation of this renewed conception of visitors' involvement (Blair et al. [1991]). In the 1-page essay accompanying her successful submission to the contest for selecting the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*'s design, Lin describes the experiential nature of her memorial as follows:

Walking through this park-like area, the memorial appears as a rift in the earth, a long, polished, black stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth. […] The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition to be understood as we move into and out of it. […] The actual area is wide and shallow, allowing for a sense of privacy, and the sunlight from the memorial's southern exposure along with the grassy park surrounding and within its walls, contribute to the serenity of the area. Thus this memorial is for those who have died, and for us to remember them. (Lin [1991])

With these words, Lin rethinks the nature of memorials and of modern practices of memorialization.

Similarly to the experience of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* described by Lin, we do not simply admire or contemplate NMMH, but live and walk through it: when we enter its gate, we have already left behind the sculptures at the entrance. Our journey from here is open ended, and can follow different directions. In other words, we engage NMMH actively, producing our experiences. We can descend the stairs of the exhibition hall, or walk toward the «Bridge of History» and, if we want to, then come back. While walking, we are immersed in the experience of NMMH, actively responding to cross-modal perceptual stimuli. When we reach the «Peace Garden», for instance, we smell the flowers, feel the breeze blowing on our faces, the warmth of the sun, or the grass under our feet, and hear other visitors' steps and words. In this temporally unfolding embodied experience, we come to notice the statues, the writings, and all those elements that tell us something about the Nanjing massacre. Such experiences are not separate from our daily lives: they are included within them. We do not engage NMMH from afar, in a contemplative attitude, but from within in a participatory sense, and by living through it we produce its meaning(s).

The complex structure of NMMH elicits participatory engagement in visitors giving rise to «a web of multiple performances» (Blair, Michel [2000]: 40), which become a constitutive moment in the creation of the experiential memorial itself.

Experiential memorials, in effect, are more than the material objects that constitute them. They require the perceptual, emotional, and experiential involvement of viewers not only to activate their possibilities of meaning-making, but also to exist as the things that they are. This peculiar variety of memorials shifts the focus from being a carrier of a specific historical narrative to being a catalyzer of viewers' engagement.

NMMH's performative nature is crucial for understanding the relationship between experiential memorial and ephemera. Performances are ephemera at least for the two following reasons. First, just like any other kinds of ephemera, performances are ontologically vanishing events. They do not persist through time and are meant to disappear. In effect, performances are necessarily executed at specific spatial-temporal coordinates. Though one can re-enact a performance that is similar to one that occurred at another moment or somewhere else, it is impossible to recreate the same performance. As events unfolding through the spatial-temporal continuum, the conclusion of a performance causes its metaphysical disappearance. Their being «antithetical to saving» (Clarke, Warren [2009]: 47), and difficult to be archived and recorded, makes performances ephemera.

Second, ephemera are not designed to objectively present a story. In effect, an ephemera is an entity (or event) «no one expected it to give social information or even to survive its career as messenger of» (Barlow [2008]: 150) a positivistic historical narrative. Performances are also incapable of objectively transmitting a pre-established history. In effect, a performance's significance essentially depends on the material conditions and context(s) of its enactment (Case [2005]; Alderman, Dwyer [2009]). Its meaning then is undeterminable before its occurrence, and cannot be fixed in advance. In this sense, a performance «ruptures and rattles and revises history; it challenges the easy composure of history under the sign of objectivity. It discomposes history as myth, making of it as a scene awaiting intervention by the performing subject» (Pollock [1998]: 27). Performances are then ephemera since, rather than whole represen-

tations of historical objectivity, they exist as fragments of the *here and now* constantly asking their audience to rewrite their significance and, therefore, that of the past.

Looking at performances as ephemera allows us to re-conceptualize experiential memorials and to better understand the possibilities of contemporary practices of memorialization. Since experiential memorials and their significance are constituted by webs of performances, these artefacts are in a pertinent sense collections of ephemera. This interestingly connects my view with Deleuze's and Guattari's conceptualization of the memorial, which they considered as «a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves» (Deleuze and Guattari [1994]: 168). They also believe that memorials are more than material objects.

Rather than a mere structure of design, NMMH is then better appreciated as a sequence of visitors' unique fleeting experiences. Those are similar to an assemblage of snapshots. Its ephemeral nature has important consequences in terms of NMMH's meaning and significance. Incapable of conveying a pre-established objective historical narrative, it opens the door to multiple interpretations and re-interpretations of the tragic events that are there memorialized. This in turn, as we shall see in the following section, is crucial for unleashing NMMH's potentials of trauma-healing.

4. EPHEMERALITY AND TRAUMA HEALING

In this section, I am interested in connecting the ephemerality of experiential memorials with trauma. In particular, I want to show how temporariness of memorialization can favor healing. To do so, it is crucial to unpack the intimate relationship between trauma and temporality. My approach aims at capturing the complexities of trauma at a global level, thus looking also at insights originating in contexts outside the West, where the concept originated (Barlow and Hammer [2008]). This in turn can also highlight how public art may very well function in the Chinese context.

In her comparative analysis of Freud's and Kant's respective answers to «questions of time, reason, unreason, and accident» (Morris [2008]: 232), Rosalind Morris points out that a dissolution of one's perception of time is a recurring feature in subjects experiencing trauma. «Freud himself was concerned to understand trauma as precisely such a disturbance of time and of causal sequentiality» (Morris [2008]: 235). According to her analysis, Freud saw trauma as accident, that is, as an experience of an event so incapacitating to one's mind that the subject cannot place it in the causal chain connecting past, present, and future events. «To put it very simply, accident/trauma is the experience of the occurrence as having no reason (to have occurred)» (Morris [2008]: 236). As an explicable event, one might say, trauma lays outside of linear temporality.

In the report of a performance given at an academic conference, Ly (2008) provides readers with a vivid and touching account casting light on the abnormality of trauma's temporality. Of Cambodian origin, Ly is a survivor of Khmer Rouge's violence, and describes his experience as follow: «trauma is forever a painful feeling, [it] is a form of obdurate history waiting to be articulated and written about, but it refuses to be written about in the past tense without the unpredictable – and persistent – intervention of the present tense» (Ly [2008]: 109).

Once experienced, trauma refuses to stay in the past, resisting categorization as a memory or a «finished product» (Ly [2008]: 110). It «resurfaces unexpectedly [as part of the present] surprisingly evoked by body language, images, words, sounds, and silence; trauma always continues to haunt us» (Ly [2008]: 109–110).

Ly's accounts echoes those given by persons who underwent similarly inexplicable moments of terrible violence (Chambers [2004]). When describing that breach of the temporal unfolding afflicting violated subjects, he talks about the «persistent temporality of trauma» (Ly [2008]: 109). Trauma condemns those who suffer from it to a Sisyphean condition of inescapable repetitiveness, where tragedy is never fully experienced as

an event from the past and keeps reemerging in a loop as a present psychological experience. One is stuck in the time of trauma. By using an effective analogy, Wendy O'Brien describes this Sisyphean condition as follows: «The [traumatic] moment(s) is repeated over and over again, like a record with a scratch or a CD that skips playing the same lyrics over and over again» (O'Brien [2007]: 213). For trauma survivors, time is not anymore a linear sequence of events and actions: they spin in circles.

The ephemerality of experiential memorials, I believe, provides us with resources for rebuilding a linear sense of temporality: it can help us place traumatic events where they belong as memories from the past. This is an important step in healing from trauma both individually and collectively. This shows us the value of ephemerality in practices of memorialization. Such a value has been largely ignored and even opposed in traditional forms of memorialization, which have favored fixity and durability as their guiding concepts (LaCapra [2001]).

In order to understand how ephemerality can heal trauma's temporal breach, let me introduce Benjamin's thoughts on historical materialism. In his philosophy of history, the German philosopher defends a «commitment to experiencing the past in current times, tracing the past's pulse in the present» (Souto [2011]: 105). Benjamin describes this dynamic relationship with the past as follows: «This state of unrest refers to the demand on the researcher to abandon the tranquil contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely this present» (Benjamin [1975]: 28). Our relationship with history, in this sense, need not be purely passive or contemplative, but when seen «dialectically» (Benjamin [1999]: 462–463), it can also be productive and (re)-interpretative.

Thanks to its ephemeral dimension, NMMH – as well as other experiential memorials – is a tool facilitating the emergence of this type of productive re-interpretation of the past. In their vanishing, transitory, and ontologically unstable performative engagement with NMMH, visitors experience tragic events of the Second Sino-Japanese War seen from the peculiar position that they occupy in their present. They do *not* relieve that trauma, but rather see it as a memory from the past. For those who walk through the path along which the various elements of the outdoor exhibition are arranged, it arises a clear sense that NMMH does not aim «to instruct by means of historical descriptions or to educate through comparisons, but to cognize by immersing itself in the object» (Benjamin [1996]: 293).

Like Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, NMMH's visitors look at the past while being «irresistibly propelled into the future» (Lewis [2007]: 32) by their performative thus ephemeral engagement with Kang's experiential design. «The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise […]. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future. (Benjamin [1973]: 257–258). Though trauma freezes the flow of temporality, producing its typical Sisyphean condition, the fragmented nature of the *here and now* – like the sun of spring after a long winter – melts that icy cage liberating the temporal stream. The loop within which trauma entraps its victims is then interrupted: temporality is restored and the possibility of both collective and individual healing arises.

The reflections of Chinese college student Yu Zhuang well reveal the interpretative productivity of the ephemerality that characterizes NMMH's performative experience. As described in an email she sent me in March 2016, Yu visited the memorial with a group of Japanese friends. Rather than experiencing a reiteration of trauma, she reinterpreted not only NMMH but also the Nanjing massacre and its significance in the light of her present experience, which included – of course – the presence of Japanese friends. Troubled by the possibility that they, who have «nothing to do with the war», could feel object of hatred while walking through NMMH, she asked me: «Should we look at the historical facts like the wall of names first, instead of [the] sculpture?». Her words show that visiting the memorial allowed her to engage productively with that past. By reinterpreting it – and

the meaning of NMMH – from the perspective of her present, she dissolved the dominant narrative of hatred and revenge.

By encouraging visitors such as Yu and her Japanese friends to engage dialectically with the traumatic past, NMMH offers a «thinking place» in the sense intended by Ulrich Eckhardt and Andreas Nachama (2005). While analyzing the shaping of regional identities in post-World War II Germany, they describe thinking places as sites where one can «sharpen consciousness and memory» (Eckhardt and Andreas Nachama [2005]: 59). And as research in psychology shows, these environments allow visitors «to see, touch, remember, deal with, and master a loss» (Watkins et al. [2010]: 368) thus helping recovery from trauma.

For instance, in the Meditation Hall's silent darkness, gently interrupted by the tenuous and warm light of candle-like lamps, the visitor can take a moment to re-think about that tragic time: a place where the dead and the living meet, here one can «dig» (Benjamin [1986]: 26) through those memories evoked by the bodily engagement with Qi Kang's design. This room – like many others places along the footpath crossing the outdoor exhibition – then «offers a quiet and somber space for spectators to ponder the horror of the massacre and the suffering of its victims, as well as the meaning of this horror and suffering to the present» (Denton [2014]: 147).

During their embodied and lived experience of walking through the path traversing NMMH, moreover, visitors can reflect on what they have seen in the others sections, namely the exhibition hall and the graveyard grounds. In this sense, the participatory and ephemeral experience of the outdoor exhibition promotes a critical and dialectical engagement also with the historical information presented in the other sections. This way of approaching the massacre in turn destabilizes the positivist historical narrative that those other parts convey, that is, the lesson that they want to instruct. And, at the same time, such an experience counteracts the response of shock that exposure to the horrific material included in the exhibition hall may engender in viewers.

This remark about the relationship between the experience of the outdoor exhibition and one's response to the exhibition hall and the graveyard grounds draws from an insight by Danto. In discussing the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, Danto examines Frederic Hart's realistic sculptures. A later addition to Lin's original design, the sculptures represent in a figurative style three soldiers of different racial types: «As a piece of freestanding sculpture, it is intrinsically banal» (Danto [1998]: 155). However, Danto adds, its link with Lin's wall, which the figures look at from afar, imbues Hart's work with a deeper and new significance. «By a miracle of placement, Hart's shallow work has acquired a dignity and even a certain power» (Danto 1998: 156).

In a similar way, thanks to their relationship – both spatial and phenomenological – with the outdoor exhibition, the exhibition hall and the graveyard ground enter in a critical dialogue with the viewers and their singular perspectives. The significance of those more traditional parts is then reshaped during the experiential journey bringing visitors to the end: the Peace Garden. Kingston (2008) wrongly dismisses it as a «jarring juxtaposition to the violence and mayhem featured inside, an unconvincing accessory that fails to persuade». Of course, the tripartite structure of Qi Kang's memorial carries unresolved tension and ambiguities – the contrary would be odd considering the events here memorialized. However, the calmness of this open space – whose features strongly contrast with the Meditation Hall that precedes it – provides viewers with the opportunity to re-think the atrocities of the Second Sino-Japanese War while imaging new ways of being-together. And, once again, the dialectical engagement that Yu had with NMMH and its story shows the productive possibilities of reflection that this experiential memorial unleash. In the following section, I take up this issue of how NMMH can promote reparation by helping visitors imagine a new community where victims and wrongdoers can finally stand side-by-side in peace.

5. "WALKING TOGETHER" AND RE-BUILDING COMMUNITIES

In her research on mass trauma following from violent events, Gobodo-Madikizela (2015) stresses the importance of reparation in processes of trauma healing. A possibility to reconnect with perpetrators or enemies seems crucial «to confront and heal a past characterized by moral corruption and widespread violations of human rights» (Gobodo-Madikizela [2015]: 1111). In effect, recognizing the humanity of perpetrators – as well as the suffering of victims – appears as a necessary step in working through trauma. Cynthia Ngewu, whose son was killed during the apartheid in South Africa, explains the significance of reparation as follows: «This thing called reconciliation – if I am understanding it correctly – if it means that this man who killed Christopher has a chance to become human again, so that I, so that all of us... so that our humanity can be restored, then I agree with it. I support it» (Gobodo-Madikizela [2015]: 1113).

The experience of NMMH, I wish to suggest, does not only help us counteract the abnormal temporality of trauma, but can also foster reparation by suggesting new ways of «being-together» (Nancy [2000]). As Nancy (2000) convincingly argues, an original community is metaphysically impossible. In this sense, human tendencies or desires to treat community or being-together as a natural fact appears as philosophically groundless – and historically dangerous. Acknowledging the non-primordial nature of communities also opens up a possibility to regard them as contingent modes of aggregation, interpersonal bonds that are created in the *here and now*. This in turn allows us to see communities as something that we can shape and reshape, even in the aftermath of traumatic events. And, NMMH can help us imagine a community that is inclusive.

The key to unleash NMMH's reparative potential is the ephemerality of its experiential nature: this power of reparation lays, more precisely, in the temporally-bound performative action of walking through the footpath traversing Qi

Kang's design. In effect, walking, or, more precisely, «walking together [is] a paradigm of social phenomena in general» (Gilbert [1990]: 1). Going for a walk with someone brings into existence a plural subject: a «we». Plural subjects are ties by means of which «individual wills are bound *simultaneously and interdependently*»(Gilbert (1990): 7). This type of ties, Gilbert maintains, are the very foundation of collective and communal life.

Gilbert' philosophical thesis about the intimate relationship between walking together and the construction of our social world finds support in recent neuroscientific research. For instance, results of fMRI experiments reveal that «listening to two persons walking together activated brain areas previously associated with affective states and social interaction» (Saarela and Hari [2008]: 401). The stimulation of these areas seems to reflect «the difference between the human perception of groups and single persons, and their impact on the behavior of an individual» (Saarela and Hari [2008]: 409).

Other researches in cultural geography and health sciences also underline the link between psychological well-being, social life, trauma, and walking together: «the shared walk can be generative of a supportive sociality that is embodied through movement and that this can result in a particular mobile therapeutic practice, which is produced and experienced intersubjectively» (Doughty [2013]: 143). Thus, from walking together, new forms of sociality can emerge. This process can produce alternative «social imaginaries» (Dawney [2011]: 542), that is, views about our shared world and how we inhabit it *together*.

But, who are we walking with when traversing NMMH? The structure of the design give rise to a multilayered, polyphonic, and symbolically rich intersubjective dimension, opening up a wide range of possibilities of metaphorical and metonymical encounter – an aspect that has been virtually ignored by previous analyses. First, visitors are sharing their experience literally with other visitors, who may be strangers or familiar individuals. Ideally, one can meet people of any ethnicity and background. In walking together, one

can surely meet individuals of Japanese heritage (if one is not already walking together with them, as it happened to Yu): dialogue – even in an incipient or fragmentary fashion – can surely start. We can begin to see others as members of a larger community. Through the bodily and lived engagement with those walking together, one can envision inclusive social imaginaries. As fleeting and ephemeral as these interactions might be, they still imply an openness to otherness and a transcendence of substantive and exclusive conceptions of social grouping.

Second, metaphorically, visitors walk together with both the survivors and the perpetrators, whose presence is symbolically evoked by important elements of NMMH. The sculptural group entitled *The Footprints of Witnesses to History* is crucial in this respect. As already mentioned, this artwork consists of 222 survivors' bronze footprints. It is placed after the Bridge of History, which connects the L-shaped entranceway with the other elements of the outdoor exhibitions leading to the Peace Garden. Thanks to its forms, representational content, and placement, it unequivocally brings to mind the presence of those who endured the terrible suffering of 1937 during one's walk through NMMH: it makes their presence palpable, if only imaginatively.

The spirit of these individuals whose footprints we see impressed on the soil accompanies us in our journey through Qi Kang's design. Their meaningful company, imagined but deeply felt, is a powerful reminder not only of the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese army on Chinese civilians, but also of the extraordinary courage and resilience of those who survived. They tell us that there is hope even after the darkest tragedies, that a future may come when we can forgive and something new can rise from the ashes of ruins.

Perpetrators also imaginatively join visitors' journey through the memorial and the reminiscences of the 1937 massacre. Their presence is revealed in many ways and instances. However, from the perspective of possible reparation, the most significant location where visitors find their presence is in the Peace Garden. Here, on the opposite side where a monumental representation of a trumpeter breaking a Japanese sword with his foot stands, one can see the sculpture of a little girl holding a flower and, behind, the «Shikinsou Garden». As the plate next to the sculpture says, the construction of the garden has been sponsored through a fundraising organized by 83 years old Hiroshi Yamaguchi, son of Seitaro Yamaguchi. Seitaro was in Nanjing in 1939. Amidst the still visible destruction that the Japanese Army brought to the city, he was surprised to see Nanjing's Purple Mountain covered in purple flowers: the «February orchids» (Li [2007]). In the striking contrast between the beauty of those flowers and the desolation of the city landscape, Seitaro saw the brutality of the actions of his own kin. When going back to Japan, he brought with him a handful of seeds of those beautiful flowers. He planted those all over Japan renaming them the «flowers of peace» (Li [2007]).

While walking through the garden, one can also learn of other gestures of repentance and restitution by Japanese people. What the Kumamoto Japan-China Friendship Association has done is noteworthy. Many members of the Sixth Japanese Division, which played an active role in the Nanjing massacre nearly 80 years ago, were from this city. For the last twenty years, this association has regularly visited NMMH in order to express support for Chinese victims. Moreover, every December «members invite survivors of the massacre to speak at events in Japan» (Globaltimes.cn [2016]). As a visible trace of their efforts of repentance, the Association has been sponsoring planting of trees on a dedicated area of the Peace Garden – a practice that, just like planting flowers, adds a further layer to the ephemerality of NMMH.

In their bodily and lived experience of the memorial, visitors then interact with a complex array of presences, some of which are only symbolically suggested but nevertheless felt as real. Walking together exposes those who crosses NMMH to the non-linear history following the massacre in 1937. They can witness the gestures of repentance that Japanese individuals performed in asking for forgiveness: actions as simple and

humane as planting a flower or a tree. This in turn challenges official narratives that emphasizes an irreparable fracture dividing Japanese and Chinese people. Through the ephemeral medium of the experiential memorial, visitors become then part – if only for a moment – of an enlarged and more inclusive community bringing together survivors and perpetrators: in this coming community of human beings, hope in future is restored.

6. CONCLUSION

Traditional practices of memorialization in the West have seen ephemerality at odds with the need for remembering and mourning tragedy. In this paper, I have critically questioned the tacit assumptions that have oriented such a tradition. Ephemerality can play a crucial role in reimagining memorials. Experiential memorials rely upon the ephemeral nature of performative engagement to tell us stories of victims of human cruelty. In the fragmented nature of the *here and now*, visitors actively engage with the story they are told, reinterpreting it in the light of their evolving sensibilities. In this way, they challenge dominant positivistic historical narratives, placing those traumatic events into the past. In doing so, unlike conventional memorials, experiential memorials do not reinforce traumatic stress by forcing viewers to relive in a loop a past event. NMMH allows us to remember the tragedies of the Nanjing massacre and to pay tribute to the victims, while promoting a re-interpretation of those facts that can bring about healing and reconciliation. While walking through Qi Kang's design, we look at the past with our wings open to the future.[5]

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Aisthesis

Art Is in the Air. The Public Dimension in Allan Kaprow's Utopian Un-Artistic Theory

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Abstract. In the present essay, I want to suggest that the public dimension is a crucial issue in Kaprow's un-artistic art theory, and that this shift from art to "nonart" literally occurs as a transition from private to public: from private contemplation of "complete" paintings to artistic experience publicly performed and shared. Primarily, I will focus on his troubled relationship with painting. Then, I will concentrate on his groundbreaking reflections on framing and unframing. After that, I will analyse his most relevant theoretical achievements, environment and happening, emphasizing the active role of publicity in his personal idea of performance art. Finally, I will discuss his distinctive interpretation of "nonart", by comparing it with other substantial variations on the "post-art" theme, offered by different authors, either modernist or post-modernist. In the end, the Kaprowian un-artistic theory will emerge re-configured as a singular, and someway "aerial", utopian proposal for public art.

Keywords: Modernism, Allan Kaprow, Happening, Performance studies.

Beginning his openly anti-modernist theoretical enterprise, Allan Kaprow paradoxically started from a strongly modernist base, that can be regarded, in some respects, as an actual heritage. He considered himself the artist as an unplanned child of what he called «the "private" plastic arts» (Kaprow [1966]: 153) in general, and of «the idea of a "complete" painting» (Kaprow [1993]: 5) in particular. He spent his entire life finding the best ways to disown those parents somehow inconvenient and definitely adverse. He firstly deconstructed the abovementioned "painterly" paradigm, which automatically superimposed pictoriality (viz. opticality and vision) to all modern art[1], with the aim of achieve a «total art» (Kaprow [1993]:

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[1] On the so-called "vision itself", or "pure vision", a unidirectional modernist standard, see Krauss (1993). On the modernist (e.g. Greenbergian) bureaucratization of the senses, see Jones (2005). On the contrary, Kaprow claimed «impurity» in art as a positive and inclusive value; see Kaprow (1993): 27-45.

10): intermedial, transmedial, and multisensorial[2]. This would have been possible only «if we bypass "art" and take nature itself as a model or point of departure» (Kaprow [1993]: 10), crossing over into a peculiar mode of overcoming Avant-garde and even Neo-avant-garde art that he called «nonart» (Kaprow [1993]: 98).

In the present essay, I want to suggest that the public dimension is a crucial issue in Kaprow's "bypassing" art, and that this shift from art to "nonart" literally occurs as a transition from private to public: from private contemplation of "complete" paintings to artistic experience publicly performed and shared. To demonstrate this, a survey on Kaprow's theory in its entirety will be necessary. Primarily, I will focus on his troubled relationship with painting meant as a specific medium restricted to the picture plane. Then, I will concentrate on his ground-breaking reflections on the picture frame, on framing in general, and on the ensuing urgent drive to unframing. After that, I will analyse his most relevant theoretical achievements, environment and happening, emphasizing the active role of publicity in his personal idea of performance art. Finally, I will discuss his distinctive interpretation of "nonart", by comparing it with other substantial variations on the "post-art" theme, offered by different authors, either modernist or post-modernist. In the end, the Kaprowian un-artistic theory will emerge re-configured as a singular, and someway "aerial", utopian proposal for public art.

1. "PRIVATE" ART: PICTURE, FIELD, PLANE, FRAME

Quite confessional in tone, Kaprow admits his feeling guilty about having been formed as a painter, and even worse as a modernist one; later, he became known as «a professor of art history»

(Kirby [1965]: 11). One would say that his writings are an attempt to atone for his *avant-gardish* sins of youth. He is always aware that this burden is inherently dangerous, and that can at any time visual-orient his perspectives on art. The aforementioned project for a "total art", for example, is clearly informed by a substrate stemming from visual arts, to the detriment of other forms of expression (and of other forms of perception other than the optical): «Because I have come from painting, my present work is definitely weighted in a visual direction while the sounds and the odors are less complex. Any of these aspects of our tastes and experiences may be favoured. There is no rule that say that all must be equal» (Kaprow [1993]: 11).

An all-encompassing art is not simply a matter of an old-fashioned *fin-de-siècle* synaesthetic interplay between arts; rather it is the search of a new horizon in artistic research, that before being acted upon must seriously cope with any pictorial and painterly residual[3]. According to Kaprow, in fact, «from time immemorial picture making […] has maintained hands-off policies respecting two elements: the […] field, and the flat surface» (Kaprow [1966]: 155). It is as if centuries of habit, custom, and norm had established an ontology of the image which is also and mainly an ontology of the picture. Or to better say, an ontology of «the framed picture» still associated «with the principles of pictorial representation» (Conte [2020]: 122), that for Kaprow are active from the time of Egyptians. "Picture making" is equivalent to making an operation of *cadrage* since its origin: there has always been – borrowing Victor I. Stoichita's vocabulary – the «instauration du tableau» (Stoichita [1999]), and it has always had political implications. This "instauration" has the characters of an imposition, and a prevarication in its tracks. It is not an «apparition», linked to «discours métapictural» and caused by «la crise du statut de l'image religieuse» (Stoichita [1999]: 9, 10); that is to say: something that happened from a certain point in time.

For Kaprow, «when the image was enclosed within a predesignated boundary, the nature of

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[2] Using the word "total", Kaprow was thinking completely different from the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*; in his opinion, the idea of a "Total work of art" (along with the further of "Synthesis of the arts") was still hierarchical, and to some extent theological; see Kaprow (1993): 10.

[3] See Kaprow (1993): 11.

the field as a unique metaphor of the real and total world has been clear» (Kaprow [1966]: 155). The status of the image as been established as ontologically grounded in the "field" of painting: «a conventional picture area» (Kaprow [1966]: 155) at the same time dependent on symbolic referentiality and dictating law to art. In every case, field is marked with a privatising and isolationistic nature, since it has sanctioned «the separation of image from environment» (Kaprow [1966]: 156), of art and life[4]. The instrument that guarantees this separation is the «the useful convention» of «the flatness of the surface» (Kaprow [1966]: 156). And here Kaprow has in mind the specific historical conception of painting, and then of modernist painting, re-shaped on medium specificity by Clement Greenberg[5]. It applies the «flatness» and «integrity» (Greenberg [1960]) of the picture plane criteria for judging every kind of artwork, in order to assure each form of visual art self-determination and self-sufficiency, with a purpose of narrowing a sharp hierarchy among arts founded on painting[6].

To free the image from picture making focused exclusively on field and plane, «a clear break with painting without simply going to sculpture» (Kaprow [1966]: 157) is needed. It was only once some Abstract Expressionists opened up the picture to «the Big Canvas», a wider pictorial support, which is «something actual, in physical size»[7] (Goossen [1958]: 49), that can hold an actual «not-quite-painting» (Kaprow [1966]: 158).

Jackson Pollock's big canvases, to give a meaningful example, are picture that «are the *actuality*, the coalescence of act, form, and content» (Goossen [1958]: 55). According to Kaprow, with the «dance of dripping» and by placing the huge canvases horizontally upon the floor, Pollock goes further; he has been the first to eradicate the tyranny of the field: he

ignored the confines of the rectangular field in favor of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously, beyond the literal dimension of any work. […] The four sides of the painting are thus an abrupt leaving off of the activity, which our imaginations continue outward indefinitely, as though refusing to accept the artificiality of an "ending". (Kaprow [1993]: 3, 5)

To overcome the field which, there, «no longer functioned in the spatial way in could in an older painting» (Kaprow [1966]: 158), the painter must conceive the painting as an experience, as an act[8], rather than an enclosed *oeuvre*. He must leave the "private" dimension of the picture and expand the boundaries of the field of painting[9]. Not by merely seeking an imaginary, fictitious and visionary *hors cadre*, but by broadening art to the "public" dimension of assemblage, environment and happening; in the end, by destroying painting[10]. For Kaprow the "not-quite-painting" goes well beyond picture making, and it tends to blur its own bounds. Thus, it dispenses the frame, that

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[4] «Painting had become symbol rather than power, i.e., something which *stood for* experience rather than *acting directly upon* it» (Kaprow [1966]: 156).

[5] Medium specificity is an eminent modernist issue, but it obviously predates it. It raises in modern Europe of the Eighteenth century (see Jurt 2019), and it develops throughout the Nineteenth century (see Anceschi 1992).

[6] Kaprow blames the Greenbergian urge to enhance «the enduring presence of flatness underneath and above the most vivid illusion of three-dimensional space» (Greenberg [1960]: 86-87).

[7] On this topic, with particular reference to Mark Rothko's big paintings, which intentionally tend to blend the distinction between picture, window, wall and space, see Venturi (2007): esp. pp. 68-149. See also Conte (2020): 141-143.

[8] The pioneer of the concept of "art as act" is of course Harold Rosenberg (1960). On Rosenberg as a forerunner of performance art (in opposition to Greenberg), I allow myself to refer to Sessa (2022). Kaprow himself adopts Rosenberg and his "art as act" as the only modernist putative father, when he says: «On the edge of such an abyss, all that is left to do is *act* (to echo Harold Rosenberg)» (Kaprow [1993]: 47).

[9] I limit myself to hint at the complex debate on the difference between "picture" and "painting", a dialectics that is crucial in several of writings of artists and critics of that period, such as Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman, by referring to Danto (2002), and Conte (2020): 122-132.

[10] As Pollock, for Kaprow, precisely did: «He created some magnificent paintings. But he also destroyed painting» (Kaprow [1993]: 2).

object both literal and theoretical, which for ages has kept him imprisoned in the regime of the illusionistic field.

Pollock's canvases are literally unframed and frameless, and, in the Kaprowian view, «discarding the frame means rejecting the packaging, the perfect balancing, the orientation, that is, the whole *architecture* that, for centuries, seemed to be a necessary condition of painting» (Conte [2020]: 132). By abolishing frames, Pollock has entirely filled the surrounding space with painting. This also implies a strong push in favour of the inclusion of the spectator, whether in the artistic experience or in the work of art itself, in a dual movement of incoming and outcoming: «The painting is continued out into the room. […] The entire painting comes out at us (we are participants rather than observers), right into the room» (Kaprow [1993]: 6). Kaprow states a total unframing – making a clean sweep of a debate that for decades saw in the frame an essential criterion to distinguish (and to divorce) art and life[11] – opens the doors to a conception of art eminently performative and evenemential, also widening the very concept of art.

2. "PUBLIC ART": COLLAGE/ASSEMBLAGE THEORY, ENVIRONMENT, HAPPENING

As it can be deduced, the liberation of art from conventions and convictions is, for Kaprow, more a matter of *space* than a matter of *media*. To reconnect art and life, it is necessary to activate a process of "de-privatization" of every form of art making. After having coped with the legacy of modernist painting and sculpture, this process is configured as a gradual motion of expansion of artisticity, from the confined insular enclosure of the field to an increasingly open and "public" space, which art gradually occupies by "infesting" it in some degree. This leads to a sort of art's

phase change, from solid to gaseous state, that culminates with its "evaporation" in the air. Kaprow frequently employs scientific metaphors, stealing the language of physics and translating it to art; it can be useful to follow his passages, from the post-painterly assemblage to the ephemeral happening.

As already said, pictorial and sculptural patterns are not a problem in itself; the thing is that they are more often given as predetermined values. It is important to detect that, since the apical modernism of Abstract Expressionism, their status has been steadily mutating and they now persistently intertwine: «a changing ratio» (Lippard [1967]: 120 ff.) is always at stake. Kaprow warns us that the new post-field artistic space «is also a space that is a direct heritage of painting. […] For purely pictorial phenomena play a strong part» (Kaprow [1966]: 160). But, to use the Kraussian terminology, painting and sculpture have to renegotiate their own «discursive spaces», letting themselves be reshaped in «space[s] of exhibition» (Krauss [1982]: 132, 133), other than the traditional ones (viz. illusionistic, symbolistic, realist) and the most advanced (viz. modernist)[12]; and finally embrace – like post '60s sculpture – an «expanded field» (Krauss [1978])[13]. According to Kaprow, visual and plastic arts must untie from «the psychological and physical definition of space given to them by architecture» or, at least, approach organic architecture, and growing as «an organism which would flow from part to part, not only easily within itself, but within the forms of nature» (Kaprow [1966]: 151-152). In simple words, painting and sculpture must go environmental[14].

The first alternative to "private art" is, for Kaprow, the so-called assemblage. Not only with regard to «new forms» and «materials», but

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[11] The whole debate, which involves important thinkers such as Georg Simmel and José Ortega y Gasset, is well summed up in the Italian critical anthology ed. by Ferrari, Pinotti (2018).

[12] According to Rosalind Krauss, modern painting is bound to a relation of dependence with its spaces of exhibition, see Krauss (1982): 133. Such a vision seems to be similar with the Kaprow's one, when he speaks of art and architecture, see Kaprow (1966): 151-155.

[13] See also Krauss (1973).

[14] See Kaprow (1966): 152.

mostly to new «attitudes» (Kaprow [1966]: 159) toward art making. Assemblage is a term with a definite history: it was coined by Jean Dubuffet in 1953, in order to differentiate his newest polymateric works from the previous forms of modernist sculpture, Futurist, Cubist and Dada collage, and *object trouvé* art: see Waldman (1992). In the Kaprowian way, it works more as a «principle» before being a genre; it goes like this: «The materials (including paint) at one's disposal grow in any desired direction and take on any shape whatsoever» (Kaprow [1966]: 159). Although «it is a different point of departure from the accepted pictorial one, being basically environmental» (Kaprow [1966]: 160), it still retains – as already seen (see *supra*, n. 12) – distinct pictorial and sculptural features. And even though some specialists have later argued that part of happening art ultimately arises from a «collage theory», largely derived from Kurt Schwitters' *Merz* found object art (Kirby [1965]: 22-24), one has to deal with the fact that it is ultimately one of modernism's latest and ripened fruit. And that has been several prominent modernist collage theories that, albeit conflicting, deeply grounds assemblage, collage, and – more generally – «the work of art as object» (Wollheim [1970]), in the visual-oriented legacy of the historical Avant-garde.

Think about Greenberg's interpretation of Cubist collage, for which the literalness of the affixed object operates as a marker stronger than ever of the pure opticality of the painting: «The pasted paper establishes undepicted flatness *bodily*, as more than an indication or sign. Literal flatness now tends to assert itself as the main event of the picture» (Greenberg [1959]: 75)[15]. Or, on the opposite, look at Harold Rosenberg's more Benjamin-like[16] point of view, which sees in collage «in itself, […] no aesthetic or intellectual character» (Rosenberg [1974]: 173). To be applied in art, it demands a of «unity» which «lies in the metaphysics of mixing formal and material realities through

introducing the concreteness», and it is therefore a mirror of modern art itself; it is «the form assumed by the ambiguities that have matured in our time concerning both art and the realities it has purported to represent» (Rosenberg [1974]: 175, 176).

For Kaprow, however, the principle governing assemblage *via* collage theory is no more metaphysical: it is experience-based. The field of assemblages is, in fact, «now an objectlike area», and «often it substitutes for the wall» (Kaprow [1966]: 163). Assemblage in an amphibious object, a chimera of painting and sculpture that simultaneously pushes their features in the reality of space. It is the prime art object capable of "heating" art, to spread in in the air. Here comes one of the first notable Kaprow's physical metaphors: «The work begins to actively engulf the air around it, giving it shape, dividing it into parts, weighing it, allowing it to interact with the solids at such a rate or in such a strange manner» (Kaprow [1966]: 164). With assemblage, not only the spectator has the task to enter the work of art; it is the work itself that publicly expands in the air, «thus becoming an Environment» (Kaprow [1966]: 165).

Environment is the eventual expansion of the field of art in space; it is «a further enlargement of the domain of art's subject matter» (Kaprow [1966]: 166), that now coincides with the domain of making (more than creating) and experience (more than contemplation). Once again, this is not limited to media, because the choice of new media is here directed toward the search of «a new range of forms not possible with conventional means» (Kaprow [1966]: 166-167). New factors enter the field of environment making, «change» and «chance» (Kaprow [1966]: 159-176), making it closer to a proper aesthetic experience in the sense of John Dewey, who – with its pragmatist declination of aesthetics so influential for lots of artists[17]

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[15] For a sharp confrontation with this lecture, see Krauss (1992).

[16] See Benjamin (1936).

[17] «Artists as diverse as Marcel Duchamp, Josef Albers, Robert Motherwell, and Allan Kaprow all read *Art as Experience*. […] Dewey's concept of art as experience lay behind the work of John Cage, Kaprow, and other contemporary artists being» (Jacob [2018]: 2,6).

– outlined it «simply as *an* experience» (Jacob [2018]: 38). According to Dewey, «in such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts» (Dewey [1934]: 37). They spring from art process, and no more from artworks, and they embody «making as manifestation of the mind-body» (Jacob [2018]: 18): of a creating self not split from its parts nor from the world. This completely fits with the Kaprowian environmental art, for which «the art work must be free to articulate […] on levels beyond the conceptual» (Kaprow [1966]: 168), read aesthetic in a metaphysical sense.

Environment is an «embodied practice» (Jacob [2018]: 19), that

> *suggest a form principle for an art which is never finished, whose parts are detachable, alterable, and re-arrangeable in theoretically large numbers of ways without in the least hurting the work. Indeed, such changes actually fulfill the art's function.* (Kaprow [1966]: 169)

Environments are enhancing experiences that, moving away from the field as a work, appear closely similar to any other kind of experience, even non aesthetic ones, as Dewey suggested, because all of them «flow from life» (Jacob [2018]: 40). In Kaprow's words, environmental art is «something to be renewed in different forms like fine cooking or the seasonal change, which we do not put into our pockets, but need nevertheless» (Kaprow [1966]: 169). Its is not merely a generator of new artistic categories, such as Minimal environments, Earthworks and Land Art[18], but «a semi-intangible entity» (Kaprow [1966]: 168), that contribute to make art ever more "public" (and, in some Deweyan sense, democratic, participative, communitarian[19]). Environments are endless works – «there is no end to the work, quite patently» Kaprow [1966]: 171) – that "aerates" art,

opening its doors to the public and getting people in to.

Happening is, finally, the extreme manner to bring forward the «free style»[20] (Kaprow [1966]: 187) of the assemblage and the environment; it ultimately wipes every shadow of the pictorial/visual and sculptural/tactile field[21], leading art in the realm of the pure event. Because they succeed in developing art process completely in *time*, as well as in space, putting art in motion: «Time would be variously weighted, compressed, or drawn out, […] and things would have to be set into greater motion. The event which have done this is increasingly called a "Happening"» (Kaprow [1966]: 184). Kaprow provides happenings a tautological definition: «Happenings are vents that, put simply, happens» (Kaprow [1993]: 16). They are most often indefinable «great moments» (Kaprow [1993]: 15), that intensify our experience in ways which somehow deal with what we are used to call art: a concentrate of experience, whose artisticity relies on the most unexpected variables, but still «*generated* in action» (Kaprow [1993]: 19). Happenings sharply make art fully performance art; in «art as action», «matter has been transformed into energy and time-motion» (Lippard [1968]: 255).

Since their emergence, there has been much discussion on their relationship with theatre, and on their supposed «theatrical» nature: on their «theatricality»; see Fried (1967). An eminent expert as Michael Kirby, for example, described them as «*a form of theatre in which diverse elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure*» (Kirby [1965]: 21), and by doing so he roots them in experimental theatre history: in that branch of «ritual» theatre (Fischer-Lichte [2005]: esp. 15-88), not entangled in «"the priority of the eye"» and «verbal character» (Kirby [1965]: 12). Others have connected performance to theatre instead of sub-

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[18] For a concise history of these post-modernist artistic tendencies, see Rose (1986): 1114-1117.
[19] See Jacob (2018): 77-142.

[20] But «Happenings are not just another new style» (Kaprow [1993]: 21).
[21] While they are quite close, environment (and of course assemblage) tends to be hierarchical on the background, see Kaprow (1966): 184.

jugating it the normative «art form as a new and unique medium»: to break away from the «concept of art» (Brown [1983]: 68). By the opposite side of the same token, Michael Fried, in his post-Greenbergian phase, used the marker of «theatrical» to label all post-painterly-shaped art. He called it «literal» and he equipped it with «literal sensibility», consisting of the attention on the beholder, the «preoccupation» with time, and with the pretence of rendering the «*endlessness*» of theatrical temporality[22] (Fried [1967]: 153, 166).

Kaprow itself sometimes indulges to the theatrical comparison, when he admits that «these events are essentially theatre pieces, however unconventional»[23] (Kaprow [1993]: 17). But what really counts to my argument is that this parallel is employed to stress the big breakthrough of the field achieved by happening, analogous to breaking the fourth wall. As in research theatre, happening breaks through – and destroys – every curtain, bringing art to nature and even to life: «Happenings invite us to cast aside these proper manner [of traditional art] and partake wholly in the real nature of the act and (one hopes) in life»[24] (Kaprow [1993]: 18). Happening perhaps it may be theatre in substance, but it transforms itself continuously, constantly refreshing all its forms, wherein «the last shred of theatrical convention disappears» (Kaprow [1966]: 196). It is due to happening's transient and transitory nature, «which would apparently transcend palpable time» (Kaprow [1966]: 193) and space.

Happening's theatricality is the fuel needed to burn all the remaining conventions of per-formance art, acting, and performing itself[25]. As Kirby affirms, a «*nonmatrixed* performing» is at play: a non-traditional acting, that enacts «a great variety» of experiences (no longer plays or *pièces*) which «take place outside of theatre» (Kirby [1965]: 16). Art and theatre conventions burst in o the air, in the massive explosion that spreads art in the air, totally engulfing the whole world of art-isticity. Kaprowian "aerial" metaphors are taken to the extreme. Happenings' «impermanence» is «melting» every formal component «into an elusive, changeable configuration»; the provide «not only a space, a set of relationships to the various things around it, and a range of values, but *an overall atmosphere* as well» (Kaprow [1996]: 20, 18; mine italics). With the continuing growing openness, Pollock's *allover painting* (still "private" and accessible only in galleries and museums) has become *an allover liminal artistic atmosphere* ("public" as the air, as long as it can be breathed by potentially everyone). The post-modernist urge to put an end to modernist elitism has led art to its "evaporation", with the believe that the utopian purpose of "art for everyone" comes about only if we cease to consider (and consume) the artwork «as a commodity» (Kaprow [1993]: 26). For doing so, it is imperative to decompose it in its «molecule-like» status (Kaprow [1966]: 159). Once we get back to the atom, and one we follow Kaprow in letting artistic experience happen, art will be in the air within everybody's reach.

3. "EVAPORATED ART": DEMATERIALIZATION, DE-DEFINITION, NONART, ATMOSPHERES

An art theory such as this, with so many radical aspects, is part of those post-modernist theoretical attitudes which Arthur C. Danto called «narratives of the end of art»: positions of dis-

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[22] «Theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of time; […] the sense which, at bottom, theatre addresses a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective» (Fried [1967]: 167).
[23] And further on: «Happening […] suggests a "crude" version of the avant-garde Theatre of the Absurd» (Kaprow [1966]: 188).
[24] In short: «There is thus no separation of audience and play» (Kaprow [1993]: 17).

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[25] The very concept of «audience […] should be eliminated entirely» (Kaprow [1966]: 195), for the realization of an actual communion between performers and participants; in happenings, they both «[them]selves are shapes (though […] not often conscious of this fact» (Kaprow [1993]: 11).

trust toward the very notion of art, expressed after modernism by artist themselves «with varying degrees of pessimism» (Danto [1989]: 331). The concept of art no longer fits advanced art practices, including happening, to which it appears obsolete. In Kaprow's own words, «the Happening is conceived as an art, certainly, but this is for a lack of a better word» (Kaprow [1966]: 190). By comparing it with other substantial variations on the "post-art" theme, offered by different authors, either modernist or post-modernist, I would like to discuss his idea of "nonart", and to prompt that Kaprow's hypothesis is not pessimistic at all, but fertile instead, thank to its utopian vitalist drive to inhabit the public dimension.

One of the first studies noticing the collapsing trends in art making and art thinking has been Lucy R. Lippard's 1968 investigation into «the dematerialization of art» (Lippard [1968]): into the loss of its physicality and objecthood[26]. Even though she ascribes the emphasis of «the thinking process almost exclusively» to «an ultra-conceptual art», she acknowledges that «losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art» also involves what she names «art as action»[27] (Lippard [1968]: 255). Since «the time element – vital, as seen, for Kaprow's work – becomes a focal point […] absorbed in unexpected ways by the performing arts» (Lippard [1968]: 256), they too get dematerialized. Even they do not equate art process with cognitive process, performing arts increasingly end up aspiring to a disembodied «"thinness", both literal and allusive» (Lippard [1968]: 270). But Kaprow's formulation, keeping up actual experience as a value, is inscribed in what Lippard outlines as the «visionary» (Lippard [1968]: 270) side of dematerialization. Namely, an artistic conception that goes non-objectual without being

exclusively intellectual[28]. It configurates itself as «a "nonvisual structure"» for denying «compositional sense» and detail, but not for claiming to be «non-visible» (Lippard [1968]: 273, 270). It is reasonably impalpable, just like air, and it does not mean that it does not exist. In the Lippardian perspective, Kaprow dematerializes what he calls the pictorial and sculptural field, but preserves the tangibility of happening, whereas he is convinced that one can "feel" it, as it can be "felt" the caress of the wind.

In his mature phase, Harold Rosenberg however complained that after Action painting «art enter[ed] into a state of limitless expansion» (Rosenberg [1967]: 302). He called that region "post-art", and he insisted on the centrality of the figure of the artist to the disadvantage of the artworks: «The post-art artist carries the de-definition of art to the point where nothing is left of art but *the fiction of the artist*» (Rosenberg [1972]: 12; mine italics). In his opinion, "de-definition" goes on with "de-aestheticization", and its essence lies in the refusal to understand the nature and the reason of any intermedial stepping. He also traces its origins in every trend that he classifies as «anti-art» (Rosenberg [1972]: 17-27), which would have characterized proper American art since its origins. The "post-art artist", who can now live without art, thus appears as an extremization of the "action painter", once strictly focused on gesture rather than on results. De-aestheticized artworks, being the final term of a process concentrating on itself all its energies, are «inventions produced and discarded in the course of a *liberating act*» (Rosenberg [1972]: 54; mine italics), fallen as a precipitate of a solution whose components are forgotten and irrelevant. Rosenberg regarded happenings as "post/anti-art", for their representing «the vision of transcending the arts in a festival of forms and sensations» (Rosenberg [1972]: 13), and his observations may be read *a contrario*

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[26] On the other side, the Greenbergian modernist orthodoxy sees in objecthood the threshold between art and "non-art", in which «the question of the phenomenal as opposed to the aesthetic or artistic comes in» (Greenberg [1967]: 186).

[27] An art in which – echoing Rosenberg and Kaprow himself – «matter has been transformed into energy and time motion» (Lippard [1968]: 255).

[28] Although Kaprow can be surely tied to the paradigm of «the artist as a thinker», he is very careful not to narrow aesthetic experience as «the stringently metaphysical vehicle for an idea intended» (Lippard [1968]: 270).

as a precise description of their disruptive feature. But, concerning Kaprow, they are not accepting whereby they stress on the artist as mythological figure. With his non-artistic resolutions, Kaprow did everything to de-potentiate the so-called legend of the godlike demiurgic artist, limiting to the minimum its inference and suppressing its aura. Kaprow's art theory may be de-aestheticized, but not artist-centered.

In direct opposition to Rosenberg's conjectures, Kaprow's project on "nonart" is deeply related to the question of the definition, or better the definitions, of art. According to him, "nonart" the striving of art to encompass in its definition each most unlikely, and seemingly unconceivable variable: «Nonart is whatever has not been accepted as art but has caught an artist's attention with that possibility in mind»[29] (Kaprow [1993]: 98). It should be distinguished, in fact, from «antiart», which is the post-Dada nihilistic and nullifying push «intruded to the arts world to jar conventional values and provoke positive esthetic and/or ethical responses» (Kaprow [1993]: 99). As should be clear, Kaprow's theory is, on the contrary, positive and purposive, and it maximally widens the artist's range well beyond predetermined artistic and aesthetic categories. The "un-artist" is now the actor who can take the issue of defining art wherever he wants, and he can share it with everyone; the word «*artist* refers to a person willfully enmeshed in the dilemma of categories who performs as if none of them existed» (Kaprow [1993]: 81). "Nonart" and "un-artist" de-define and de-aestheticize just in the mentioned Deweyan sense: in order to thin line between art and life; "nonart" is not "antiart", rather it is «an active art» and «an arena of paradoxes», supremely incarnated by happenings, «whether life is an Happening or a Happening is an art of life» (Kaprow [1993]: 64, 82, 87).

Art's lack of definition (but not of defining urge), is specular to "nonart"'s molecular, and evaporating configuration. Even Kirby argues that a real happening takes shape if «dynamic [...] atmospheric qualities» are enacted, instead of the «passive» ones (Kirby [1965]: 26). Given all the Kaprowian "aerial" characterizations of environment and happening, such achievements in art theory seem to anticipate new tendencies in aesthetics subsequent of decades; namely, those in which the idea of a «new aesthetics» rises precisely from "atmosphere" as a «basic concept» for an "ecstatic" «ontology of thingness», like that of Böhme[30] (2017): 14, 35. In this respect, Kaprow's conceptions of environment and happening thus analysed accords well with those phenomena of modern art which, according to Gernot Böhme, generate atmospheric aesthetic experience, because they «offer the extraordinary advantage of taking up a wide range of everyday experiences» (Böhme [2017]: 124). The Böhmeian definition of «ecstasy of things» as felt atmospheres or moods, for which «to sense oneself bodily is to sense concurrently one's being in an environment, one's feelings in this place» (Böhme [2017]: 21), is incredibly close to Kaprow's un-artistic theory. Happenings are finally an outstanding example of what Böhme calls «the art of staging», arranged by a «*phantastike techne*» (Böhme [2017]: 163). Yet for the political implications. In this view, "the art of staging" is intrinsically politic (other than aesthetic), since its field of action is no more localized in a specific place (in the Kaprowian field)[31]. It is ideally the whole world, on which it acts a disperse, public and evaporating "nonart" flying around in the air.

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[29] It is interesting to note that the Kaprowian writings devoted to this topic are entitled *The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I and II*, echoing Friedrich Schiller's classic *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795), thus reinterpreting in a post-modernist declination the Schillerian scope of aesthetic education.

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[30] On the contemporary developments of the aesthetics of atmospheres, see Griffero (2014).
[31] See Böhme (2017): 28-34.

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The Entanglement Between Public and Private in the Work of Félix González-Torres

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Abstract. This paper discusses through the prism of psychoanalysis some specific peculiarities of the poetics of the American artist Félix González-Torres. In particular, the text seeks to highlight how the concept of "burial work", taken here from the work of the French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida, is central to understanding the ways in which González-Torres has been able to hold together public and private, autobiographical experience and the involvement of the spectator in order to construct a shared memory that develops along the lines of dynamism and imprecision, renouncing common expectations of the representation of a memory.

Keywords: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Psychoanalysis, Public/Private, Memory.

In 1991, the Cuban-born artist Félix González-Torres placed some huge bills in the city of New York. *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* – this is, like all the artist's works, the title of the piece – is a rough black-and-white photograph depicting an empty and unmade bed. The hollow in the middle of the pillows suggests a recent presence and confers a profound sense of intimacy upon the image, an intimate setting that is nevertheless in mismatched conflict to its public arrangement by a billboard. Exhibited for the first time on the streets of Manhattan, this recollection of absent bodies defined almost all of Félix González-Torres' work until his death, occurred in 1996 and due to AIDS-related causes. The artist is best known for his ephemeral installations: a pile-up of candies lying in a corner, a geometric and monumental pile of bills on the floor or a string of lights dangling from a ceiling that recall the visual and formal language of conceptual and minimalist art of the sixties and seventies.

However, González-Torres did not merely fit into the genealogy of minimalist artists such as Donald Judd or Dan Flavin but introduced a truly contemporary annotation into his work. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, artists began to focus on the construction of

identity, including gay identity. In his work, the strings of lights recall a disco environment, and the candies on the floor are a perverse reference to the prescription of AZT, used to fight HIV. The photograph of the bed – reminiscent of another famous work by González-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, where two paired wall clocks marched slightly out of step with one another (one is a few seconds off) until they are completely asynchronous and their respective batteries run out – recalls the censored image of homosexual love slowly leaving its trace.

Towards the end of the eighties, a new season of gay activism began: the *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (*ACT UP*) was formed and suddenly the old questions about the relationship between art and politics took on a new meaning for gay artists. Artists' collectives – such as *Gran Fury* – began to use images and texts to instill explicit political messages about the US government's controversial policies towards AIDS patients.[1] However González-Torres did not follow this path. Doomed to disappearance but at the same time perpetually reproducible – viewers could remove a bill or take a piece of candy, but at the moment in which the basic elements of the piece are finished, the installation can be restored to its original state to begin its journey of erasure anew – his pieces took a different, more elegiac path, where any straight representation of homosexuality and biographical experience are rarely evident.

In this way, his works enact the construction of an abstract and at the same time concrete memory of loss and mourning – *in primis* the death of his companion Ross Laycock, which occurred in the same year as the creation of *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* – but without the clear display of an autobiographical memory; the trace of heads pressed on cushions in the *Untitled* billboard thus becomes a simultaneous declara-

tion and disavowal of homosexual love within the urban landscape and public space. According to the typical dual register of González-Torres' poetics, the series of *Untitled* unfold at the same time the *public* and the *private*, political themes and autobiographical drifts on the same formal and material surface.

Born in 1957 in Cuba, González-Torres grew up as an artist in the eighties. At that time, postmodern artists often worked with existing images and texts, appropriating and examining an increasingly media-saturated world. His first piece placed itself exactly in this background: following the example of Jenny Holzer – who in the late seventies reproduced found slogans or random feelings on affixed bills on the streets of Lower Manhattan – in 1988 González-Torres presents a framed photostat (a early version of a photocopy) of a sentence. It is a muddle of words, white letters on a black background reading out: «supreme 1986 court crash stock market crash 1929 sodomy stock market crash supreme 1987». In this way, he offers a poetic commentary on the erasure of gay history, inserting a reference to the 1986 Supreme Court ruling – upholding laws against sodomy in the state of Georgia and indeed criminalizing homosexuality – between two significant dates in economic history.

Untitled (billboard of an empty bed) marked an important threshold in the history of contemporary art. At the end of the eighties, the art world underwent significant changes. It seemed to many critics at the time that postmodern art could only exist only to illustrate complex philosophical concepts, while the affective character of experience, a basic condition for the renewed wave of identity politics, was almost systematically neglected. Emphasizing the sensual magnitude of experience, artists such as Robert Gober, Kiki Smith and Jane Alexander created sculptural pieces with a visceral impact; many artists began to rediscover long-discarded artistic strategies such as narrative, constructed forms rather than appropriated models, anything that refers to the nexus with the contemporary and the living aspect of everyday experience without mediation.

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[1] González-Torres' work developed at a time when Ronald Reagan (US president from 1981 to 1989) famously never uttered the word "AIDS" because of its predominant association with homosexuality.

In some way, González-Torres' poetics keeps a foot in both fields: *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* certainly looks like the bills Barbara Kruger already made in the mid-eighties. Her *Surveillance is Your Busy Work* presented in Minneapolis displayed a characteristic use of advertising imagery reconfigured with text to fit into discussions of public space, gender and corporate culture. But the image of a bed in disarray was devoid of any textual or even didactic guideline. Significantly, the photograph represents the artist's own bed: *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* suggests – without *portraying* – a tangible presence within the process of disappearance.

If we appreciate the verb *to portray* it is for a very precise reason, which clearly shows the *diplopia* (*double vision*) and the double regime of memory of González-Torres' work: on one hand, the photograph of an empty bed – but also the pile of candies whose total weight is always equal to Ross's weight during his illness or to the sum of the weight of the two lovers, as in *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)* – does not depict anyone but shows what remains of the lovers' past presence; on the other, it establishes a kind of *negative portrait*, in the manner of the *imago* of ancient Rome, where the deceased is remembered through a mold of his own face. In this way the *memorable*, or the construction of an intimate and private memory, is not directly displayed and cannot be reconstructed by the public through material evidence. It can only be imagined *negatively*, hallucinatorially, through what *absence* imperceptibly suggests. From this point of view, if González-Torres remains in some ways a minimalist artist, it is not only because of the essentiality of forms and materials used but also, and above all, because of the small amount of information passing through his works. These *portraits*, which at the same time are not portraits at all, are not only diplopic from the point of view of the way they are exhibited but also from the point of view of the work of memory's construction that inextricably links the work of the artist and the experience of the spectator. It is a matter of giving physical materiality to an absence now present only into memory. This process, defined as *letting go*, is constructed precisely from the *reductio ad minimum* of the available information in order to allow a polysemous and repeatable representation of the world, experience and memory. The *setting* of the work – here we use a psychoanalytic expression to differentiate it from the typical *display* of the exhibition spaces, an inappropriate term for González-Torres' work, which intrinsically requires the presence (but also the absence) of a spectator who interacts imaginatively or physically with the work – with its embodiment, entangles two intertwined and at the same time irreducible dimensions. The spectator who interacts with the work runs into an *outside*, into a dimension that is absolutely *foreign* to him or her and not at all familiar: the biographical intimacy of the artist of which the spectator knows nothing and of which the artist provides only *minimal clues*. According to an inverted dynamic, the artist – who stages his own private memory, through its remains – can only reconstruct this memory and keep it alive thanks to the participation of the public, through *insignificant gestures* such as taking a sweet and sucking it: it is a paradoxical situation, whereby one's own memory needs a fundamental *foreigness* (which in this case concerns public space) in order to be kept alive.

It is possible to trace a similar dialectic of the work in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* – a text moved, according to a dynamic common to several of González-Torres' works, by the *experience of mourning*:

> *History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it. As a living soul, I am the very contrary of History, I am what belies it, destroys it for the sake of my own history (impossible for me to believe in "witnesses"; impossible, at least, to be one; Michelet was able to write virtually nothing about his own time). That is what the time when my mother was alive before me is – History (moreover, it is the period which interests me most, historically). No anamnesis could ever make me glimpse this time starting from myself (this is the definition of anamnesis) – whereas, contemplating a photograph in which*

she is hugging me, a child, against her, I can waken in myself the rumpled softness of her crepe de Chine and the perfume of her rice powder. (Barthes [1980]: 65)

Barthes' quotation highlights precisely the paradoxical diplopia of González-Torres' *Untitled* and their capacity to stage the hysteria of History: experiencing the piece means accessing the artist's history by looking at it *from the outside*, remaining in a certain sense always "excluded" from the individuality and specificity of his memory; at the same time it is the very presence of the artist's biography that "destroys" the possibility of a History. In this processuality the role of the public – and of the public space – becomes that of recomposing an inaccessible history through the appropriation of a symbolic fragment of a private history decomposed within the structure of the work.

The life of the artist is thus present as a *ghost* within the creative, productive and reproductive circuits of the artworks; it is present as an *absence*, as a space to be deciphered or as material to be incorporated, but never in a direct and explicit way. This is also the trap that González-Torres' work sets for aesthetics, art criticism and even for any psychoanalysis of the art. The biographical element – always presented according to *ghostly* trajectories – never describes an explicative path, in the causal sense that in order to understand the work it is necessary to understand the artist's biography, to reconstruct his experience. In spite of this, it is easy to read his artwork in a reductive manner, as a pure and simple thematisation of personal suffering or as a critique of homophobic policies and the ghettoisation of AIDS sufferers.

For Gonzalez-Torres, the scarcity of biographical or didactic information is the element – always in *trompe-l'œil* – that prevents the activity of memory construction from being reduced to an *après-coup* re-construction of meaning through the artist's personal history or through a banal visual transposition of a critical position. If the *corpus* of the Cuban artist's works is also evidently constructed starting from critical positions towards the political and social context of America in the 1980s, the presence of an enigmatic inti-

mate and private element is precisely what makes it something different than a pure work of social criticism. We could perhaps hazard a guess that González-Torres' formal and poetic strategies, rather than being part of a critique, are part of a process that could instead be described as *clinical*.

This is an attitude that is both poetic and epistemological: a *clinic* beyond any *critical* horizon that proceeds from the mutual isolation of a subject and an object. Here we borrow the notion of *clinic* from psychoanalysis but declining it in the light of a more extended and non-psychoanalytic sense: a *clinic* is the possibility of thought and action at the point of collapse of criticism, where the subject encounters *the Real* according to a path that assigns the subject itself to the contingency of the event. In order to better clarify the choice and the philosophical function of the term *clinic*, we would like to take up a remark by the psychoanalyst who, more than anyone else after Freud, has questioned the problem of psychic causality: Jacques Lacan. In the fifth chapter of *Seminar XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan poses a fundamental question: «Where do we meet this real? For what we have in the discovery of psychoanalysis is an encounter, an essential encounter – an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us» (Lacan [1973]: 53). This question, a central theme in French psychoanalyst's thought, reveals a double requirement of psychoanalysis: that of being a metapsychological theory that cannot avoid thinking about encounter with the real. Questioning the "place of the real" means trying to think of «those radical points in the real that I call encounters, and which enable us to conceive reality as *unterlegt*, *untertragen*» (Lacan [1973]: 54), a German term that Lacan translates with the French *en souffrance*: «Reality is in abeyance [*en souffrance*] there, awaiting attention» (Lacan [1973]: 56). The relation between place and encounter is so intimate that, in *Seminar VI*, Lacan differentiates analysis from a simple reconstruction of the past, in order to compare it to:

Psychoanalysis is not a simple reconstruction of the past, nor is it a reduction to pre-established norms; analysis is neither an epos nor an ethos. If I had to compare it to something, it would be to a narrative that would itself be the locus of the encounter at stake in the narrative. (Lacan [2013]: 572)

Until now we have used various terms from psychoanalytic and metapsychological fields: clinic, ghost, memory, mourning; this is not a recovery in order to explain the art piece, according to which the *Untitled* could somehow be psychoanalyzed together with the artist's biography. Our attempt is rather to define structural and procedural homologies with the metapsychological construction – an attempt already inaugurated by Sigmund Freud when he tried to construct a psychoanalytical discourse around artists and works of art (Freud [1906], [1910]).

From this point of view the reference to Barthes can help us to make some considerations in this regard. The French semiotician published *Camera Lucida* in 1980, two years after the death of his mother and shortly before he was hit by a van on his way out of the Collège de France, an event that was to lead to his death on 26 March of the same year. The text on photography abruptly interrupts a drift, so to speak intimist, of his thought that developed particularly in the years between the seminar on *Lover's Discourse* (1974-1976) and the death of his mother in 1977 (cf. Barthes [1977]). *Camera Lucida* was inspired by a photograph of his mother, and thus by a certain rethinking of the experience of mourning. This is an element common to a large part of González-Torres' artistic production, in particular the artworks produced during the end stage of Ross Laycock's illness and after his premature death. On this point, too, the trap we have highlighted above reappears, because if we read his work as a melancholic testimony of love for Ross, brutally interrupted by his death, everything seems to work. González-Torres' operation is much more subtle and could be defined – taking up the words of the French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida – as an "œuvre de sépulture" [*burial work*]:

Comment doit être faite la mémoire des hommes, si elle veut accorder à ses morts une sépulture qui protégé les vivants et permet à ceux-ci de continuer à s'entretenir avec eux? Serait-ce seulement le rêve qui disposerait de la juste nature propre à accorder aux morts la sépulture dont ils sont dignes et qui – mémoire masquée – les garderait à l'abri de l'oublieuse conscience des souvenirs? C'est cela que j'ai avancé. Mais il reste à comprendre comment le rêve convient à la survivance et ainsi à la substance des morts. (Fédida [2001]: 108)

According to Fédida, it is the dream, and its hallucinatory capacity to make person appear and disappear, that constitutes the model of a burial of deceased loved ones. Fédida's reference is to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud [2010]), when he refers to «à ces rêves indistincts où les formes humaines sont semblables à des ombres qui absorbent toute l'attention du rêveur dans son rêve et qui se soustraient à toute reconnaissance» (Fédida [2001]: 107). In such dreams, these shadows would be "morts sans sépulture", wandering souls waiting for a burial that the dreamer would like to grant them through the dream itself. Dreaming would thus be a way of thinking about our dead, since «les apparences humaines qui viennent en rêve et qui sont tissées de notre propre personne portent la marque de la disparition. Le rêve, ai-je dit, est un approfondissement de la dépressivité du deuil» (Fédida [2001]: 107). Fédida's attention is focused here on the fact that "rêves indistincts [*blurred dreams*]" appear in the analysis as an expression of absence, of an absence produced by disappearance: «La disparition n'a-t-elle pas ceci de particulier, qu'elle empêche toute localization du corps et qu'elle tourmente alors l'attente du vivant? Est-il bien mort, ce disparu? C'est la question du supplice du survivant» (Fédida [2001]: 109). This situation of the subject defines what Fédida calls the "état dépressif", «L'être déprime est un *état d'affect* que l'on caractériserait donc comme cet état *affecté* ignorant qu'il est ainsi par *oubli des morts*» (Fédida [2001]: 109): it is an oblivion which in turn corresponds to "l'étouffement assourdissant" and to "l'extermination" which ends up involving the people who are still alive.

In this sense, the *depressive state* arises as a pathological equivalent of an impossible mourning, in respect of which psychotherapy will somehow have to find ways of releasing the dead from their imprisonment by granting a space to host and protect them. It is common for pathological mourning to make the dream itself impossible, when the influence exerted on the dreamer by these faceless shadows is resolved into enchantment and fascination:

> *On serait aussitôt tenté d'ajouter: ce que les rêves indistincts rendent impossible, c'est l'hallucination négative. Il ne serait plus dans le pouvoir du rêveur de faire apparaître/disparaître les personnes. La vengeance des morts serait-elle à ce point violente que le rêveur resterait immobilisé et ainsi contraint – tel dans L'Enfer de Dante – à se laisser emmurer par celui ou celle auquel il refuse sépulture? La condamnation infligée au survivant par le mort sans sépulture équivaut à celle de devenir mort-vivant enterré dans le sommeil. (Fédida [2001]: 110)*

In the depressive state, the disappearance prevents the "localization du corps [*location or boundary of the body*]" and for this very reason torments "l'attente du vivant"; this is fundamental because the problem of *location and boundaries* is decisive in many of Félix González-Torres' artworks. Consider, for example, the series of *Untitled* in which he uses sweets – either lying on the ground in a rectangular shape or piled up in a corner – whose weight corresponds to the weight of Ross' sick body: the physical space of the piece becomes the psychic space of memory, the space of physical deconstruction – the number of sweets gradually decreasing – becomes the space for a memory's construction shared with the public. Fédida itself explores the problem of localisation, asking himself where the end of life begins:

> *Mais où commence la fin de la vie? Non pas quand, mais où? La question est nietzschéenne plûtot que freudienne. Elle appelle cet accroissement de l'étendue de la pensée – sans doute son désert –, lorsque le corps commence à se raréfier et à devenir trop étroit, en quelque sorte. Si la question appelait une réponse*

> *dans la durée du temps, elle entraînerait sûrement cette capitulation lyrique – sorte de lâcheté de l'âme – par laquelle les humains se font passifs sous le temps. […] Le rétrécissement du corps, sa raréfaction qui, depuis l'intérieur, offre cette générosité inattendue de porter un corps à se simplifier dans une sorte de formule, cette raréfaction abandonne au regard des autre la rapidité de voir disparaître. Ainsi peut-on savoir chez un individu quand a commencé la fin de sa vie. Parfois depuis très longtemps. Ou encore, parfois, depuis peu, mais de façon accélérée. Mais qui veut dire où a commencé la fin d'une vie? (Fédida [2001]: 111-112)*

This is a key question not only for psychoanalysis but also for González-Torres' poetics. A superficial reading would invite us to *interpret* the work according to "*quand*" [*when*], to the chronological temporality of the artist's mourning: but in that case an artwork such as *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)* would take on the didactic function of a monument to memory – a procedure that in Fédida's perspective would entail a risk: «les humains sont plûtot menaces de se server de la mort pour survivre en un sommeil sans rêve» (Fédida [2001]: 112). But if, in the other hand, we try to think about this work according to the "*où*" [*where*], then all its creative possibilities open up and *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)* can then be thought of as a *space of transference* where the artist and public, although *foreign*, contribute to the constitution-reconstitution of a memorable. The insistence on the "où" rather than the "quand" does not imply, however, a crushing of temporality on the spatial dimension: in fact, the Freudian conception of the "work of mourning" *cannot be separated from a reference to duration*. As Fédida points out, «*le problème du deuil est le problème de l'encombrement du survivant par le cadavre*! Et, de ce point de vue, il ne serait peut-être pas abusif de prétendre que le travail du deuil équivaut à une protection que s'accordent les humains, afin d'intérioriser le temps de la mémoire et de l'oubli ou encore (ce qui revient au même) payer une dette symboliquement et imaginairement exigée pour rester en vie» (Fédida [2001]: 113). This quotation almost seems to refer to the precise

modalities of "staging" in many of González-Torres' artworks where the theme of "encombrement [*encumbrance*, *size*]" and its *exactness* is poetically carved through the reference to the weight of Ross' body: an encumbrance subject to progressive lightening thanks to the interaction of the public. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)* thus *does not stage* a work of mourning or a work of passing away, but rather an "œuvre de sépulture" that «concerne l'acte d'ensevelissement du mort, mais aussi cette preparation, après la mort, du lieu qui rendra possible la communication entre les vivants et les morts» (Fédida [2001]: 113). And such a "preparation" – a term unintentionally used by Fédida in the museum-like sense of "setting up", "arrangement", "display" or "staging" and which finds in the reference to González-Torres' work a new and different exactness – accords «une très grande importance aux aspects du corps que l'on veut conserver au-delà du cadavre» (Fédida [2001]: 113). However, it is not a facet, a familiar gestures, the intonation of the voice or a simple movement of the body that will embody the stylistic modalities of Ross's survival, but rather the paradoxically, objective and impersonal appearance of the body: its weight, which becomes the locus of burial, «cette *mémoire réminiscente de l'intimité d'un corps*» (Fédida [2001]: 113).

This locus which, according to Fédida, "*est le lieu d'une mémoire du nom*" – Ross Laycock's name is never present in the titles of the works except for some parenthetical occurrence – «*c'est aussi le lieu don't les parents et amis ont besoin pour continuer à communiquer avec les morts*» (Fédida [2001]: 113). In this sense, "la construction d'une sépulture" is, in the life of each one of us, our task towards our loved ones: in Gonzalez-Torres' unique poetics it is provocatively entrusted to the public since, as Fédida himself shows with great clarity: «Une théorie de l'affect ne saurait sous-estimer cette pensée qu'à chaque instant, une rencontre humaine rendra ou non possible cette sépulture dont depend la vie» (Fédida [2001]: 114). Starting from this assumption it is possible to understand the exceptional attention the Cuban artist took in explaining to the room attendants the dynamics of interaction between the works and the public.

González-Torres' work is then something else altogether melancholic, if we understand melancholy as «est le résultat de cette faute d'avoir négligé ses morts et de les avoir privés de la sépulture du rêve» (Fédida [2001]: 116): the tragic experience that the human being has to face is that his own life «dépend de la place qu'il donne, dans sa vie, à la mort, et à laquelle il accorde le pouvoir de son enracinement généalogique, ainsi que les potentialités créatives du temps» (Fédida [2001]: 119). The essential element that prevents González-Torres' works from becoming *melancholically closed in a state of depression* is precisely the complex role that the public plays within the processuality of the work. The public, in fact, is not the recipient of the work, just as the work is not intended for the spectator's enjoyment; in his art pieces, the *private* and *public* dimensions are marked by indiscernibility, and even the notion of a "public" that enjoys the artwork is confused with that of a *ghostly public*. On several circumstances González-Torres has defined the only true public of his work – and often the subject of them – as Ross Laycock: «When people ask me, "Who is your public?" I say honestly, without skipping a beat "Ross". The public was Ross» (Félix González-Torres quoted in Storr [2014]: 241). The figure of Ross understood as "public" refers to a virtual space defined as a space of absence. As involuntary accomplice in the construction of the artwork's meaning the public accepts, by its active participation, to collaborate in the separation of the artist from his work and at the same time in the destruction of the latter.

Therefore based on a dialogue and a relationship that are only physically interrupted, the process of *letting* works *go* by supporting the artist's need to detach himself from the piece and, consequently, from the memory it carries. In other words, *letting go* means not being trapped in a melancholic and depressive affection but on the contrary being able to start from it, exploiting the "potentialités créatives du temps".

Freud said that we rehearse our fears in order to lessen them. In a way this "letting go" of the work, this refusal to make a static form, a monolithic sculpture, in favour of a disappearing, changing, unstable, and fragile form was an attempt on my part to rehearse my fears of having Ross disappear day by day right in front of my eyes. (Félix González-Torres quoted in Rosen [1997]: 44)

Art of the precariousness and momentary, *letting go* assumes the intangible and fragmentary form of memory, opening up to sharing, to re-elaboration and to the assumption of new nuances and different directions of meaning. Similarly, González-Torres' autobiographical memory develops along a path of dynamism and vagueness, renouncing the common expectations of representation of the memory. Memory, in a contemporary reinterpretation of Proust's famous madeleine, now takes the form of piles of sweets, different in shape, colour and weight, which the public is invited to take away, eat or share. Set aside in the corner of a museum room, or scattered on the floor, the candies become sweet instruments through which the author's autobiographical memory becomes the memory of the public, «a sharing experiences, one's life» (Merewether [1994]: 64).

Memory, the artist seems to suggest, is not only psychic but also physical (Ferguson [1994]: 32): synthesized by the sweet taste of a coloured candy, it has a direct effect on our body, involving all five senses and restoring our being as a concrescence of time. As painful as the moment of *letting go* may be for the artist, it allows – for the artist who sees his work vanish and for those who contribute to its scattering – to materially visualize an imperfect and fragmentary memory in order to reshape the present and build a future (Ferguson [1994]: 25): in the fragmentary narrative of the past, kept alive through the interaction between the work and the public and its free circulation, it is then a question of opening a dialogue with the present time where the history of the artist – as well as that of the public – becomes part of the history of each individual spectator, in

a construction never given *a priori* and always to be constructed.

The *medium* – which perhaps we should here identify as memory[2] – is definitively embodied in the physical representation of a memory, in a Brechtian *mise-en-scène* projected into the psychophysical dimension of the spectator and into the space of the exhibition: in this way, the ordinary objects at the core of his artworks – piles of paper, sweets, puzzles, luminous threads, billboards – become poetic vectors, distilled statements of political and cultural criticism impregnated with whispered autobiographical clues.

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[2] Regarding memory as a *medium* cf. Krauss [2011].

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Aisthesis

Messianism and Happiness in Walter Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment*

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Abstract. On the basis of a citation from the final part of Walter Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment* (1920-21), we shall hypothesize a similarity between Benjamin and Kant, the political thinker and philosopher of history, in his *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*. According to Kant, the man who participates in history and in the human race seeks happiness and the means to procure it for himself as a member of «free» humanity, thus seeking to unify external freedom and happiness in institutions of law. During the period 1920-1921 Benjamin was strongly critical of the concept of law, including also that of Kant, which he saw as contradictory to the idea of justice; in opposition, Benjamin held first an anarchist-libertarian view, then a revolutionary one. From a dialectical perspective, however, we find in common in Benjamin and Kant a redemptive pessimism that foresees, in the «twisted wood» of mankind, an ultimate providential and messianic *possibility*: «The spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, that leads to immortality, correspond to a worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality», the eternal succession of generations and their institutions, which is «the rhythm of messianic nature», is happiness. Nature eternalizes itself in this virtual spatial and temporal totality in the history of humanity moving toward the realization of the idea of law and, spatially, the achievement of global, cosmopolitan politics: «nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total caducity».

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, Immanuel Kant, History, Messianism, Happiness.

1. A FAILED PROJECT: THE DOCTORAL THESIS ON KANT AND HISTORY

The spiritual restitutio in integrum [...] corresponds to a worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.
To strive for such a passing away – even the passing away of those stages of man that are nature – is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism. (Benjamin [1920-1921]: 305-306)

On the basis of this citation from the final part of Walter Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment* (Benjamin [1920-1921]: 305-306), we shall hypothesize a similarity between Benjamin and Kant, the political thinker and philosopher of history, in his *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent* (Kant [1784]: 9-23).

In 1917, the year he attended the University of Berna, Benjamin prepared an outline of a thesis on «Kant and History» (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 98; Benjamin to Scholem, 22.10.1917). In December of the same year he narrowed his theme with the title «The Concept of infinite task in Kant» (Ibid.: 103-104; Benjamin to Scholem, 7.12.1917), encompassing it within the more general question, «What does it mean to say that science is an infinite task?» (Ibid.: 105-107; Benjamin to Scholem, 23.12.1917). In the same period he wrote *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy* (Benjamin [1917-1918]: 100-110).

Even before elaborating his plan to take up Kant as a doctoral thesis, Benjamin planned and then put off the reading of Kant's work (probably the *Critique of Pure Reason*), because he wanted to accompany it with the reading of Hermann Cohen (possibly *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, which he would read in 1918) during his study of early Romanticism. The philosophy of early Romanticism enters into his thesis project due to the importance of its concepts of "religion" and "history", for its relation to the mystical and Kabbalistic tradition, and for its conception of messianism[1]:

> *In one sense, whose profundity would first have to be made clear, romanticism seeks to accomplish for religion what Kant accomplished for theoretical subjects: to reveal its form. But does religion have a form? In any case, under history early romanticism imagined something analogous to this. (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 89; Benjamin to Scholem, 06.1917)*

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[1] On the messianism of early romanticism, see Benjamin's doctoral thesis, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Benjamin [1919]: 116-200), and his letter to E. Schoen of 7.04.1919 in Benjamin (1910-1940): 139-140. On early romanticism's concepts of religion and history, see the June 1917 letter to Scholem (Ibid.: 87-89).

By tracing the steps of the early Romantics, Benjamin intends to explore the concepts of religion and history (in their union and coincidence in a superior sphere of thought and life), according to their theoretical form and systematic role, by employing Kant's method of critical inquiry, that is, the analytical process of proceeding from the conditioned to the conditions, a practice which Neo-Kantianism would name the transcendental method.

In *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy*, his project of revising and developing the Kantian system, religion would play a central role as the source of ideas and a site of the unity and totality of consciousness, while history (which must seek its concepts in a new transcendental logic) would stand at the base of the «becoming» of knowledge, a process tending toward the (messianic) fulfillment of «doctrine», a fully realized system of philosophy where religion and history would coincide (*Ibidem*).

In a letter dated October 22, 1917, Benjamin presents Scholem with a working project on Kant (although he has not yet begun the reading for it), which intends to explicate the relation between philosophy and history, theory of knowledge and philosophy of history, and which proposes to develop the Kantian system in new directions. He also writes, however, that the possibility of starting from this basis for his doctoral thesis depends on the results of his reading of Kant's works on history:

> *This winter I will begin to work on Kant and history. I do not know yet whether I will be able to find in the historical Kant the completely positive content required in this regard. Whether a doctoral dissertation will come out of this study in part depends on that. For I have not yet read the relevant works by Kant. (Ibid.: 98)*

The theme of the work is made more specific in a December 7, 1917 letter to Scholem, in which Benjamin notifies his friend that he still can't send him an essay he is writing on Kant, *On the Program of a Coming Philosophy*, because it is still a draft; neither can he discuss Kant with Scholem (he still hasn't finished reading Kant's writings on

the philosophy of history), but he again promises a substantive advance in his knowledge and ability to thoroughly explain the epistemological questions he is working on in his partnership with Scholem:

it is necessary to begin by being concerned with the letter of Kantian philosophy. Kantian terminology is probably the only philosophical terminology that in its entirety did not only arise but was created. It is precisely the study of this terminology that leads to a realization of its extraordinary potency. In any case, it is possible to learn a lot by expanding and immanently defining the terminology as such. In this regard, I recently came upon a topic that might have something in it for me as a dissertation: the concept of the «infinite task in Kant» (what do you think?). (Ibid.: 103-104; transl. modif.)

Benjamin renders the theme of «the concept of infinite task in Kant» in parallel with the need (born in part from his reading of Scholem's letters about Kant) to carefully study the «terminology» and the «letter» of the Kantian system – which is to say its exact logical-linguistic substance, its definition of the field, and the possibility of applying its concepts and ideas so as to develop an immanent interpretation leading to a revision of Kant's epistemological and metaphysical thought. The problem is to interpret Kant from a new perspective, one which passes through Cohen's interpretation of the Kantian thing-in-itself and the role of ideas in the investigation of experience. Benjamin's goal is to surpass Cohen's interpretation in a direction that goes beyond exclusive reference of the transcendental method to the physical-mathematical science of nature.

Benjamin intends, in fact, to identify a new concept of knowledge and a new concept of experience which are founded on a religious vision of language and which develop in a messianic historical process aimed at resolving philosophy in a metaphysical-religious and linguistic dimension (characterized by a «magic of language»)[2] which

he, together with Scholem, calls «doctrine», and which he identifies with the Pentateuch in the Torah. In the same letter, after asking Scholem's judgment of this project of his, he returns to the theme of the philosophy of history in relation to Kant (but only after having developed his own ideas on history does he think he may learn something decisive from Kant) and Torah:

under certain circumstances it is necessary to be a completely independent thinker when it comes to your own thought, above all when ultimate questions are at issue. In any case, there are certain questions, like those related to the philosophy of history, that are central for us, but about which we can learn something decisive from Kant only after we have posed them anew for ourselves. […] No doubt, we can have a real exchange of ideas about the Torah and the history of philosophy only when we are together again. (Ibid.: 104; Benjamin to G. Scholem, 7.12.1917)

Benjamin positions the "letter" of Kant in relation to a concept of the philosophy of history which he will not find in Kant, but which is linked, in his and Scholem's thought, to the Judaic conception of the interpretation of the sacred text and the messianic idea of justice[3]. This involves all philosophy, including the theory of knowledge (but all philosophy seems included in this knowledge, as «pure knowledge»)[4], in a process-oriented vision of the task of philosophy toward a redemptive and messianic «resolution» (*Auflösung*) in the doctrine as a metaphysical realm, founded on the

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[2] See Scholem's observations on Kabbalah, mathematics and magic in language (Scholem [1995]: 403-404; annota-

tions, 11.10.1916). There is a link between the mathematical theory of truth and the internal form of the Hebrew language: in both, pure spiritual form is central, respectively mathematical structure and linguistic structure, while empirical or significatory contents are not fundamental (see Tagliacozzo [2016]: 79-108).

[3] See the note of October 11, 1916 in Scholem (1995): 404, where the idea of justice in Judaism is seen as a historical-messianic category that leads Judaism itself to conquer, in the Torah, the mythical and magical dimension. See also Desideri (1995).

[4] See Benjamin (1917-1918): 108: «All philosophy is thus theory of knowledge, but just that – a theory, critical and dogmatic, of all knowledge».

theological language of revelation (see Benjamin [1916]: 62-74; see also Ponzi [2016]: 185-198), of the conceptual, ideal, mathematical, and ethical orders whose center is God, and which coincides with the Torah (which in Hebrew means doctrine, teaching).

The term "doctrine" (*Lehre*) is strictly connected, in that period, to Benjamin's concepts of tradition and teaching[5]: doctrine presents itself as the spiritual and ethical "linguistic" content (for this reason the Torah is also called "The Law") which is passed on and developed in teaching. For Benjamin, the order of teaching «completely coincides with the religious order of tradition», and to educate «is only (in spirit) to enrich doctrine» (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 94; Benjamin to Scholem, 6.9.1917)[6]. It develops in a historical-messianic process directed toward its fulfillment as justice

(as the presence of God in the world, Shekinah)[7]. With their just actions, the just help to usher in Shekinah, the justice of God, and the coming of the Messiah. But can actions be just in the profane realm, in free humanity's search for happiness? This question brings us again to the relationship between morality, justice, and happiness in Kant, and to the relation between Benjamin and Kant's texts on history.

On December 23, 1917, Benjamin writes to Scholem of his disappointed expectations after reading *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent* and *On Perpetual Peace* (Benjamin lists the review of Herder along with the two readings) (see Tagliacozzo [2003]: 319-320):

> *As far as Kant's history of philosophy is concerned, my exaggerated expectations have met with disappointment as a result of having read both of the main works that deal specifically with this (Ideas for a Universal History [Ideen zu einer Geschicthe] and Perpetual Peace [Zum ewigen Frieden]). This is unpleasant for me, especially in view of my plans for a disser-*

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[5] This concerns the Judaic tradition of Kabbalah as taken up and reinterpreted (in the wake of Böhme) by Christian philosophers Molitor and Baader, who, Benjamin says, certainly influenced Schelling (see Benjamin [1910-1940]: 88). The title of Franz Joseph Molitor's most important work, in fact, refers specifically to the philosophy of history as tradition; that is, as Scripture, its interpretation (especially Kabbalistic), and transmission: *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition in dem alten Bunden und ihre Beziehung zur Kirche des Neuen Bundes mit vorzüglicher Rücksicht auf die Kabbala* (Molitor [1827-1855]). Scholem also references his reading of this text in a letter to Siegfried Lehmann dated October, 1916, in which he explains his perception of the relation between Judaism and religion, the tradition of the Torah, and the magic of the language in the Hebrew text (Scholem [1994]: 47-48; letter 17): «*[the concept of God] is the concept and reality of the Torah, this is the Hebrew concept of doctrine (Lehre), it is the Hebrew concept of "tradition", incredibly profound and true, and which we achieve in reality. […]* The Torah – according to the mystics – will be perfect in the days of the Messiah».

[6] See *Ibidem* the entire passage: «In the tradition, everyone is an educator and everyone needs to be educated and everything is education. These relations are symbolized and synthesized in the development of the doctrine (*Entwicklung der Lehre*)». Doctrine, and the philosophy it contains, is conceived by Benjamin with a theological vision of language, in which language originates from the divine word that creates the world and of which the Torah is made.

[7] See Scholem (1995): 411 (annotation 27.10.1916): «Now I know that even the most arid "juridical" discussion in the Talmud is a religious issue – to put it simply: Since Judaism wants justice and the Talmud does not contain a doctrine of law, but a doctrine of justice». On justice as a preparation for the coming of the Messiah and sign of the presence of God in the world (*Shekhinah*) see a November 16, 1916 note, Ibid.: 419: «The essence of the Jewish idea (*Vorstellung*) of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), as "an effort to make the world into the highest good (*höchstes Gut*)", as Benjamin has written [see Ibid.: 401], is deeply revealed in the *extremely* untranslatable words of the sage which Hirsch transmits on *Gen*. 24, 1 [see Hirsch (1889): 319]: […] *the just will prepare (for the arrival of the) Shekhinah on Earth* […]: the just prepare the Earth [to make it into] […] a divine place, to drag the Shekhinah *down*. […] the essence of the Shekhinah is justice. And therefore the increase in justice is in fact only the increase in the revelation of justice, the true growth of divine power on Earth, of Shekhinah; thus justice is the maximum revelation of God and its maximum veneration. The *just* summon the Messiah, no one else. Shekhinah is often translated as "Splendor of God"; fine, this is the […] (*zedaka, justice*), justice is in truth a reflection of God. One can love without God, but one cannot be just without God».

tation topic, but in these two works by Kant I find no essential connection at all to works on the philosophy of history with which we are most familiar. Actually, I can perceive only a purely critical attitude toward them. Kant is less concerned with history than with certain historical constellations of ethical interest. And what's more, it is precisely the ethical side of history that is represented as inadequate for special consideration, and the postulate of a scientific mode of observation and method is posited (introduction to Ideas for a Universal History). I would be very interested in knowing whether you have a different opinion. I find Kant's thoughts entirely inappropriate as the starting point for, or as the actual subject of, an independent treatise. (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 105; Benjamin to Scholem, 23.12.1917)

These words of Benjamin's reveal to us the degree to which he mistook Kant's intentions, that in the search for a law of history he did not seek a new natural law, but, rather, a «connecting thread» that would be theological and ideal (precisely an «idea of universal history») rather than mechanical. But he could find no similarity in Kant with the Judaic and messianic viewpoint he shared with Scholem.

2. LAW AND JUSTICE

That Benjamin, having already read some Kant (*Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Critique of Judgment*, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, at least in part), was already reflecting on these themes of law[8] and justice is revealed by a note in Scholem's diary that copies from one of Benjamin's notebooks a text entitled *Notes for a work on the category of Justice*. We may repeat here, then, the question posed at the outset of this discussion: in a free humanity's search for happiness, can actions be just within the realm of the profane? The answer comes to us from the above-mentioned text of 1916:

From the notebook loaned me by Walter Benjamin. Notes for a work on the category of Justice.

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[8] We translate with the term "law" the german term *Recht* with the English term "law".

To every good, as limited by the spatio-temporal order, inheres the character of possession (Besitzcharakter) as an expression of its passing-away (Vergänglichkeit). Possession, however, as a prisoner of that very finitude, is always unjust. Therefore, no order of possession (Besitzordnung), no matter how ordered, can lead to justice (Gerechtigkeit).
On the contrary, this resides in the condition of a good which cannot be a possession […].
Justice is the effort to make the world into the highest good (höchstes Gut).
The reflections here pointed out lead to the hypothesis: Justice is not a virtue alongside other virtues […], rather, it establishes a new ethical category […]. Justice does not appear to refer to the good will of the subject; rather it establishes a new state (Zustand) of the world: justice designates the ethical category of the existent (des Existenten), while virtue designates the ethical category of that which is needed (des Geforderten). One may require virtue, while justice ultimately can only exist as a state of the world and a state of God. In God, all virtues have the form of justice. […]
Justice is the ethical face of the struggle; justice is the power of virtue and the virtue of power. The responsibility we have toward the world reveals itself as such in the demand for justice. […] [It is] the demand for justice, for the just state of the world. The single empirical act relates to moral law somehow as an (ineluctable) fulfillment of the formal schema. Law, on the other hand, relates to justice as the schema does to its fulfillment. Other languages have pointed out the immense gap that opens up between law and justice in their essence. Ius fas themis dike mishpat zedek. (Scholem [1995]: 401-402; my transl.)

Justice is one of the elements of Messianism, and in Judaism is both *mishpat* (law applied rigorously) and *zedek* (mercy, charity). According to Scholem, the concept of justice as *zedek* or *zedakà* also comes to Benjamin from his reading of Achad Ha-ham. Benjamin divides the two terms and considers Messianic justice exclusively as *zedek*, relegating law to the realm of the mythical and contingent, of violence and destiny, but as such and because of this, it is the place where free humanity must be able to strive for happiness. The arrow of Messianic intensity and justice which we

find in the *Theological-Political Fragment*, directs in a certain way the arrow of law, despite the fact that these two arrows point in opposite directions. Posed as a question, we ask, does free humanity's search for happiness within the institutions of law favor the coming of the messianic Kingdom? In the meantime, in 1918 Benjamin will read the *Critique of Practical Reason*, while in his 1921-1922 essay *Goethe's Elective Affinities* we find a citation of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (see Benjamin [1892-1940]: VII/1, 441; Benjamin [1922]: 300).

3. THE *THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL FRAGMENT*: MESSIANIC NATURE AND HAPPINESS

The first question posed to us in the *Theological-Political Fragment* is who is the Messiah?[9] What is the relation between the profane order and the messianic order? And, we might add, in what sense can nature be messianic? What does Benjamin mean by «profane order»? In what sense does he mean, «the profane order of the profane can favor the coming of the Messianic Kingdom» and «To strive for this [the eternal and total caducity of nature] […] is the task of world politics» (Benjamin [1920-1921]: 305-306; transl. mod.)?

I would like to show how the profane order characterized by an internal and total caducity («the rhythm of messianic nature») (Ibid.: 306) here interprets and reflects the Kantian conception of the humankind, eternally contingent in the succession of its generations, as subject of history and politics, on the path toward the realization of the idea of law, in institutions, as the perfect republic. In Benjamin, the generations follow the rhythm of messianic nature, happiness (conceived also as fortune); that contingent dimension bound to the needs of man, which politics and history must also take into account.

In Kant, happiness, a (secondary) element of the Highest Good, is acquired by a humanity that

has made itself worthy by pursuing the realization of moral law and the idea of law in institutions (see Scuccimarra [1977])[10]. Kant identifies law as the setting of external liberty, which must permit all to seek their own happiness:

No one can constrain me to be happy in their way (in a way which another considers to be for the benefit of other men); rather, each must be able to see his happiness according to the path they prefer, as long as they do not intrude on the freedom of others to follow an analogous goal, a freedom which may be in concord with the liberty of each person (or with the rights of the other) according to a possible universal law. (Kant [1793]: 290; my transl.).

The union between moral law and happiness allows for justice. In the first *Critique*, Kant writes, «Happiness, therefore – in exact proportion to the morality of rational beings, which renders them worthy of happiness – constitutes on its own the highest good in a world in which we must take our place on the basis of reason – practically applied» (Kant [1787]: 683, B 842-A 814; my transl.).

Thus it is equally necessary to admit on the basis of the reasoning – applied theoretically – that each person has a right to aspire to happiness in the same degree to which he has made himself worthy of it through his conduct, and thus the system of morality is indissolubly joined – only, however, in the idea of pure reason – with that of happiness. (Ibid.: 680, B 837-A 809; my transl.)

In paragraph 87 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes:

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[9] On the presence of Spinoza and his *Theological-Political Treatise* in the essay's title (given successively by Adorno) and on Benjamin's reflections during 1920-1921, see Palma (2019): 221-238.

[10] See also Fabio Minazzi (2003): 68: «In this comprehensive framework one can better understand, then, how for Kant the very right of happiness for each individual citizen pertains exclusively to that individual, but pertains precisely in his specific quality as member of a civil society and in his quality as a man, that is his quality of "being capable in general of law". For Kant happiness and freedom thus represent two sides of the same coin, to the point that from his perspective it is never possible to consider only one component of the problem, neglecting its direct and constitutive connection with the other aspect» (my transl.).

The moral law as the formal rational condition of the use of our freedom obliges us by itself alone, without depending on any purpose as material condition; but it nevertheless determines for us, and indeed a priori, a final purpose towards which it obliges us to strive, and this purpose is the highest good in the world possible through freedom.

The subjective condition under which man (and, according to all our concepts, every rational finite being) can set a final purpose for himself under the above law is happiness. Consequently, the highest physical good possible in the world, to be furthered as a final purpose as far as in us lies, is happiness, under the objective condition of the harmony of man with the law of morality as worthiness to be happy.

But it is impossible for us in accordance with all our rational faculties to represent these two requirements of the final purpose proposed to us by the moral law, as connected by merely natural causes, and yet as conformable to the Idea of that final purpose.

[…] Consequently we must assume a moral World-Cause (an Author of the world) in order to set before ourselves a final purpose consistent with the moral law; and in so far as the latter is necessary, so far (i.e. the same degree and on the same ground) the former also must be necessarily assumed; i.e. we must admit that there is a God. (Kant [1790]: 380-381)

The unity of moral law and happiness, which is beyond of power of the moral, natural man because he cannot entirely dominate nature, is guaranteed in Kant by the postulate of the existence of God as the moral cause and author of the world. Thus transcendence, represented in Benjamin as the Messiah, presents itself as the sole power able to create the relation between the profane and the messianic, between happiness and morality, in the guise of justice: «Only the Messiah in person complete each historical occurrence in the sense that he alone redeems, creates its relation to the messianic itself. For this reason, nothing that is historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to the Messianic». But since the profane is erected on the idea of happiness, and since the relation between the profane order and the messianic order is «one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history», «free humanity's

search for happiness» favors «the advent of the messianic Kingdom». «For in happiness all that is earthly seeks its downfall, and only in happiness is it determined to find its downfall» (Benjamin [1920-1921]: 305-306; transl. mod.). Contingency, death, and happiness are inseparable. Seeking happiness does not bring about, but favors, the advent of the Kingdom indirectly, as the «profane order of the Profane», the profane elevated to a power. Thus the necessity emerges in the profane order to elaborate a law which, however «mythical» and unredeemed, may, within «world politics, whose method must be called nihilism» (Ibid.: 306), favor the advent of the Kingdom, in the history of a humanity which presents itself as eternal in the succession of its generations, notwithstanding the fact that the individual is contingent and mortal. Precisely by defining itself in terms of the contingency and fragility of the human, in seeking to recuperate that which is always lost in the process of passing away (*Vergehen*)[11], in its sobriety, can the political be messianic and redemptive.

On the other hand, the moral man, the single, internal man, has within himself a messianic intensity which «passes through unhappiness, in the sense of suffering» (Ibid.: 305; transl. mod.) in a spiritual *restitutio in integrum* which introduces him to the immortality of the soul. This is the tragic man of Benjamin and the moral man of Kant, given direction by internal freedom (purity of intention). Set against the collectivity of humankind, the individual in Benjamin presents himself as a moral subject, alone and unhappy, characterized by an immortal soul in which messianic intensity is expressed in a present, fulfilled eternity, the virtual realization of the Kantian moral law united with beatitude in *post mortem* eternity.

According to Kant, the man who participates in history and in the humankind seeks happiness and the means to procure it for himself as a

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[11] One cannot help thinking of Benjamin's reading of Hölderlin, the subject of a study by Benjamin in 1914-1915, in particular Hölderlin's text *Das Werden in Vergehen* (Hölderlin [1794]: 641-646). See Pelilli (2019): 153-168.

member of «free» humanity, thus seeking to unify external freedom and happiness in institutions of law. During the period 1920-1921 Benjamin was strongly critical of the concept of law, including also that of Kant, which he saw as contradictory to the idea of justice; in opposition, Benjamin held first an anarchist-libertarian view, then a revolutionary one. From a dialectical perspective, however, we find in common in Benjamin and Kant a redemptive pessimism that foresees, in the «twisted wood» of mankind, an ultimate providential and messianic *possibility*: «The spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, that leads to immortality, correspond to a worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality», the eternal succession of generations and their institutions, which is «the rhythm of messianic nature», is happiness. Nature eternalizes itself in this virtual spatial and temporal totality in the history of humanity moving toward the realization of the idea of law and, spatially, the achievement of global, cosmopolitan politics: «nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total caducity» (Ibid.: 306).

In Kant, in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, the goal of nature and history, is a «universal *cosmopolitan condition*, as the womb in which all the original dispositions of the human species will be developed» (Kant [1784]: 20-21). The idea of law will be realized in the coming together at the limit (from an eternal perspective) of the idea with all its historical realizations in the realm of law itself. Humankind is «immortal» but composed of «rational beings who all die» (Ibid.: 13).

If free humanity achieves happiness in the profane order, justice also is realized, the highest good, the redeemed state of the world; together with peace, justice is one of the dimensions of the messianic era. And vice-versa, without a full realization of the profanity of the profane, the messianic cannot come about. Without the historical succession of the generations of humankind in its search for happiness, in all its contingency and

perishability, moving toward the realization of cosmopolitan institutions that guarantee external freedom and happiness, there can be no justice, and thus no messianic state (*Zustand*):

> *Free humanity's search for happiness tends to diverge from that messianic trajectory [...]. The rhythm of messianic nature is happiness. For nature is messianic by reason of his eternal and total caducity. To strive for such a caducity, even for those states of mankind that are nature, is the task of worldly politics, whose method must be called nihilism. (Benjamin [1920-21]: 306; transl. mod.).*

The method of world or worldly politics, *Weltpolitik*, must present itself as the degree zero of the political, at the point where the political and the moral meet; not as the means of achieving an ultimate goal, but rather as a teleology free of any ultimate goal. In Benjamin the ethical, political and «historical task» pertaining to the conscious subject and collective agent (in the *Theses* of 1940 the generations, the oppressed masses; see Benjamin [1940]: 389-400) is founded on the autonomy of Kantian reason and on a conception of time that is not empty and mechanical, but that is full, intensive, and redemptive. This latter is the time of the Bible and prophecy, where historical contingency and the eternity of the idea coincide and mirror one another, as in the idea of happiness and sunset referred to in Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment*. The infinity of the *new* cognitive, ethical, and political task is intensive and comes to fruition in *actuality*, in which the concept of historical consciousness redeems the past and provides instruction for praxis. The relation between past and present is given in the dialectical image, in the concept of history, in a messianic interruption of the course of history. This owes to the jewish doctrine of the Kabbalah, to Kant and to Marx (see Khatib [2014]). This owes also a great deal to Hermann Cohen's neo-kantian and Judaic-messianic conception of ethics and his concept of temporality and eternity, his concepts of sanctity, humanity, justice and peace bound to history, and to his ethical anti-ontologism and anti-eschatologism – even granted Benjamin's inversion of Cohen's idea of ethics

bound to the future in the actuality of remembrance and the political interruption of the course of history (see Desideri [2005], [2015], [2016]; see also Tagliacozzo [2020]).

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Aisthesis

Secularization of Political Authority. On the Political Content of Theology in Benjamin's Theory of Trauerspiel

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Abstract. This article investigates the relationship between secular politics and theology in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*. It explores that question by starting from how the Weimar legal theory conceived the relationship between modern, secular law and the theological tradition. Focusing on Carl Schmitt's concept of secularization, it investigates the analogy model in term of which the legal discourse understood the named relationship as well as its political consequences. The article suggests that Benjamin's theory of the *Trauerspiel* elaborates a different, dialectical model which deploys, on the contrary, the crisis of any analogy between theology and modern politics.

Keywords: *Trauerspiel*, Political Theology, Benjamin, Schmitt, Kelsen, Secularization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin developed a theory of matter and the form of the baroque drama. The Trauerspiel is in many ways bound to the emergence of the idea of secular politics. This bond manifests itself in the sovereign being the center of the baroque stage. The sovereign is not just any person, character, or role; in fact, he represents the supreme political authority of a secular territorial state. Even the audience of the Trauerspiel was entangled in a secular reality, since it consisted mainly of court officials, who were mostly jurists. As Benjamin emphasizes, even the poets spent most of their time as statesmen (Benjamin [1928]: 38).

The secular state idea, undeniably present in the Trauerspiel, occurs paradoxically under the sign of theology: the *secularisation* of the Counter-Reformation era, «nowhere did [...] make the religious concerns feel less weighty» (Benjamin [1928]: 65). Although staging the sovereign as the ruler of a temporal regiment, the Trauerspiel nevertheless holds the conviction that the sovereign's person

is invested by God with an «unlimited hierarchical dignity» (Benjamin [1928]: 56). Considering the tension between the secular state idea on the one hand, and the predominance of religious modes of thought on the other, one asks how, according to Benjamin, the Trauerspiel conceives political authority. Does it present political authority as being structured analogously to religious models – or as radically profane? Is political authority the manifestation of a divine will, or a mere function of the profane order? How can we understand the correlation between the tendency towards secularization, so characteristic of seventeenth-century drama, and the undeniable hieratic coloring of political authority by it? All these questions lead back to the following: how secular politics and theology interrelate in Benjamin's theory of the Trauerspiel? This is the question to which this essay is devoted.

The question how secular politics and theology interrelates in Benjamin's theory of the Trauerspiel is twofold. On the one hand, it regards the conception of political authority during the Counter-Reformation, i.e. the era to which Benjamin's theory of baroque drama refers. On the other hand, the same question became particularly important for the period Benjamin composed his study on the baroque drama, i.e the Weimar period[1]. Indeed, the question about the relationship between theology and politics arose again within the Weimar legal and political theory; it is often associated with Schmitt's *Political Theology* and his influential secularization thesis.

Here, I will investigate the relationship between politics and theology in Benjamin's theory of Trauerspiel regarding the double *Zeitkern* described above. *At the outset*, I will examine the analogy model in terms of which Carl Schmitt, whose *Political Theology* Benjamin cites in his baroque-book, attempted to conceive this relationship. In order to better explain Schmitt's position and intentions, I will briefly refer to his counter-

part, Hans Kelsen, who, even before Schmitt, also used the analogy model; although with opposite aims. As I will argue, the analogy model is deeply problematic, mainly because it can serve both, the affirmation and the denial of the political content supposed to be expressed in the analogies between theology and modern secular law. Based on this reconstruction, I will then deal with Benjamin's *Trauerspiel-book*. I will suggest that Benjamin's theory of Trauerspiel offers a different understanding of the political-theological question. Instead of drawing on analogies between the two domains, Benjamin portrays the crisis of the analogy model itself by recurring to the political-historical experience reflected at the level of factual content («Sachgehalt») of baroque drama. Following Benjamin, theological and juridical-political thought are not analogous because they are interrelated in a dialectical way, resulting in the crisis of their analogy. As I will argue based on Benjamin's theory, the baroque theological discourse legitimized profane authority as divinely given, and precisely by doing so, it defined political authority as purely profane.

Of course, I am not claiming that this approach covers the issue of how theology relates to politics in the entire Benjaminian oeuvre. I rather intend to explore how Benjamin's theory of the baroque Trauerspiel can offer an answer to a highly controversial question posed within the Weimar legal theory. So, when I refer to «theology», I mean this term not in a general sense, but in the way Weimar legal theorists understood it.

2. CARL SCHMITT AND THE POLITICO-THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

The question regarding the relationship between theology and modern law became known through Schmitt's *Political Theology*. In its third essay, Schmitt sums up this question in the form of his well-known secularization thesis: «All significant concepts of the modem theory of the state are secularized theological concepts» (Schmitt [1922]: 36). That is, not merely a statement about

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[1] Regarding the re-emergence of theological thought schemes in the German-speaking intellectuals during the Weimar period, see Gangl (2007) and Graf (2005): 49-81.

their pedigree; it is a statement about their conceptual structure: the concepts of modern constitutional law are secularized theological concepts «not only because of their historical development but also because of their systematic structure» (Ibid.: 43). Schmitt's intention is to suggest that the structure of legal concepts is identical to the structure of theological concepts. And the means towards this end is the detection of analogies between the named domains, or as Volker Neumann call it: the analogy model (Neumann [2008]: 170).

According to Jean-François Kervégan, Schmitt's secularization thesis «is both "descriptive" and "political", that is, polemical» (Kervégan [2019]: 105)[2]. To understand it, it is thus necessary to identify the thesis opposed by Schmitt. Schmitt's secularization thesis counters Hans Kelsen, to whom Schmitt ascribes «the merit of having stressed since 1920 the methodical relationship of theology and jurisprudence» (Schmitt [1922]: 40).

In a series of publications aimed at establishing the Pure Theory of Law, Hans Kelsen indeed endeavored to point out parallels in the way of thinking between Christian theology and the predominant theory of the state[3]. Unlike Schmitt, by detecting such analogies, Kelsen was not aiming at bringing to light a supposedly unbroken bond between Christian theologoumena and modern legal concepts worth to be preserved. By emphasizing the methodological parallelism between the legal thinking of his time and Christian theology, he attempted instead to draw attention to the fact that the predominant doctrine of *Staatsrecht* had not yet reached the standpoint of modern science. On the contrary, it still lay on the level of unscientific, theological thinking. Kelsen intended to overcome the jurisprudence's theological mode of thought by extricating legal theory from any metalegal or extralegal concept, and above all the

extra-legal concept of state power or will. Thus, Kelsen's legal philosophy – the Pure Theory of Law – has an explicit critical and anti-theological orientation, as has been already pointed out (Dreier [2019]: 27-66; Górnisiewicz [2020]; Matos [2013]).

Kelsen dealt extensively with those analogies in his work *Der soziologische und der juristische Staatsbegriff* (1922). In its last section, entitled *State and Law: God and Nature* (Ibid.: 222-247), he traces the analogies between theological and jurisprudential theorems to the «double hypostatization» (Ibid.: 215) of the object, common to both theology and jurisprudence. This double hypostatization indicates two thought steps: Firstly, the predominant legal theory divides law into law and the state, like theology divides the world into world and God. It assumes the existence of a state, standing behind the legal order, like theology asserts that behind the world there is God's will. Law is thus conceived as an emanation of the state's will, just as theology considers the world to be an emanation of the divine will. This is the first hypostatization. The second hypostatization consists of attributing inherent dynamics to the first hypostatization, i.e. the state respectively God. As in theology, God is not identical with the world representing a distinct potency, the predominant legal theory considers the state to be non-identical with positive law and to bear a kind of higher «legal potency» transcending positive law and undermining its «dominion» (Ibid.: 210). Attributing a non-positive legal potency to the state, the predominant legal theory accepts, in the extreme case, the suspension of positive law declaring legally undefinable state acts to be legitimate. Thus, the notion of an extra-legal state act undertaken in favour of the state's integrity, finds its theological analogy in the concept of an immediate divine act of suspension of natural law, i.e., in the miracle. (Ibid.: 245-247)[4].

In opposition to the «legal theology», Kelsen's own *Pure Theory of Law* can be understood as a

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[2] See by contrast, Böckenförde (1983): 19, who conceives Schmitt's thesis merely as a sociological one.

[3] See Kelsen's self-presentation written in 1927, where he retrospectively considers the reconstruction of those analogies to be one of the essential elements of his theoretical work (Kelsen [1927]: 35).

[4] For a more detailed presentation of Kelsen's analogy model, see Neuman (2008): 164-174, and Baume (2009).

radical profanation of the law. For it leads to an understanding of the legal order as an autonomous and humanly constructed system of norms, within which authority is not a substance, but only a posited function of positive law. It leads to the understanding that authority does not create the normative order, but vice versa: the normative order gives authority its foundation.

Considering the above, it becomes intelligible what Schmitt's political theology is opposed to: his main target is the «negative ethico-political effect» that Kelsen's criticism of the «legal theology» has. For a legal theory born out of that kind of criticism, leaves no space for a legally unbound and unconditional state authority. As Kelsen put it at the end of his essay *God and the State,* such a theory «disposes of the idea that the state is an absolute reality»; by

> teaching […] to apprehend the state as simply the legal order, it makes the individual aware that this state is a human artefact, made by men for men [...]. If it has always been the rulers under the prevailing state order, who have met every attempt at changing this order with arguments drawn from the nature of the state [...] then the doctrine which declares the state to be the legal order prevailing at any time, whose content is changeable and can always be changed [...], is a doctrine which disposes of one of the most politically effective obstacles which at all times has been laid in the path of reforming the state in the interests of the ruled. (Kelsen [1922-1923]: 81)

Schmitt attempts to counteract the political implication of Kelsen's criticism of the «legal theology» by employing the secularization theorem. Like Kelsen, he also uses analogies between legal theory and theology. However, he reads them as an indication of the structural identity of legal and theological concepts expressing a political content worth to be preserved. In other words, by stating that modern legal thought remains dependent upon the theological mode of thinking, he suggests that it depends upon an authoritarian understanding of the state having its roots in the theological tradition. Even more than in *Political Theology*, this becomes evident in *Political Roman-*

ticism, where Schmitt elaborates on his secularization thesis for the first time. In the preface to the second edition of 1924, he defines the concept of secularization as follows:

> Metaphysics is something that is unavoidable, and [...] we cannot escape it by relinquishing our awareness of it. What human beings regard as the ultimate, absolute authority, however, certainly can change, and God can be replaced by mundane and worldly factors. I call this secularization […]. (Schmitt [1917-1924]: 17-18)

For Schmitt, the transformations of the mode of thinking lie in this deep metaphysical level. «Here, ever new factors appear as absolute authorities, even though the metaphysical structure and attitude remain» (Ibid.: 17). The quoted passage makes clear that the essence of Schmitt's concept of secularization is both the retaining of the «metaphysical structure» as well as its obscuring. In Schmitt's view metaphysics means above all the «idea […] of an ultimate authority» (Ibid.: 17). Therefore, secularization means the process by which the inherently unavoidable place of an ultimate authority remains, but gets occupied by non-transcendent, i.e., worldly factors. Hence, secularization does not mean a radical revolution of the mode of thinking, but, firstly, the preservation of the structurally theological idea of an absolute and transcendent authority, and, secondly, the obscuring of this fact by means of the replacement of the transcendence by profane, non-transcendent factors.

As Werner points out (Werner [2011]: 128-130), Schmitt's secularization thesis does not reject every kind of secularization. It does not imply a return to pre-modernity. If «metaphysics» is for Schmitt inevitable, secularization is irreversible. Schmitt regards it legit if a worldly factor claims an absoluteness analogous to theology. «[A] certain objectivity and cohesion always remain possible whenever another objective authority, like the state, takes the place of God» (Schmitt [1917-1924]: 18).

Schmitt's secularization thesis thus bears the assertion that only absolute factors can and should occupy the place of the ultimate authority. It

serves mainly to delegitimize *modern* understanding of law and state, according to which authority should only be a posited one; i.e., only a function of a normative order made by men, either consciously or unconsciously.

The political content and intention of Schmitt's parallelism of theology and legal theory becomes clear in *Political Theology*. The secularization thesis there coheres with a strong plea for an authoritarian understanding of the concept of sovereignty. The main characteristic of the latter is the inseparability of sovereign and sovereignty, of office bearer and office: «the subject of sovereignty, that is, the whole question of sovereignty» (Schmitt [1922]: 6). And in Schmitt's view, theology provides the model for this inseparability.

Perhaps the most central parallel between legal theory and theology drawn by Schmitt in *Political Theology* is the one between the state of exception and the miracle. «The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology» (Ibid.: 36). This analogy leads directly to the further claim that the modern concept of the state's sovereignty models itself on the theological notion of God. The presence of the state of emergency in modern constitutions, i.e., the provision of the suspension of the law in case of emergency, implies – as Schmitt argues – the possibility for the state of breaking the legal bonds; that is, analogous to the theological belief in a divine suspension of the natural laws, i.e., the miracle. This analogy, however, implies that modern law doctrines admitting such a possibility presuppose no less than a sovereign acting within legal order, like God within the world order (this is what the second chapter of *Political Theology* undertakes to suggest, Ibid.: 16-35; see also Neuman [2008]: 176-179). The decisive point of this line of thought is that sovereignty is not a function of the legal order – in the same way as God is not a function of the world order – but a quality bound to its subject. Sovereignty is inseparable from its bearer – i.e. the subject of sovereignty.

As Kelsen has illuminatingly emphasized, the assumption of a legal miracle is necessary only for a dualistic legal theory presupposing a higher right of the state, apart from the positive legal system:

The act supposed to be an act of the state, although illegal, actually extra-legal, since it is not determined or determinable by any legal norm, […] cannot be judicially perceived; determined by another super- or extra-legal order, i.e. the order of the state's will as a meta-legal phenomenon of power, this act is the legal miracle. (Kelsen [1922]: 246-247; my transl.)

Precisely because Schmitt presupposes such a meta-legal state standing above positive law, he consciously sees a «legal miracle» in the state of emergency; this is the reason why he considers the decision on the state of emergency to be the fundamental characteristic of sovereignty. Such a total decision is external to norms and depends solely on the person who decides. Precisely because this person represents a higher principal than all positive-legal norms, i.e., the state and «its right of self-preservation» (Schmitt [1922]: 12), he cannot be an authorized, but only an authoritarian person. «The existence of the state is undoubted proof of its superiority over the validity of the legal norm. The decision frees itself from all normative ties and becomes in the true sense absolute» (*Ibidem*). By referring to the decision, Schmitt always implies the person of the decision-maker and thus a non-positive order, represented or resembled by that person. Schmitt considers this legally unbound state action to be an eminent act of representation and, for this very reason, an act of sovereignty. His *Constitutional Theory* defines representation as follows: «To represent means to make an invisible being visible and present through a publicly present one. […] In representation […], a higher type of being comes into concrete appearance» (Schmitt [1928]: 243). This «higher type of being» transcends positive law. For that reason, it becomes visible within the immanence of legal life only by the sovereign's suspension of the positive legal order[5]. The sovereign is not authorized by a

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[5] For the relation between the decisionistic and personalistic elements in Schmitt's concept of sovereignty see the analysis of Jonas Heller (2018): 67-75.

positive legal norm; on the contrary, he establishes the norm by virtue of his decision; for this very reason, he can suspend it. Since he represents the state in toto, he is *legibus solutus*[6]. «[A]uthority proves that to produce law it need not be based on law» (Schmitt [1922]: 13). Suspending the positive law, this kind of sovereign authority renders visible the supreme order of the state.

It is precisely this theologically inspired notion of a substantial bond between sovereignty and the subject of sovereignty that Schmitt sees in the birth of the modern state in the 16th and 17th centuries. The modern theory of law and state begins by postulating «the sovereign as a personal unit and primeval creator» (Ibid.: 47). This becomes evident precisely by the fact that it grants the holder of sovereignty the power to suspend the law and derives from this ultimate power all other competencies (Ibid.: 9). Schmitt presents the personalistic conception of sovereignty (that is, the dogma of the inseparability of the state's sovereignty and the subject of sovereignty) as «the metaphysical kernel of all politics» (Ibid.: 51), which have been forgotten and repressed by the state theory of the 19th and 20th century: «All tendencies of modem constitutional development point toward eliminating the sovereign in this sense» (Ibid.: 7). Only the counter-revolutionary thinkers nurtured a vivid memory of the authoritarian and personalistic essence of the state's sovereignty. This is the reason why – according to Schmitt – they were still aware of the political content of the theological-political analogies (Ibid.: 43, 59); it is precisely that political content Schmitt wanted to reawaken by working out the juridico-political analogies.

So far, we have clarified what was the intention, as well as the methodological instrument of Schmitt in encountering the question concerning the relationship between theology and modern state law. He wanted to reintroduce an authoritarian understanding of state authority, whose model

he believed to find in the Christian theological tradition; by doing that, he countered the modern conception of state and law, currently expressed in Kelsen's legal positivism. The methodological instrument toward this end was the (re)construction of analogies between God and state or sovereign, i.e., between theology and law.

At this point, we can name the twofold problem of Schmitt's methodological position. First, the analogy model cannot explain the process Schmitt pretends to explain: that is the secularisation of political authority in modernity. By employing the juridico-political analogies, he only demonstrates the continuation of theological structure supposed to be substantial for the modern state and law, not a radical change. Second and more important: as we saw, the analogy model can serve opposite political ends. For analogy is both identity and difference. Two relations – like the relation between God and the world, and the one between state and the positive law – can be considered analogous because of their identity in some characteristics. However, this tacitly presupposes that they are indeed two different relations. Hence, one can either interpret an analogy as an indication of a difference worth being founded, like Kelsen attempted to; or, as an indication of substantial identity worth being preserved, as Schmitt did. Although one can justifiably claim – as Kelsen in his late writings noted (Kelsen [2012]: 17) – that the only scientific way to deal with the juridico-political analogies is to approach it from the perspective of difference, the opposite approach – the one that transforms analogy into identity – is by no means excluded; on the contrary, it becomes thereby possible, no matter how unscientific it may be.

3. THE PROFANATION OF AUTHORITY IN BENJAMIN'S THEORY OF TRAUERSPIEL

Benjamin's theory of the Trauerspiel contains elements of a methodologically different answer to the political-theological question going beyond the analogy model. Benjamin's Trauerspiel theory answers the political-theological question by pre-

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[6] See Schmitt's discussion of the notion of *legibus solutus* as essential to the modern concept of sovereignty (Schmitt [1926]: 96).

senting the crisis of the analogy model[7]. It may not be far-fetched to claim that the entire account of the material part of the *Trauerspiel-book* – i.e., the level of factual content[8] – could be described as the deployment of the crisis the analogy between the theological and the juridical-political entered with the Reformation.

In the first part of his study, originally supposed to be titled as «the king in the Trauerspiel» (Benjamin [1989]: 877; letter to Scholem, 16.09.1924), Benjamin quotes Schmitt. Two aspects of the latter's work are of particular importance to him: firstly, the dogma of the «absolute inviolability of the sovereign» (Benjamin [1928]: 49), that is, the sovereign's quality as *legibus solutus*; and secondly, that he has the power to decide on the state of emergency. These two aspects are intimately connected. The sovereign is *legibus solutus* because he has the power to decide upon the state of emergency. He has the power to do so because the state theory – according to Schmitt – ascribes to him a position analogous to that theology ascribes to God. Viewed in this perspective, Benjamin seems to refer to Schmitt as a non-questionable authority in the history of legal and state theory. Although he seems to accept Schmitt`s position by stating that the «theological- juristical mode of thought» was «characteristic of the century» (Ibid.: 50), he introduces a decisive difference rooted in the «theological situa-tion of the epoch» (Ibid.: 67): the reformatory idea of separation of office and office bearer and, in turn, the separation of sovereignty and the subject of sovereignty[9]. Even though Schmitt seems to be one or perhaps the central, political-philosophical reference in Benjamin's work on baroque[10], a careful reading of the *Trauerspiels-book* reveals that this is not the case. As Jennings has pointed out (Jennings [2012]: 114-115), far more fundamental than Schmitt's conception of sovereignty is the political thought of the Reformation, precisely because – as I will try to suggest below – it offers Benjamin the religious-historical basis for the re-purposing (*Umfunktionierung*) of Schmitt's concept of sovereignty and the secularization theorem inherent in it. By employing the Reformation's political thinking in his theory, Benjamin indirectly counters the analogy model in terms of which Schmitt (as well as Kelsen) tented to consider the relationship between theology and modern law.

3.1 The Political Thought of the Reformation

Benjamin emphasizes that the German dramatists were Lutherans (Benjamin [1928]: 140).

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[7] As it became recently clear that Benjamin must have been familiar with some of the major works of Schmitt as well as those of Kelsen: in a note recently transcribed and published (Benjamin [2021]), Benjamin lists nearly all the central texts of the political-theological debate. Apart from Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* (1922), Benjamin also includes *The Political Romanticism* (1919), the first edition of the *Dictatorship* (1921), as well as Kelsen's *Der soziologische und der juristische Staatsbegriff* (1922) and *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (1925).

[8] In his classic study of Benjamin, Garber considers the determination of the factual content to be the basis of all aesthetic determinations of Baroque poetry, particularly of the allegorical (Garber [1987]: 94). Burkhardt Lindner has also pointed out the indispensability of the analysis of the factual-content for the elaboration of the aesthetic form-determinations of the Trauerspiel; the same view holds Poppe (Lindner [2000]: 55, 22-25).

[9] The sentence «In the theological- juristical mode of thought that is so characteristic of the century [...]» is followed by a reference to August Koberstein's book *Grundriss der Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur vom Anfang des siebzehnten bis zum zweiten Viertel des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1872), whose main claim was that the theological- juristical mode of thought prevailing in the 17th century, «was not a truthful and vital science developing and progressing in accordance with the spirit of the Reformation, but a rigid and dead literalism indulging in scholarly sophistry and a stubborn and tenacious adherence to the school tradition, through which neither a genuine Christian nor a truly civic spirit might be awakened» (Koberstein [1872]: 15). One can claim, that when the trauerspiel employs the reformatory idea of radically separating the office from the person, it challenges the dogmatic and outdated ideas prevailing within the juridical and theological disciplines of the era.

[10] The question of the relationship between Schmitt and Benjamin has been extensively discussed giving rise to various speculations. See my critique of the status of the debate (Tzanakis Papadakis [2019]: 45-46).

That indicates, firstly, that they held a worldview according to which the world is completely desacralized and one can only achieve salvation in the inward realm of faith. The radical internalization of faith expressed in its separation from confession, led consequently to a radical devaluation of the world and human actions. «Human actions were deprived of all value. Something new came into being: an empty world» (Ibid.: 141). This world is empty in the sense that it is devoid of all transcendence, i.e., it is godless[11].

«[T]he tension between world and transcendence» (Ibid.: 51), essential both to Luther's worldview and to Benjamin's theory of the Trauerspiel, has a political index. In order to understand this index, it needs a brief retrospective of Luther's political thinking. Only then one can answer the following question: how, following Benjamin, does the baroque Trauerspiel perceive the relationship between political authority and theological modes of thought?

Luther's political thought is marked by a profound contradiction expressed in his doctrine of the two kingdoms; the divine and the temporal. According to Luther, Christ is ruling over the true Christians in the divine kingdom. True Christians are those who act good voluntarily, i.e., without coercion. Therefore, the temporal law and the sword do not apply to them (Luther [1523]: 12-14). Unlike the divine kingdom, the political authorities rule in the temporal kingdom. Though instituted by God, these authorities apply to the imperfect Christians, who do not act good on their own accord, but must be forced to do so. The task of the temporal regiment is to prevent men from wrongdoing and to establish nothing but a temporal peace. The means towards this end is external, i.e., the implementation of law (*Ibidem*). In this way, Luther limited the role of temporal authorities to external actions. Moreover, temporal authority itself belongs exclusively to the world of externality and evil.

Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms and the resulting complete internalization of faith let the temporal authorities rule in an entirely desecrated and hence «evil» world. He preached unconditional obedience «for there is no authority except from God» (Ibid.: 11). However, since he attributed to it merely profane tasks, he indicated its structure to be completely profane. This contradiction created, according to Marcuse (Marcuse [1936]: 145) and Skinner (Skinner [1978]: 3-19), a politically impossible situation. For Luther's doctrine can justify both obedience and disobedience: Since temporal authority is instituted by God, no matter what it does, one must unconditionally obey it; for Luther rebellion is, after all, the worst of all sins (see Marcuse [1936]: 147). But because this authority is nothing but temporal, because it is not immanently related to the beyond, it belongs entirely to the world, the domain of sin. By virtue of this contradiction, Luther was able to assert both, that every authority is to be obeyed as well as that the princes were in general «the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth» and that the people should not obey if their prince was «wrong [...]. [F]or it is no one's duty to do wrong» (Luther [1523]: 36, 48).

This perspective on political authority was reflected in the concept of person: «First of all, we must distinguish that office and person, or work and agent, are different things. For, an office or work can be good and right in itself, which is nevertheless evil and wrong, if the person or the agent is not good or right or is not doing it right» (Luther [1526]: 52). In order to preach unconditional obedience, Luther used this new concept of person: he called the princes God's persons or «representatives» (*Statthalter*; Luther [1518]: 376). The rebellion against them means therefore a rebellion against God. However, to discredit the princes he also used the characterization of God's person. Since the prince is God's representative on earth, he must act in accordance with the office divinely given to him; acting otherwise, he sets aside his divine «larva» – he unmasks himself

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[11] For the question raised by Giorgio Agamben as to whether Benjamin asserts that the baroque tension between transcendence and immanence leaves place to eschatology (Agamben [2005]: 55-57), I refer to Thomas Mayer (2007).

– and his subjects have no duty of obedience (see Skinner [1978]: 16-17). Like his political thinking in general, Luther's concept of the person is ambiguous: it allows both total submissiveness and radical hostility to authority. What is decisive here is the political tendency emerging out of this ambiguity. By separating the office from the person, Luther reached the threshold of modern political thought. For, as Marcuse put it, in this way he rendered an idea of authority impossible, according to which the office was bound to its holder as an immanent property (Marcuse [1936]: 145)[12]. It was precisely such a conception of authority that Schmitt wanted to rehabilitate for the 20th century by means of his secularization thesis. Considering the office, not as the property of its bearer, but, instead, as a function of temporal order, implies a normative circumscription of the office, and thus a profound gab between office and person in office. The office thus shifts from the sacral to the profane sphere.

3.2 The Separation of Office and Person in Benjamin's Material Analysis of the Baroque Trauerspiel

The drama of the German Protestants, whose theory Benjamin's *Trauerspielbuch* develops, corresponds precisely to this Reformation tendency towards profanation of political authority. Now, I will proceed to consider how this tendency is interwoven into Benjamin's theory of baroque drama.

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[12] The separation of office and person stated by Luther should not be confused with the dogma of the King's two bodies, investigated by Ernst Kantorowicz. Kantorowicz himself distinguishes clearly the reformatorian separation of person and role from the English fiction of the double body of the king: «the distinction between the king as King and as private person [...] was well established also on the Continent» and it does not «matches» exactly to the *physiological* fiction of the King's Two Bodies. Moreover, English custom apparently tried to reduce the king's *privacy* so far as possible (Kantorowicz [1957]: 20). The latter was a «purely English device», while in the German speaking world, at the end of this large historical development «it was the abstract State with which a German Prince had to accommodate himself» (*Ibid.:* 446 ff.).

Firstly, it is important to draw attention to Benjamin's thesis that one of the most typical motifs of baroque *Trauerspiele* is «[t]he antithesis between the power of the ruler and his ability to rule» (Benjamin [1928]: 56). The account of the "material part" of the *Trauerspielbuch*, dealing with the basic motifs and obligatory themes of the Trauerspiel, centers around this antithesis which is based on the Lutheran separation of office and person. Like every office, the sovereignty (*Herrschermacht*) is divine; the office bearer (the person of sovereign) is not. Assigning this divine, or divinely given office, to a principally non-divine bearer implies that the latter's actions may be morally disreputable. The German Trauerspiel turns this possibility inherent to the Reformation's political thought into a certainty rendering it to an obligatory dramatic motif. It does so by presenting the sovereign as a melancholic, who in his madness destroys himself and the state. «The prince is the paradigm of the melancholic» (Ibid.: 145)[13]. According to the ancient humoral-pathological and astrological doctrines (Ibid.: 148-156), from which Benjamin draws the baroque image of the melancholic prince, melancholy is considered to be a «severe mental disturbance» (Ibid.: 148). The sovereign of the German baroque drama does not downfall because someone else – for instance, the counter-king – overthrows him, even less because the «common people» (Ibid.: 182) storm into the palaces. The prince downfalls because of his inner melancholy; he ruins himself. That is the reason why «[t]he prince, with whom rests the decision concerning the state of exception, shows that, as soon as the situation arises, a decision is nearly impossible for him» (Ibid.: 56). In the theatrical figures of the era, Benjamin continues, «is expressed not so much the sovereignty [...] as the sudden caprices of a continually changing storm of emotions» (Ibid.: 56). The same also applies for the so-called martyr drama. For the sovereign being a martyr gains stoically control over his affectional inner life and at the same time looses control over

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[13] For further reading on Benjamin's uses of the notion of melancholy, see Ferber (2013).

his sovereign office, so that at the end «torture and death await him» (Ibid.: 59). If the «concern of the tyrant is the restoration of order in the state of exception», then the stoic technique aims also to empower a corresponding stabilization for a state of exception of the soul, the realm of affects» (*Ibidem*). If the martyr remains sovereign, he does so only in the inner realm at the price of loosing the power of his sovereign office. Again, the figure of the baroque martyr underlines the separation of sovereign's person and sovereignty.

By locating the drama of the seventeenth century upon the antithesis of sovereign power and the sovereign's (in)capacity to rule, Benjamin implicitly invokes the Reformation's understanding of authority; in doing so, he prepares the ground for a reflection on the political function of the baroque drama. For when the drama portrays the sovereign as a raging ruler ruining himself in his madness, it depicts him as not being adequate to his sacral office; in this way, however, it highlights the separation of office and person, and consequently, the principal difference between sovereignty and the subject of sovereignty. According to Benjamin, it was the dramatic performance of this difference or separation, that this era found so fascinating in the downfall of the sovereign: «What continues to fascinate in the downfall of the tyrant is the conflict the epoch feels between the impotence and depravity of his *person* and its belief in the sacrosanct power of his *role*» (Ibid.: 57; my emphasis). Therefore, what elevated the downfall of the sovereign to one of the most typical motifs of German *Trauerspiele* was the contrast between the sovereign office ordained by God and its morally disreputable holding by its bearer. Benjamin's well-known claim of the affinity between the drama of the tyrant and the drama of the martyr also lies in the radical separation of office and the person in the office, which became a general conviction with the Reformation: «The *sublime status* of the emperor, on one hand, and the despicable feebleness of *his actions*, on the other, make it difficult to decide, at bottom, whether one is witnessing the drama of a tyrant or the history of a martyr» (Ibid.: 58-59; my emphasis). What structures

the factual content (*Sachgehalt*) of Baroque drama, then, is the reformatory conception of the sovereign *bearing* sovereignty as a function, instead of *possessing* it as a property.

Let us now compare Benjamin's account of the relationship between the theological and the secular-political realm, with the analogy model Schmitt employed. As it has been pointed out, Schmitt refers to analogies between legal and theological modes of thought, interpreting them as symptomatic of their structural identity. As a result of the structural identity between theology and modern law, Schmitt argues for the eminently political assertion that the modern concept of sovereignty is modelled on the Christian concept of God. Like God the Son incarnates God the Father, the sovereign embodies sovereignty. He represents the state by holding the ultimate power of deciding on the state of exception; that is, the decision on the suspension of his legal bonds. By suspending the law, he proves himself to be transcendent to the state, like God transcends the world order. Benjamin refers to Schmitt's remarks, especially to the decision on the state of exception, as an essential characteristic of sovereignty and to the sovereign's inalienability (i.e., being *legibus solutus*); in other words, Benjamin refers to both aspects Schmitt deduces from the analogy between theology and modern state law. The decisive change in Benjamin's argument is the employment of the Reformatorian interpretation of the relationship between the divine and the profane, between transcendence and immanence. By considering the sovereign office to be divinely given, and by heightening the profanity of its bearer to the point of melancholic madness, the Trauerspiel brings the analogy model into crisis. For, the divinely instituted nature of the sovereign office does not reverse the profanity of the person bearing it, but rather emphasizes it. Here, the theological transcendence does not serve as a model for the immanence of the political realm. It has an other function: it demonstrates the non-divinity of the sovereign's person, and in this way, it performs the fundamental separation of (in itself divinely instituted) office and (merely profane) person.

Following Benjamin's interpretation, by separating office and office bearer, the Trauerspiel renders impossible a concept of sovereignty in the sense of Schmitt's secularization thesis. And that is the case precisely because the reformatory thought strived to glorify the sovereign power by defining it as a sacrosanct office.

This dialectical deployment of the Reformation for the interpretation of the modern concept of sovereignty is the decisive difference between Schmitt's sovereignty concept and Benjamin's own dealing with it. The difference between the two is not to be found – as Agamben suggests – in respect to the fact that Schmitt sees the sovereign as the one who, by his decision, *includes* the state of exception into the legal order, while the sovereign in Benjamin's view attempts to *exclude* the state of exception out of the legal realm. The «substituting "to exclude" for "to decide"» in the definition of sovereignty is not, as Agamben claims, a «substantial modification» (Agamben [2003]: 56); it is more likely a mere reformulation. As I have already argued above, when Schmitt defines sovereignty through the decision upon the state of emergency, he means the regression of positive law up to the point of elimination on behalf of the extralegal value of the state. What Schmitt's theory attempts to include into the legal realm is, if anything, this extralegal value of the state, rather than the «pure violence – that is, a violence absolutely outside the law» (Ibid.: 54). What the main target of Benjamin's critical reception of Schmitt's sovereignty definition and his secularization theorem is, is mainly the dogma the inseparability of sovereignty and subject of sovereignty, which came into crisis with the baroque «collapse of all eschatology» (Benjamin [1928]: 67)[14]. The crisis of that very dogma is deployed in Benjamin's view in the baroque drama.

The crisis of the dogma of «inviolability of the sovereign» (that is, in Schmitt's terms: the insepa-

rability of sovereignty and sovereign person) lurking in the trauerspiel is also underlined by the dialectics of fidelity and infidelity, being both an element of Trauerspiel's factual content and an element of its allegoric form. This very dialectic expresses itself in the behavior of the secondary theatrical characters of baroque dramas, the intriguers.

The intriguer's behavior corresponds to the downfallen sovereign. Benjamin describes this behavior in terms of the dialectics of fidelity and infidelity. On the one hand, it is «treachery [...] his element» (Benjamin [1928]: 161). The intriguer is ready to abandon his «sovereign and join the opposite camp» (*Ibidem*). On the other hand, his infidelity and «lack of principle» (*Ibidem*) expresses a stark fidelity to «crown, royal purple, and scepter», i.e., the insignia of power. «His infidelity toward human beings corresponds to a fidelity toward these objects» (*Ibidem*). Detached from the sovereign person, sovereignty assumes a reified character; it becomes depersonalized. The fidelity toward the thingly of power which the intriguer displays is a sign of fidelity toward the impersonalized sovereign power, the impersonal power of the state; by virtue of that paradoxical fidelity, the intriguer underlines the separation of sovereign and sovereignty, person and office and any attempt to model sovereign power to the theological notion of God.

Out of Benjamin's elaboration of the crisis of the analogy model within the Baroque drama, we can deduce one further political consequence. It concerns the person of the prince and is related to the principal of human equality leading beyond the 17th century's absolutistic concept of sovereignty Schmitt has attempted to rehabilitate.

What becomes manifest with the theatrical downfall of the sovereign is not just the separation of office and person; it becomes apparent not only that the sovereign does not possess sovereignty, but he merely bears it. Performing ostentatiously the separation of the sovereign from his role, the baroque theatre exposes him in his creatureliness. «As highly enthroned as he is over his subjects and his state, his status is circumscribed by

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[14] This does not mean necessarily that Benjamin rejects any kind of eschatology. As Martel suggests, Benjamin presents in other works a different kind of ἔσχατον (Martel [2009]: 187-190).

the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature» (Ibid.: 72). As often pointed out in secondary literature, the creature motif is ambiguous and difficult to exploit[15]. However, it is indisputable that one of its more distinct semantic dimensions is humanness. The downfall of the sovereign reveals his humanness; i.e., the truth that he is subject to the same passions and afflictions as any other human being:

> For if in the ruler, and precisely at the point where he unfolds power most deliriously, there is recognized the revelation of history and, at the same time, the authority that calls a halt to its vicissitudes, then this one thing speaks for the Caesar who loses himself in the intoxication of power: he falls victim to a misrelation between the unlimited hierarchical dignity with which God has invested him and the state of his poor human nature. (Ibid.: 55-56; my emphasis)

The truth stated here is that the sovereign remains a human being, despite the dignity of his office. The theatrical performance of the separation of sovereignty and sovereign leads to the insight into the creatureliness, alias the humanness of the office bearer.

This idea can also be found in the passage from Pascal's *Pensées* quoted in the Melancholia section – a passage Benjamin considers as «a more exact commentary on the trauerspiel than the various poetics could provide» (Ibid.: 144):

> Put it to the test; leave a king entirely alone, with nothing to satisfy his senses, no care to occupy his mind, with no one to keep him company and no diversion, with complete leisure to think about himself, and you will see that a king who sees himself is a very wretched man and that he feels his miseries like any other. (Ibid.: 145)

Pascal's reflection corresponds to the basic material motifs of the Trauerspiel, because it divests the sovereign – certainly not dramatically – from his role as sovereign. Like the prince in the Trauerspiel, whose falling from his status reveals his humanness, Pascal's thought experiment reflects on the sovereign who, in his contemplation, divests himself of the insignia of the sovereign power. A king left alone, thinking of himself, a king divesting himself of the dignity of his office, will inevitably discover – as Pascal points out – that he is nothing more than a common man full of «misères». The dignity he may emanate does not derive from his person but from the external signs of his sacrosanct power; internally, he remains a man like any other. That is why – as Pascal ironically recommends – one should never let him contemplate himself by means of amusement and play. Otherwise, he would become aware of the sad truth that his sublime position rests on the ground of pure humanness, by reason of which he does not distinguish himself from his subject. This indicates a primary experience of equality. The spectator of the Trauerspiel learns that the political ruler is a role and its bearer a human being like himself, like «[t]he simple subject, man» (Ibid.: 73). When Benjamin, then, writes that «[n]othing attests so drastically to the frailty of the creature as the fact that even the prince must submit to this condition» (Ibid.: 145), he is referring to this very experience of equality that Trauerspiel performs by means of the downfall of its hero. The removal of the office dignity makes the person appear in the light of an admittedly gloomy experience of equality, and the spectator recognizes in the deposed sovereign of the stage the mere human being. No matter how divine it may be, no matter how embedded in a hierarchical order full of superiors and inferiors, the sovereign office in the Trauerspiel confronts itself with the idea of human equality.

The baroque staging of the sovereign unsettles a concept of sovereignty, which attributes absolute power to its holder. Generalizing what Fabrizio Desideri writes in respect to Shakespear's *Hamlet,* we can say that the baroque Trauerspiel «ends

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[15] Santner reconstructs the creature motif in terms of its biopolitical implications in order to reinterpret it as the «flip side of the political theology of absolute sovereignty» (Santner [2006]: 29). In contrast, see Beatrice Hanssen (1998). Regarding the multiple aspects of the notion in Benjamin's works see Weigel (2008) and Weidner (2010).

without king, bringing to completion the aporias immanent to the creatural character of sovereignty» (Desideri [2019]: 121). In the light of confronting the hierarchical political order with an experience of equality, the modelling of political power in analogy to the notion of the divine omnipotence becomes nearly impossible. If the Trauerspiel of the Germans combines absolutist sovereignty with the insight into the humanness of the person bearing it, it exposes that form of sovereignty as unbearable. As Sam Weber puts it: «The naturalistic destiny of the prince does not merely imply the rise and fall of an individual figure, but more significantly, the dislocation of sovereignty as such» (Weber [1998]: 9). For if sovereignty is depersonalized into a mere role, it is not only the humanness of the prince's person that is presented as the unworthy matter of the political. At the same time, the absolutist conception of sovereignty, assigning to a human being a god-like position within the state, falls into disrepute; it is not made for human beings – this is the political experience of the Trauerspiel.

4. CONCLUSION

I have examined how the relationship between theology and modern law has been pursued within the Weimar legal debate, especially by Carl Schmitt, who deployed the analogy model with the intention to (re)introduce an authoritarian and personalistic concept of sovereignty, which he believed to trace at the beginning of the modern legal and political thought of the 16th and 17th centuries. In his theory of baroque drama, Benjamin approached the same question via a differentiated model. By invoking the political thought of the Reformation, he deployed the crisis of the analogy model throughout the baroque drama's factual-content. Moreover, he situated this crisis at the mournful sunrise of modernity. Theological and legal modes of thought do not interrelate in terms of analogy, but dialectically: The theological foundation of the sacrality of political authority (sovereignty) during the Counter-reformation serves to radicalize the profanity of its bearer, and

thus indirectly institutes the separation of office and person. Therefore, the theological mode of thought provides no model for the political realm. It rather renders any attempt to model the realm of state law analogously to the theological paradigm obsolete and impossible. Furthermore, the dialectical model employed by Benjamin reveals one major political content the analogy model cannot make visible, let alone conceive: the principle of equality as the basis for any post-reformation, *modern,* political order.

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Aisthesis

Escaping the Metaphysics of Fate/Fact. Comparing Spengler and Adorno

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Abstract. *The Decline of the West* belongs to that group of controversial books that have been more attacked than actually and properly read. Today, in deference to the myth of de-ideologisation, that polemical charge has diminished considerably. Nevertheless, Spengler is still topical, especially following the recent political and economic-health crises that evoke the «spectre of decline». From a critical perspective, Adorno was the first to acknowledge Spengler's topicality and superiority to numerous liberal-progressive opponents. For its part, this current essay, via an ancipital impulse to critique and salvation, aims at exploring Spengler's idea of fatal/factual decline by unmasking its aporias and ambiguities through comparing it to Adorno's «silent and questioning utopia», dialectically preserved «in the image of decadence». Through this close comparison and the development of Adorno's critique, the paper urges to unveil, on the one hand, the "true" – negative – aspects of Spengler's legacy and, on the other hand, the «forces», hidden from his «attentive gaze», that are «set free in decay». Ultimately, in the no man's land between decline and utopia, Spengler and Adorno meet and their legacies intertwine.

Keywords: Nature, History, Necessity, Fate, Domination, Decline, Utopia.

For Livia

1. SPENGLER TODAY: CRITIQUE AND SALVATION

The Decline of the West belongs to that group of "numinous" books that are as «familiar» as they are «not cognitively understood»[1]. While overexposure is without exception the elective mask of ignorance, the degree of appreciation of such books is different. For some of them, the quotation has the magical power to ennoble, while for others, such as Oswald Spengler's *magnum opus*, its mention is in itself disqualifying. The stone of scandal, capable of

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[1] Hegel (1807): 35, rightly pointed out that «quite generally, the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood».

sowing harmony among the work's critics, is the morphological-biological conception of history, built on the basis equating *Kultur* with the living organism. Hence the intention to provide a historical prognosis of the ineluctable – insofar as it conforms to a supposedly necessary law of nature, i.e. fate – collapse of Western civilisation. In order to fulfil this task, however, Spengler must resort to the "fatal" naturalisation of history, in which his peculiar metaphysics of fate/fact is substantiated.

This is why, alongside its extraordinary popularity beyond a narrow circle of specialists, Spengler's "fatalistic" *Weltanschauung* aroused, since its first appearance in Europe, an avalanche of anathemas, more often than not failing to meet their target despite being hurled by some of the most remarkable thinkers of the time. Examples include the hasty attacks of Benedetto Croce (1920 and 1989), Robert Musil (1921) and Ernst Cassirer (1946), the nevertheless valid Marxist assaults by Ernst Bloch (1922 and 1935) and György Lukács (1954), as well as the aporetic critique by Thomas Mann (1924), who is equally ensnared in the scheme of «the false dichotomy *Kultur/Zivilisation*», upon which the work of his polemical idol is based (Bruzzone [2020]: 115-124). For this reason, Theodor W. Adorno, in an acute critical-apologetic essay on Spengler (in which the first aspect is most predominant), can rightly declare that the latter, almost forgotten in spite of his initial fame, «found hardly an adversary who was his equal: his oblivion is the product of evasion» (Adorno [1938/1950]: 48). As will be seen in the course of this paper, Spengler certainly found this adversary in Adorno himself. Being able to cope with, and even to overcome, Spengler's capacity for critical analysis, Adorno nullifies the topicality of his own statement.

Today, in deference to the deceptive myth of de-ideologisation, the polemical charge against Spengler has diminished considerably. Nonetheless, the messenger of decay is still relevant, especially following the recent, devastating, political and economic-health crises that evoke the «spectre of decline» (Kracauer [1921]: 706). Actually,

rethinking Spengler's philosophy with its aporias and ambiguities, as well as on the ground of the comparison with Adorno's dialectical-utopian perspective, means thinking critically about the present in the light of the past in order to open up the horizon of a possible, different future. Therefore, also in this essay, as in general in metaphysics, critique and salvation are intertwined in the name of solidarity with what falls (see Adorno [1998]: 19, 34-35, 42, 81-82, 140, 155; Adorno [1966]: 400). Developing Adorno's meaningful critique of Spengler proves all the more useful as, on the one hand, it makes it possible to grasp the "best" of his thought (i.e. his negative legacy), that is what his acute critical faculties were able to discern and "prophesy" about domination; while, on the other hand, having circumscribed the limits of his philosophy (namely in the fact that the very prevalence of domination obscured his vision with respect to all those tendencies that go beyond it), the development of Adorno's critique allows to question what emerges – which it does negatively – from what Spengler did not consider because he could not, and did not intend to, do so (see Adorno [1938-1950]: 57, 71). Ultimately, Spengler experienced and represented emblematically the *dialectic of domination*, since this latter is both what enlightened and blinded him (see below, § 4).

2. LAW AS FATE: SPENGLER'S HYPOSTATISING DIALECTICS

The Decline of the West ends with an emblematic quotation from Seneca, who translated verses from the Stoic Cleanthes which champion the unconditional acceptance of destiny: «Ducunt fata volentem, nolentem trahunt» [Fate guides the willing, but drags the unwilling][2]. For Spengler, the only alternative is between «doing the necessary or doing nothing» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1195), namely between adapting sponta-

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[2] More precisely, Seneca (65 AD): 107, 11, 5, wrote: «Ducunt volentem fata, trahunt nolentem». Cleanthes' famous prayer to Zeus can be found in Arnim (1905): I, 527.

neously to necessity or being dragged, powerless, by necessity's relentless course. Whichever way one "decides", destiny will be fulfilled equally and regardless of the will of individuals, with or without their help since, unlike these transient and relative wills, destiny is eternal and absolute. Ultimately, acquiescence is the only real possibility for man, i.e. his very impossibility. This is Spengler's response to the vexed question of freedom, which he also understood and resolved in terms of a dutiful «recognition of necessity» (see Engels [1877-1878]: 106; see also Hegel [1830³]: I, § 147 (*Zusatz*), 288-292, 290).

Spengler's «physiognomic thought», as Adorno correctly notes, «is chained to the totalitarian character of the categories». More precisely, «the insistence on the universal dependence of individual moments on the whole» – peculiar to the conceptual yearning for total subsumption – «is so abstract in its breadth that it tends to obscure the concrete and sharply differentiated moments of dependency which are decisive in human lives» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 59). Thanks to the cold disregard of the individual moment – its aspirations and sufferings – the appalling «historyless stage» of *Zivilisation* (the subject of the second volume of the *Decline*), as the twilight phase of an exhausted *Kultur* nearing its end, is «depicted by Spengler with horrified delight» (Ibid.: 61). But, above all, with the absolutely fatalistic planning even of the case – a real «tyranny of categories» (Ibid.: 58) –, he annihilates the very possibility of novelty and diversity, namely the only forms of resistance to the overwhelming power of the *status quo*.

After an initial fascination with *The Decline of the West*[3], Thomas Mann, for his part, just as polemically treats the «indifference towards the human factor» as the distinctive feature of this philosophy of resignation from such a «defeatist of humanity»:

Spengler […] is a fatalist. But his fatalism, summed up in the sentence: «We must want the necessary or

nothing at all», *is far from having a tragic-heroic character […]. Rather, its character is that of a malign apodicticity, of a hostility towards the future that masquerades as scientific inexorability. It is not* amor fati. *With «love», then, it has nothing to do – and this is precisely its most repulsive side. […] Now, this presumption and this indifference towards the human factor are Spengler's characteristic. (Mann [1924]: 174)*

Mann, like Adorno later, attacks Spengler's «hyena prophethood» (*Ibidem*), i.e. his complicity with destiny as an anti-human function: «if there is something even more gruesome than destiny, this is the man who bears it without lifting a finger» (Ibid.: 176). Indeed, it is precisely and only this cynical connivance that makes humanity regress «to the zoological stage, to a cosmic factor without history» (Ibid.: 178). Yet, in hindsight, the recourse to a supposedly necessary law, intrinsic to history-nature, sounds like an alibi for those who, like Spengler, promote regression and then justify it by tying it to that same ruthless biological legality, (in)appropriately raised to the rank of an evil *deus ex machina*. Against Spengler's benevolent acceptance of the inexorable law of necessity, it must be claimed that this law exists only in the head of those who, unable to imagine freedom, as well as to think dialectically about the relationship between universal and particular, want to impose it on others in order to be able to pass off the precipitate of their own *subjective impotence* as a priori *objective omnipotence*.

Hence Spengler's unconditional surrender to *historical naturalness*, which he perceives and presents as a biology elevated to the status of metaphysics, of which there is nothing left but to become willing supporters. And hence also the *historical relativism* of Spengler. Only the biological ages with their symptoms – understood as an immutable factor and a general scheme of the cyclical conception of history – unite civilisations that are otherwise very different from each other, even in their birth, growth and death. The various *Weltanschauungen* unfolding in history are *absolute* in the particular context of a specific civilisation, while they are *relative* in the universal histor-

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[3] See Mann (1979): 271-279, 281, 283 (Journal entries of Summer 1919).

ical course in which all civilisations arise and disappear like organisms. The accidents (civilisations) change, but the substance (the biological cycle) remains as an implacable destiny.

According to György Lukács, the historicisation of nature is the main road «through which Spengler comes to establish the uncontested lordship of historical relativism», namely of «an increasingly bold and unbridled mysticism» (Lukács [1954]: 406). However, his purpose is not only to historicise nature in order to «subordinate it to historical relativism» in the name of irrationalism and in contempt of scientific objectivity (Ibid.: 406-407). Furthermore, the «prophet of decline» (Groh [1988²]: 366, 373; and Farrenkopf [2001]) also implements a naturalisation of history in order to bind it inextricably to natural absolutism – that is the only way to make ends meet of his catastrophic prognoses, which can now be "scientifically demonstrated". By virtue of this double-edged operation, the *relativism of history* is intertwined with the *absolutism of nature*, and the result is an undifferentiated amalgam in which there is no room for freedom. Historical relativism is the means and the mask of natural absolutism, which promotes the *causality of nature* as the irrevocable *destiny of history*, and, at the same time, transforms *historical disorder* into the ineluctable *natural order*, i.e. the primary object of science.

By means of the production of insuperable necessity via a pseudo-dialectic of relativism and absolutism, historicisation and naturalisation, Spengler put the «eternal return of the same» of his great inspiration, Nietzsche – of whom, for Thomas Mann, he is the «cunning monkey» (Mann [1961]: 201-202, 202, letter to Ida Boy-Ed, 5.12.1922) and the «detestable parodist» (Mann [1961]: 320-321, 321, letter to Hermann Graf Keyserling, 30.07.1932)[4] –, to the various closed and discontinuous cycles of civilisation into which the historical course has been relativistically shattered.

Each cycle expresses the specific soul that informs it and with which it identifies: hence the different sciences, arts, mathematics (see Spengler [1918-1922]: 71-124), conceptions of the world, etc. But relativisation is the secret agent working tirelessly for the absolutisation of reality, which must be accepted with "heroic" *amor fati* – namely necessity raised to the heights of virtue. Indeed, the eternal, identical pattern of development and decline – presented as an inescapable and unavoidable law – of the individual (*ergo* relative) civilisations-organisms is even more absolute, to the extent that each of them, however different from the others, is an expression of the natural ever self-same that transcends and substantiates it. In other words, those civilisations are an expression of the one and only ruthless law of history, atomised just to be multiplied to the nth degree and, thus, always made to produce the same result: «The perpetual reproduction of man's guilt towards man» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 68), i.e. of the pattern of fighting and suppressing each other in an incessant struggle for domination. This is, according to Spengler, the absolutely valid operating system for reading and interpreting historical facts. And it is so insofar as it appeals to the ineluctable destiny of life-history-nature, understood, beyond Hegel – therefore definitively, not just temporarily –, as an immense and necessary «slaughterhouse» (Hegel [1917-1920]: I, 58; see below, § 3).

On this basis, Adorno asserts that, in Spengler, «Hegel's theory that what is real is rational degenerates to a caricature» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 62)[5]. This statement is valid as long as, *in accordance* with Hegel's theoretical *desideratum* (the equation of rationality and reality; see Hegel [1821]: 24), biological destiny is understood as the degeneration of the course of the world effectively innervated by reason, of which reality is no other than the necessary deployment. But if one does not

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[4] *Mutatis mutandis*, Adorno (1938-1950): 69, also reads some of «the most brutal passages» in Spengler's *magnum opus* as «an unintended parody of Nietzsche».

[5] As we have seen above (text and footnote 4) with regard to Thomas Mann's critique of Spengler's «hyena prophethood» (Mann [1924]: 174), Adorno conceives the latter as «a caricature» of Hegel and «an unintended parody of Nietzsche».

believe in this postulate – namely if one declares *against* Hegel that «the whole is the untrue»[6] – and offers to the prophet of decay «the experience of the historical dialectic»[7], then one should also see in Spengler's bowing before an irrational totality the implicit disclosure of universal falseness. Paradoxically, Spengler's *truth* coincides, indeed, with his *particular falseness*, which emblematically reflects and unmasks the universal falseness of that same reality, which he attempts to mould and reconfigure in an amateurish way in the individual details, i.e. the primary object of his sometimes-reckless analogies. Yet this paradox alone, overlooked by Adorno, is precisely what he truly means with «the experience of the historical dialectic».

In contrast, the *falseness* of Spengler is produced by his *particular truth*, which conceals the universal falseness, otherwise revealed by his particular falseness. This is, instead, what I stigmatise as Spengler's pseudo-dialectics, which is reminiscent of the Kantian «Logik des Scheins», as the art of pretence. Such a "dialectics" fulfils the task of favouring the final victory of the thesis that is a priori intended to prevail and to be proved, which is thus the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the entire Spenglerian procedure. There are three circular levels of intensity in which Spengler's hypostatising dialectics, reflecting his own cyclic theory of history, takes place simultaneously and in alternating current in the whole *Decline of the West*.

The first level is that of the subtle, *partial* pseudo-dialectic between relativism and absolutism, historicisation and naturalisation. The second term of the two conceptual pairs is the one actually promoted by Spengler, although he makes the former appear dominant. The latter, indeed, is just

a temporary means for the realisation of the pole that opposes it, with which it is artificially maintained in an asymmetrical, instrumental relationship. Far from being completely eliminated, as happens in the "classical" perfect pseudo-dialectics (in which the removal of the "stumbling" factor is, in fact, complete), the first term is subordinate to the second, which introjects it. While the hypostatisation of the element predestined to survive is total, such is not the elimination of the antithetical one, whose unfinished annihilation, equally predetermined, thus serves to disguise a triumph that was carefully premeditated and then passed off as destiny.

The second level is that of the *complete* pseudo-dialectic, which concerns the relationship between freedom and necessity, singularity and concept. Here, the first instance is entirely suppressed and the second is hypostatised via this abolition. What remains is, therefore, necessity alone, the ontological invariant of life-history-nature and, *ipso facto*, the central category of Spengler's morphological system. In the third and last level, we have the dialectic between causality and destiny, closely linked to that between freedom and necessity, singularity and concept. In this case, there is an *extreme* pseudo-dialectic, which hides the real identity of its terms, causality and destiny, as well as their full dissolution in the absolute necessity that synthesises and informs them. Properly speaking, this is not even dialectics, since it only includes the synthesis operated by a further third metaphysical element, which subsumes and embodies to the utmost degree the other two elements in false antithesis. This is also the reason why necessity – i.e. law as fate, or life as a metaphysical entity – has the first and last word in Spengler's (deterministic) universe.

However, «there is no doubt that his philosophy does violence to the world» – Adorno pertinently argues – «but it is the same violence that it endures daily in reality» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 61) and by reality itself. Spengler's adaptation to irrational reality reproduces and reveals its violent mechanism on a metaphysical plane. With respect to the critique of society, the greatest merit

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[6] While Hegel (1807): 24, asserted: «Das Wahre ist das Ganze», Adorno (1951): aph. 29, 55, states the opposite: «Das Ganze ist das Unwahre».

[7] Adorno (1938-1950): 55, who also argues that, by virtue of this «historical dialectic» (yet never named in the *Decline*, as well as in other works), Spengler «shows himself to be superior to» Machiavelli, «the proto-bourgeois philosopher of the state».

of Spengler's philosophical-historical morphology is «directing attention towards the "system" in the individual, even where it assumes a semblance of freedom which conceals just the universal dependency» (Ibid.: 59). Unlike many others, he «sees something of the dual character [i.e. the dialectic] of Enlightenment in the era of universal domination» (Ibid.: 52). It is thus correct to concede that Spengler, by seeing in the ostentatious and advertised freedom the cover image of a lack of freedom[8], «belongs to those theoreticians of extreme reaction whose critique of liberalism proved itself superior in many respects to the progressive one» (Ibid.: 63; see also Adorno [1955]: 140-148). This is where, indeed, the polemical impetus of many of Spengler's "liberal-progressive" critics breaks down (see below, § 4). And in spite of his superficial opponents – moved by a pedantic, scientist spirit and/or blinded by the resentment of the haughty professor towards the outsider enjoying public success –, reality, in Spengler, far from being distorted or transfigured in a decisive way, is, on the contrary, sanctified and maintained exactly as it is in its negative absoluteness.

The conservative character of Spengler's assent to this *total* reality is also evident when he tries to discipline it into a theory that exclusively forces its individual *disjecta membra* who remain, however compelled, the faithful mirror of the cruel universal. Hence the mixture, well grasped by Adorno, of *metaphysics* and *positivism*: on the one hand, Spengler thinks, indeed, of himself as a metaphysician (and he is such), but, on the other hand, he also proudly and rightly presents himself as a stone-cold «man of facts» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 65). In other words, what is violated, in Spengler's philosophy, is not the reality of facts (magnified by him), but rather humanity (never considered by him), which must resign itself to living in that very same reality positively elevated to absolute *fate/fact*: the unescapable life. Nothing, for Spen-

gler, is imaginable beyond being so and not otherwise, beyond the datum as a fact raised to a high pitch, or irrevocable fate. Therefore, ultimately, it is more "convenient" to bow spontaneously before the *totem-totum*[9] of *esse uti est*, understood as an inescapable, *ergo* metaphysical, biological destiny (see below, § 4).

3. STRUGGLE AND DECLINE: SPENGLER'S OUTCOME

All this means, indeed, overturning Adorno's judgment and conceiving the Hegelian doctrine of the rationality of reality as the comforting caricature (*ante litteram*) of the uncanny Spengler's theory of the irrationality prevailing in history as a «slaughterhouse». The process is dialectically symmetric. Reflecting, from antithetical points of view, the same necessity that animates them identically and with an outcome equally guaranteed, although diametrically opposed (respectively, optimism and pessimism, in contempt of realism), both doctrines, Hegel's and Spengler's, are, in the end, the mirror of each other.

More precisely, in Hegel, necessity takes the form of an immanent teleological process which, as an expression of the «cunning of reason» (Hegel [1917-1920]: I, 83), would redeem the dramatic course of world history. In Spengler what instead remains is the blind vital compulsion "in itself and for itself", as an emanation of the *dementia of reason*, without any rational teleology that can soothe the pain of humanity by explaining it sensibly or overcoming it on the level of thought. Thus, in Hegel, necessity is bearable insofar as it would represent and protect the fulfilment of a happy fate for humanity (often not for the individual). In Spengler, on the contrary, that very necessity becomes asphyxiating, since it coincides with an inauspicious destiny in its untranscendable metaphysical immanence, lacking in purpose and also indifferent to the acting and suffering of humanity as well as of individuals.

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[8] See Spengler (1918-1922): 615-616, 678, 942, 986, 1061-1064, 1125-1126, 1137-1142, 1193-1195. And Spengler (1933): 78, asserts: «Liberty has always been the liberty of those who wish to obtain the power, not to abolish it».

[9] On the «totem/totum», see Adorno (1966): 370, and Adorno (1998): 291.

Teleology, which Hegel bans from the philosophy of nature (see Hegel [1830³]: II, § 245, 13-14), returns definitively in the philosophy of spirit and becomes theodicy: the justification and direction of all that exists in the light of revelation and the immanent realisation of Spirit in world history. Reason-Idea overcomes the alienation of nature, integrating it within itself. In other words, by spiritualising it, reason revives that «gigantic corpse» (Ibid.: II, § 241 (*Zusatz*), 360-367, 365) which is nature. Therefore «history» is «the unfolding of God's nature [*Natur*] in a determined particular element» (Hegel [1917-1920]: I, 24). In the end, as in the beginning, «a divine will dominates mightily in the world» (Ibid.: I, 8) and, *eo ipso*, cancels the scandal of pain: the torment of the negative. This is why Hegel can profess that «the great content of world history is rational and must be rational» (*Ibidem*), just as rational is reality itself (Hegel [1821]: 24).

Sub specie temporis or from a partial point of view, history undeniably takes the form of a «slaughterhouse»; but this form, as a product of a particular perspective (namely that of the suffering individuals), is deceptive and fails to grasp the intrinsic rationality of history/reality. Indeed, *sub specie aeternitatis* or from the «totality of all points of view» (*scil.* that of the triumphant Spirit; Hegel [1917-1920]: I, 9), it becomes intelligible that history, now «conceptually understood» in its rational «necessity» (Hegel [1830³]: I, § 147 (*Zusatz*), 288-292, 290), is oriented and informed by a positive final goal (τέλος), with which it coincides. If the negative is, in fact, the functional dialectical obstacle to the final blaze of the positive, the fleeting cruel *Sein* (συμβεβηκός) is suppressed by the permanent good *Sein* (οὐσία), which degrades it to the status of mere appearance (*Schein*). Since the domination of the negative is only provisional (unreal, relative: *Schein*), while that of the positive is definitive (real, absolute: *Sein*), «philosophy of history acquires the meaning of a theodicy» (Ibid.: I, § 147 (*Zusatz*), 290). And this theodicy is obtained, eventually, via a recourse to the device of the dialectic of tragedy, which dismantle the «tragic as dialectics»[10] by relativising the negative to an ephemeral moment – *essential* in its having-to-be there, yet *accidental* in the transience of its being there – of the implementation of the positive, made absolute and tempered by the struggle with the limited negative.

In Spengler, on the contrary, there is no happy ending or, properly speaking, an end: hence the tragic, always repeating nature of his circular philosophy, in which the pain of mankind remains unredeemed by virtue of the elevation of tragedy to an unsurpassable horizon: that of the pseudo-dialectics. Here, every genuine dialectic, as well as every chance to break out from the vicious eternal recurrence of the violence/domination of life-history-nature, is indeed obliterated. Furthermore, suffering – the «origin» and «goal»[11] of world history – is "justified" through the appeal to an absurd, inescapable destiny: the natural one. As the foundation and emanation of the «sleep of reason», it is the alpha and omega, the meaningless sense of the whole eternal historical-biological vicissitude: «Every high civilisation *is* a tragedy; the history of mankind *as a whole* is tragic» (Spengler [1931]: 75), because «struggle (*Kampf*) is the *original fact* of life, is life itself» (Spengler [1933]: 14), and because, as we know, tragedy eliminates dialectics and, with it, the very possibility of change. It is precisely in the conflict, the tragic raised to an insuperable circular dialectic, that Spengler sees the essence of the «Faustian man», for whom «life means struggling, overcoming, winning through» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 436). Nevertheless, he rightly reproaches – and therein lies his great topicality – the hypocrisy of the nineteenth century (which is the same as today) for having «merely put [the struggle] into mechanical-utilitarian form» (Ibid.: 437). This signifies that conflict, by no means eliminated, is rather transferred, disguised as economic competition.

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[10] Szondi (1993): 113-115, 113, letter to Fritz Arnold, 13.12.1960. See also Szondi (1961): 173, 196, 199, 213.
[11] See Kraus (1919²): 69, who wrote the renowned verse «Ursprung ist das Ziel».

In particular, Spengler denounces, in a similar way to Engels[12], the fierce competition of the commodity economy aimed at subordinating everything (including politics) to its lust for profit. For both thinkers, economics is indeed nothing but a pharisaic perpetuation, softened in manner but not in substance, of the ineradicable natural unrest (see Spengler [1918-1922]: 986; and Spengler [1933]: 28-30), which Spengler magnifies, however, in its most "virile" form: the open *bellum*, harbinger of greatness. «War is the creator of all great things. All that is meaningful in the stream of life has emerged through victory and defeat» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1007). Blinded by the fata morgana of Nietzsche's «*gefährlich leben* (to live dangerously)» (Nietzsche [1882]: aph. 283, 526-527), Spengler does not realise that the extreme competitive spirit of Western civilisation is, dialectically, the cause of both its triumph and its defeat. Precisely the disaster of the First World War, as a vain showdown between identical imperialisms under different banners, offers irrefutable proof of the «decline of the West», struck to death by its stolid rapacious instinct.

What matters to Spengler is to point out that «history is something that takes no notice whatever of our expectations» (Spengler [1931]: 6). «History recks nothing of human logic» (Spengler [1933]: 13), just like «the logic of destiny has never taken human wishes into account» (Ibid.: VII; see also 4). History coincides, therefore, with the blind *force of things*, which breaks and reifies men. Like «the primordial world of animals» (Adorno [1970]: 181), the historical universe is the realm of unleashed terror, perpetuated courtesy of the inextinguishable «beast-of-prey nature of man» (Spengler [1931]: 72). Hence the relentless struggle of its voracious inhabitants, living expressions of the "beast-of-prey ethics", conceived as an ontological invariant of (natural and social) history (see below, § 4). Unlike the herbivore that unconsciously *undergoes* its fate, man, as a conscious «beast of prey», *is* that very same fate (see Spengler [1931]: 14-22). The struggle is the «grand meaning that ennobles life, the *amor fati* of Nietzsche» (Ibid.: 22). Indeed, as we have seen, «the struggle, which is a necessity of nature» (Spengler [1933]: 132), «is life itself» (Ibid.: 14): *ipso facto*, man fulfils his terrifying "beast-of-prey destiny", which he cannot escape and with which he identifies[13]. Thus, Spengler can again conclude that «human history is war history» (Ibid.: 7), «then as now» (Spengler [1931]: 53).

History, like life, is a perennial disaster, without meaning or redemption. Both, history and life, stride on «from catastrophe to catastrophe» (Ibid.: 28), merging into a single natural entity, in an indissoluble union under the sign of «the eternity of annihilation» (Adorno [1966]: 354). Indeed, if war is the «form» (Spengler [1933]: 24) of the total natural horizon – or, more briefly, if «life *is* war» (Ibid.: 163) – then also «peace» will be nothing but «the continuation of war with different means» (Ibid.: 24)[14]. In other words: «War is the primary politics (*Urpolitik*) of *everything* that lives, and so much so that in the deeps battle and life are one, and being (*Sein*) and will-to-battle expire together» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1109). Therefore, war is nothing but the most evident declination of the universal, vitalistic, metaphysical struggle (the *bellum omnium contra omnes*) at the particular level of the pseudo-meaning of history. Shortly, war is identical to life in its blind self-reproduction through «creative destruction» (Schumpeter [1942]: 81-86).

An eloquent passage at end of *The Decline of the West* clarifies even better Spengler's conception of history:

[12] See Engels (1844): 499-524, especially 504: «The law of the strong hand, the open highway robbery of the Middle Ages, became humanised when it passed over into trade […], into the mercantile system. […] Such is the humanity of trade. And this hypocritical way of misusing morality for immoral purposes is the pride of the free-trade system».

[13] On the psychoanalytical mechanism of identification of the powerless victim with the omnipotent executioner, see Freud (1936): 125-129. See also below, § 4.
[14] Here Spengler echoes a famous passage from Clausewitz (1832): XII and 19: «War is the continuation of policy with other means».

Ever in history it is life and life only – race-quality, the triumph of the will to power – and not the victory of truths, discoveries, or money that signifies. World history is the world court[15], and it has ever decided in favour of the stronger, fuller, and more self-assured life – decreed to it, namely, the right to exist, regardless of whether its right would hold before a tribunal of waking-consciousness. Always it has sacrificed truth and justice to might and race, and passed doom of death upon men and peoples in whom truth was more than deeds, and justice than power. (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1194)

On the basis of such a positivistic Darwinism, Spengler infers, emphasising it, the pantragedy of life-history-nature, which is driven by an ineluctable, catastrophic fate. Hence, he sees only one "chance" for humanity: embracing with «*brave* pessimism» this «*tragic* view of life» (Spengler [1933]: 13), on the altar of which everything is sacrificed. Just as "freedom" coincides with «the recognition of necessity», so the "victory" over destiny equals, for Spengler, its acceptance, that is, the glorification of one's own defeat at its hands. Devastated by the force of things, human beings act and suffer the tragedy of that very irresistible dynamic sadomasochistically, reproducing it permanently with no possibility of redemption. Humanity thus becomes agent and (in)sane bearer of the inhumanity of the natural course, just as the pompous metaphysics of «souldom» (*Seelentum*), magnified in the *Decline*, degenerates into a plant state, the "plantdom" (*Pflanzentum*).

And yet Spengler is firmly convinced that, only by swimming along with this ominous current, one can aspire to «make history», but without ever being able to avoid shipwreck, which is the necessary outcome of life *tout court*:

The man who is incapable of experiencing or enduring tragedy can never be a figure of world significance. He cannot make history unless he experiences as it really is – tragic, permeated by destiny, and in

consequence meaningless, aimless, and unmoral in the eyes of the worshippers of utility. (Spengler [1933]: 13; see also Spengler [1918-1922]: 53)

Unable and indifferent to think rigorously «the dialectic of concept and singularity» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 58), Spengler officiates the sacrifice of convenience – while skilfully concealing it with the hypostatising dialectic of relativism and absolutism – of the particular to the universal, of history to nature, of man to biological destiny. Thus, the whole natural vicissitude takes the form of a colossal «charnel-house of long-dead interiorities» (Lukács [1916-1920]: 55), always returning to itself, but in various changing forms. «If, as Hegel argues, the whole is what is true» – Adorno claims for his part – «then it is so only if the force of the whole is absorbed into the knowledge of the particular» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 59), avoiding, *eo ipso*, to smash it to pieces. And, again, only if the fragment resonates, in turn, with the whole, informing it of its own irreducible singularity.

Yet «the concept of fate, which subjects man to blind domination, reflects the domination exercised by men» (Ibid.: 68), without solution of continuity, in every historical-natural cycle. This is, for Spengler, the totality of history as an insurmountable second nature. Ultimately, Adorno asserts, «the metaphysics of the soul assists his positivism by hypostasizing the principle of relentlessly self-perpetuating domination as something eternal and inexorable» (Ibid.: 69), namely as an indisputable fate/fact. Hence Spengler's hatred of materialism, which «is not sufficiently positivistic for him and would like the world to be other than it is» (Ibid.: 65). And hence also the destruction of the very same thought of the alternative in the name of the myth of the incontrovertible datum/fact: «Those who hold power in the totalitarian states, those who despise their own lies hate the truth and cannot rest until there is no one left who dares to dream» (Ibid.: 61) the possibility of a different state of affairs.

The unsurpassable cyclical naturalism, ontologically inherent in the vortex of history, reveals the intimate kinship between the world of men

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[15] Schiller (1786): 68, uses for the first time the expression: «Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht». See also Hegel (1821): § 340, 503.

and the world of beasts: committing evil so as not to have to suffer it, being executioners so as not to be victims. «Human history, progressive natural domination, continues the unconscious one of nature, of devouring and being devoured» (Adorno [1966]: 348-349). Until the decline inexorably arrives to put an end to a cycle – followed, equally mercilessly, by the fatal dawn of a new cycle, different in its manifestations, but always identical in substance to all the others that have preceded it. The details and accidents (men, cultures, civilisations) change and are destined to disappear almost without a trace; the totality, on the other hand, animated by the evil essence of domination, is as immutable and eternal as the mortal wound it inflicts to humanity.

This is, for Spengler, the invariable dimension of world-nature history, the object of his metaphysics of fate/fact and subject to the force of things.

4. UTOPIA AND DECAY: ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE

Even if under the spell of his peculiar metaphysics of fate/fact, Spengler shows indeed an extraordinary capacity for critical analysis, which represents his greatest relevance today and his "true" – negative – legacy. With his usual taste for paradox, Adorno grasps this ambiguity, when he states that Spengler is «clever enough not to be clever» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 60). This signifies that Spengler's ability to detect the anti-democratic tendencies in democracies (or «the potentialities of domination»; Ibid.: 57) is, dialectically, the result of his «affinity with the ideal of domination» (*Ibidem*) as well as of the fact he does not have to reckon with the self-deceptions of bourgeois ideology, which deludes itself into claiming to represent the realisation of ideas that are, on the contrary, only the appearance of truth.

In addition to what we have already seen, Spengler highlights the uncanny *reversal of society in nature* (see Spengler [1931]: 55-56), by means of the «beast-of-prey nature of man» (or the «logic

of domination», in Adorno's words), who becomes both the victim and executioner. Therefore, for Spengler, any rebellion of mankind against the nature that lives within it and is stronger than it is doomed to failure:

This is the beginning of man's tragedy – for nature is the stronger of the two. Man remains dependent on nature, which, in spite of everything, embraces him within itself, as its creature. All the great civilisations are defeats. […] The fight against nature is hopeless and yet it will be fought out to the bitter end. (Ibid.: 35-36)

Man's struggle against nature is, more precisely, man's schizophrenic struggle against himself, since hard-fought nature is nothing more than the external, immediately perceptible form of the rapacious human nature. Nonetheless, Spengler, on the one hand, seems to ignore the effects of this man-nature struggle (see also above, § 3) and, on the other hand, he does not realise that his own conception is an effect, almost an offshoot, of this very same conflict. Adorno, for his part, exploits this lack of awareness as a critical picklock to dismantle Spengler's philosophical conception: «Nature, with which men have had to struggle in history, is pushed aside by Spengler's philosophy with a sovereign gesture. In return, history itself is transformed into a second nature, as blind, dead-end, and fateful as only plant life can be» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 67).

Spengler is so busy naturalising history that he «does not grasp the degree to which historical fatality, which absorbs all his attention, results from the need to confront and transform nature. He sees history aesthetically» (Ibid.: 65-66). On the contrary,

What can be called human freedom constitutes itself solely in man's efforts to break the bondage of nature. If this is ignored, if the world is treated as a mere manifestation of the pure essence of man, freedom becomes lost in the exclusively human character of history. Freedom develops only through the resistance of the existent; if freedom is posited as absolute and souldom (Seelentum) is raised to a governing princi-

*ple (*zum herrschenden Prinzip*), that principle itself falls prey to the merely existent (*dem bloßen Dasein*). (Ibid.: 67)*

Due to his metaphysical positivism, Spengler does not go so far as to foresee that the possible total defeat of nature at the hands of man (today an extremely real risk) would represent the annihilation of the victor and the "revenge" of the collapsing defeated foe. The paradoxical victory in defeat of those who triumph by losing reveals the chiasmus of domination, that Spengler overlooks: by dominating, humanity is dominated (the domination of men by other men), while nature dominates (reproducing itself in society), via its own domination.

Nevertheless, according to Adorno, «Spengler's specific prognoses are […] astonishing. First, a *military prediction*» (Ibid.: 53; see also Spengler [1918-1922]: 1097-1099), the result of the fact that, unlike many other conservative or even reactionary intellectuals, blinded by a *Kriegsbegeisterung* and a romantic vision of war completely detached from reality (see Bruzzone [2020]: 106-168), Spengler treasures the gruesome experience of the First World War:

The mere existence of these [professional] armies [of voluntary and enthusiastic soldiers, that will replace the huge standing armies] is no substitute for war [as it was, according to Spengler and all European governments, in the nineteenth century]. They are there for war and they want war. In two generations their will is going to be stronger than that of all those who want peace. (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1098)

Spengler thus foreshadows the Second World War, as an imminent, schizophrenic clash of civilisations. And he even prophesies that those «catastrophes of blood and terror» (Ibid.: 1099), caused by the belligerent states, will be followed by «*a time without history* in a demonic way» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 53): the so called «end of history» (Fukuyama [1989] and [1992]). Relentless economic competition replaces war, of which it is the continuation with the *same* means, as much as society is the continuation of nature with the same

means, namely a second nature. The inexorable vortex of domination – the ontological invariant of life – condemns, indeed, history, society and culture to a «static state» – a reified state of nature –, which, for its part, «compels the incessant and deadly repetition of what has already been accepted» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 54). So, the messenger of decadence is among the first to show how history itself, like the species and the civilisations that alternate in its course, becomes liable to extinction.

At the same time, Spengler predicts «a *change in the essence of the political party*», and «emphasises the mechanisms which allow the party system to turn into dictatorship»; so «the principle of democracy develops into its opposite through the rule of the party (Ibid.: 54-55). Following Max Weber's insight, Spengler sees the transformation taking place in the parties of the masses which are completely informed and directed by the economy, raised to the status of an irresistible force of nature. Parties thus become instruments of enrichment, as well as mere "followers" of a «cæsaristic» dictator or of some minorities equally dictatorial (see Spengler [1918-1922]: 1125-1126).

Spengler senses that *politics will disappear* in general indifference: «All great political questions are solved, as they are solved sooner or later in every *Zivilisation*: inasmuch as questions are no longer felt as questions and are not asked» (Ibid.: 615-616). According to him, «among the gravest signs of decay […] is the fact that, in the course of the nineteenth century, economics came to be considered more important than politics» (Spengler [1933]: 28). Spengler also goes so far as to foresee that, in the age of the decline of metaphysics – which «has exhausted its possibilities» as well as the civilisation that gave birth to it and has been informed by it –, economics will turn into metaphysics, assuming (at first) «a social-ethical and social-economic character» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 471). Yet, today, economics can proudly present itself in the pure and exclusively economic form, which no longer tolerates anything ethical, except the mask – the simulacrum – of ethics, that allows it to better perpetrate infamy. Society,

meanwhile, has been confined to the evanescent, but functional, dimension of the social network.

If, however, Spengler thinks, on the one hand, that humanity is eventually destined to live in an apolitical and ahistorical world, he conceives, on the other hand, the inevitable clash between economics and politics as still open (see Ibid.: 986). The "fatal" antagonism between the Political and the Economic – i.e. between «cæsarism», that is the extreme reaction of politics in the final phase of *Zivilisation*, and the «dictatorship of money», which reifies everything – represents «the decisive battle of history» (Ibid.: 1193) and for history itself: namely a *Kulturkampf*. At stake here is, indeed, the only possibility of revoking the supremacy of economics (see *Ibidem*), which annihilates history and aims at subordinating everything to its unrelenting lust for profit. Cæsarism, as a phenomenon and *Weltanschauung*, is invoked, illusorily, by Spengler to resolve the crisis of politics and history (hence the dreadful apolitical and ahistorical nature of *Zivilisation*). As a product and embodiment of this very crisis, cæsarism epitomises, for Spengler, the last chance to open a new political and historical horizon (Ibid.: 1194-1195)[16].

Furthermore, he prophesies the *advent of post-truth*, as a mere personal possession of "truth", devoid of any objective value, *ergo* no longer potentially subversive. Everyone has their own truth and claims it with pride, because there seems to be no longer any truth or anything that aspires to be such. Spengler grasps the relativism of "post-truth" for what it really is: an invitation to stop once and for all to seek truth, only so as to accept and endure what power, through the media, decrees as truth, namely the tautological proclamation and reproduction of itself. In Spengler's words:

> What is truth? For the multitude, that which it continually reads and hears. A poor wretch may settle somewhere and collect grounds on which to deter-

mine "the truth" but what he obtains is just his truth. The other, the public truth of the moment, which alone matters for effects and successes in the fact-world [Tatsachenwelt], is today a product of the press. What the press wills, is true. Its commanders evoke, transform, interchange truths. (Ibid.: 1139)

In the end, as Adorno points out (see Adorno [1938-1950]: 50), Spengler unveils the *bad essence of free time*, which is entirely managed and manipulated by the mass-media (the press, cinema, etc.). Before Adorno's famous critique, Spengler stigmatises the *Kulturindustrie* (see Horkheimer, Adorno [1947]: 141-191) as a form of narcotisation of the masses, subjected in their free time to the very productive process that makes them insubstantial as human beings (see Adorno [1938-1950]: 50-51): «Intellectual tension knows only one form of recreation, that which is specific to the metropolis, namely, the release of tension in the form of relaxation, "distraction"» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 678). In Adorno's more radical perspective: «The original affinity between business and entertainment reveals itself in the meaning of entertainment itself: as society's apologia. To be entertained means to be in agreement» (Adorno, Horkheimer [1947]: 166-167).

Unlike his liberal-progressive opponents (see above, § 2), Spengler understands that weapons of mass *distraction* are even more effective than weapons of mass *destruction*: «The quantity of organised amusement is converted into the quality of organised cruelty» (Horkheimer, Adorno [1947]: 160). This is why the system's media-recreational machinery, with its «intellectual artillery» (i.e. pounding propaganda), grants its free-slaves fun, a false freedom of thought (Spengler [1918-1922]: 1138, 1141) and of the press (Ibid.: 1061-1064, 1137-1140), which is nothing but a surrogate for the liberty that has been actually obliterated. Yet this amusing surrogate is able to disguise domination as democratisation, and to make the masses accept the most ruthless lack of freedom as the utmost liberty. Whoever, like Spengler, is not blind to the «monstrous drama» (Ibid.: 1138) of the complete domination over the masses through the press and

[16] The opening of a new historical and political horizon is precisely the task that Spengler undertakes in *Jahre der Entscheidung* (1933).

propaganda (Ibid.: 1140-1141)[17], is fully aware of the necessity to «demand not freedom *for* the press, but freedom *from* the press» (Ibid.: 1140). Indeed – and also this remark is absolutely topical:

There is no more appalling caricature of freedom of thought. Formerly no one was allowed to think freely; now it is permitted, but no one is capable of it any more. Now people want to think only what they are supposed to want to think, and this they consider freedom. (Ibid.: 1141)

Nevertheless, Spengler's analysis detects and blames the effects rather than the cause of the problem. In other words, while Spengler is not blind to the mechanism of domination, he is instead blinded by domination itself: hence the ambiguity underlined above (see also § 1). Nietzsche's famous aphorism on monsters and the abyss finds its culminating example in Spengler: «If thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee» (Nietzsche [1886]: aph. 146, 98). The very *prevalence of domination* – Spengler's greatest flaw – obscures his vision with respect to all those tendencies that go beyond it. This is why «his sympathies are with the rulers […], his entire image of history is measured by the ideal of domination» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 57). So «the full force of Spengler's scorn is directed not at the manipulators but at their victims, at those who fall prey to the "civilising" industry of an advertising culture» (Ibid.: 51). And, moreover, «Spengler's prediction that the power to think will die out culminates in a taboo on thought which he attempts to justify on the basis of the inexorable course of history» (Ibid.: 56)[18].

This is what Adorno stigmatises as «the *death of spirit*» and sees as «the Archimedean point of

Spengler's scheme» (Ibid.: 56-57). Namely, this is the exact point at which metaphysics breaks the appearance of positivism and reverses it into an *oxymoronic metaphysical positivism*, where fact is elevated to destiny (see above, § 2). Spengler himself reveals paradigmatically this essential turning point in his philosophy: «Life is bound only to facts, consists only of facts, and tends only to facts. Truths are entities of thought, and their validity must be sought within the "realm of thoughts". [...] Where reality begins, the realm of thoughts ends» (Spengler [1921]: 70). As Spengler reasserts, if «*for life there are no truths, but only facts*» (Ibid.: 73), and if the latter are, *eo ipso*, «*more important than truths*» (Ibid.: 67), then facts become metaphysical entities like life itself. Therefore, «despite his belief in facts and his relativistic scepticism, Spengler introduces a metaphysical principle» – life – «as the ultimate explanation of the historical dynamic» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 65). Hence the fatal/factual combination of metaphysics (life) and positivism (the "fatal facts", determined by life) in the name of «a latent philosophy of identity» (*Ibidem*) – precisely the identity of life and facts. Indeed, the magnified life – i.e. the hardest fact, or the "realm of facts" – is nature itself, that is the only reality ever self-same. Before this ominous fate all that remains is to bow spontaneously, as Spengler repeats throughout *The Decline of the West*.

Against Spengler's metaphysics of fate/fact, it is necessary to produce

Perspectives […] which set the world beside itself, alienated from itself, revealing its cracks and fissures, as needy and distorted as it will one day lay there in the messianic light. To win such perspectives without caprice or violence, wholly by the feel for objects, this alone is what thinking is all about. (Adorno [1951]: aph. 153, 283)

These perspectives are nothing but «the forces», hidden from Spengler's «attentive gaze» as obscured by the preponderance of domination, that are «set free in decay» (Adorno [1938-1950]: 71). Namely the forces of the vanquished, who are relentlessly wasted by life-history-nature and disowned by «Spengler's hunter's eye» (*Ibidem*):

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[17] Adorno (1938/1950): 52, rightly claims that «Spengler prophesied Goebbels».

[18] And, indeed, this «taboo on thought» – or even *Denkverbot* – is exactly Spengler's *desideratum*: «If the influence of this book leads men of the new generation to turn from poetry to technology, from painting to the merchant marine, from epistemology to politics, they are doing what I desire. One could wish nothing better for them» (Spengler [1918-1922]: 57).

The powerless, who at Spengler's command are to be thrown aside and annihilated by history, are the negative embodiment within the negativity of this civilisation of everything which promises, however feebly, to break the dictatorship of civilisation and put an end to the horror of pre-history. In their protest lies the only hope that fate and power will not have the last word. (Ibidem)

After all, it is still a question of moving, as Marx proclaimed, from pre-history (natural history) to history (fully human), founding a civilisation suitable for *all* men. And precisely this transition is «the utopia that, silent and questioning, is contained in the image of» every «declining civilisation» (*Ibidem*). But such a utopia demands refusing to react to historical disappointment via a recourse to the convenient idea of fatal/factual decline[19], which is nothing but the stigma of a "consoling" metaphysical impossibility aimed, then as now, at justifying an escape in the face of the imperative duty to think and act for the best in the context of the worse. Ultimately, in the no man's land between decline and utopia, Spengler and Adorno meet and their legacies intertwine: in the forces preserved and released in decay. Only by means of those forces it is possible to not get lost in the darkness that follows sunset and to prepare for the dawn of something truly different from everything that has been.

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[19] See Cioran (1957): 1519-1559, who has dealt properly with the idea of decadence as an elective asylum for those who are defeated by history.

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La malinconia del «pellerossa». Estetica e morale nell'antropologia francese della seconda metà del XIX secolo

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Abstract. Based on the theoretical and methodological indications provided by the Geneva critic and historian Jean Starobinski in his analysis of melancholic figures in the 19th century, this study focuses on the presence of the figure of the «Redskin» or «Savage» of North America in French anthropology of the same period. Starting from the observation of its melancholic character, the origins of this figure and its attributes will be reconstructed, and its moral and epistemological function in physical anthropology, in the emerging palaeoanthropology and in colonial ideological discourse, will be analysed. This path will be an opportunity to question the complex relationships between scientific and aesthetic languages in European modernity.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Alterity, Anthropology, Melancholy, Moral.

1. INTRODUZIONE

Tra quanti si sono dedicati a esplorare il rapporto tra l'arte, la letteratura e la scienza, Jean Starobinski si è distinto per il carattere filosofico che ha saputo infondere alle sue riflessioni. Mi riferisco in particolare a quegli studi nei quali ha proposto un'analisi della «disponibilità metaforica»[1] (Starobinski [1970]: 200; cf. in proposito Azouvi [1985]) di alcune immagini in transito dalla scienza (in particolare dalla medicina e dalla psicologia) all'arte e alla letteratura, cioè della loro capacità di divenire figura e forma simbolica, e poi di caricarsi, nel tempo, di contenuti eterogenei. L'invenzione di termini quali malinconia, nostalgia, clorosi, ecc., corrisponde, secondo l'intellettuale ginevrino, all'invenzione di una malattia e al suo ingresso nell'immaginario collettivo. Il *successo* dell'immagine o della figura legata alla patologia ne determina poi l'importanza nella saggistica

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[1] Tutte le traduzioni sono nostre.

medica, nella letteratura, nelle arti figurative, nella filosofia, nella divulgazione scientifica e nel linguaggio della politica.

Per Starobinski, la figura del malinconico e quelle a essa legate – ad esempio il dandy, il clown triste e la donna clorotica – hanno una vasta diffusione in Francia soprattutto a partire dalla seconda metà del XIX secolo perché sono un sintomo della maniera in cui quest'epoca si percepisce e si esprime. Più precisamente, queste figure sono significative di un «momento della storia della coscienza occidentale» (Starobinski [1982a]: 251) in cui la società si apprende come *malata* e si caratterizza per il *rifiuto del presente* (Trucchio [2021]: 157-175). Starobinski pone poi questa attitudine alla base del successo dei miti della rinascita che caratterizzeranno i fascismi del Novecento, con le loro promesse di un uomo nuovo e di un futuro glorioso nel quale «le insoddisfazioni del presente» saranno finalmente appagate (Starobinski [1982b]: 552).

In questo studio, le indicazioni teoriche e metodologiche fornite da Jean Starobinski verranno applicate allo stesso contesto storico e geografico, la Francia della seconda metà del XIX secolo, e in un ambito scientifico prossimo, quello delle scienze dell'umano. L'immagine che sarà analizzata non appare però mai negli studi di Starobinski: è quella del «pellerossa», una derivazione ottocentesca di quella, precedente, del «selvaggio» o «indiano» nordamericano. Anche questa figura ha dei tratti malinconici, perché viene evocata al fine di rappresentare un'umanità miserabile, che si trascina in terre inospitali oscillando tra ferocia e inoperosità, inevitabilmente destinata a scomparire di fronte all'avanzata della civilizzazione. Essa è ben nota, sopravvive in qualche modo ancora oggi e non necessita dunque di una lunga descrizione: si tratta di un uomo seminudo, con in mano un'ascia rudimentale o una mazza rompi-testa (per la caccia e la guerra), o ancora un sonaglio (per i riti e la danza), agghindato con orecchini e collane d'osso, artigli e conchiglie, nonché con le immancabili piume sulla testa.

Utilizzerò la terminologia dell'epoca – «selvaggio» (*sauvage*), «indiano» (*Indien*), «pelleros-

sa» (*Peau-rouge*), ecc. – per sottolineare che non mi riferisco in nessun momento alla realtà delle Prime Nazioni del Nordamerica, ma a una figura che ha le sue radici in Europa e che si è legata poi indissolubilmente all'ideologia colonialista; un'immagine rimasta sostanzialmente invariata dai primi ritratti all'acquerello fatti da John White agli autoctoni della Carolina del Nord nel XVI secolo, alla letteratura di viaggio del XVIII secolo, fino ai romanzi di Chateaubriand e di Fenimore Cooper all'inizio del XIX secolo, e poi ancora oltre, nei fumetti e film western.

Nonostante la presenza della figura artistica e letteraria del «pellerossa» nelle scienze dell'umano al momento del loro costituirsi, non esistono studi su tale questione, a parte alcune allusioni sporadiche (per esempio in Coye [1997]). Questa mancanza è dovuta probabilmente al vecchio problema della specializzazione delle discipline, cioè al fatto che le ricostruzioni storiche, anche critiche, delle diverse dottrine coinvolte (preistoria, etnologia, antropologia, medicina e neurologia, archeologia, linguistica, ecc.), non hanno tenuto in considerazione che questi campi del sapere, oggi considerati distinti, si sono dati lo statuto di scienza nello stesso momento storico in cui le loro frontiere erano affatto permeabili.

A quest'epoca, la figura del «pellerossa» attraversa nei due sensi la frontiera tra il linguaggio artistico e letterario, e quello scientifico. Da un lato, essa è protagonista dell'arte e della letteratura popolare grazie, ad esempio, al successo dei romanzi di Chateaubriand e di Fenimore Cooper. Dall'altro, il «pellerossa» è spesso presente nel discorso scientifico e in particolare in quella che alcuni studiosi hanno chiamato l'«invenzione della preistoria» (Richard [1992], [2008]), una vicenda innanzitutto francese, contemporanea alla nascita della Société d'anthropologie de Paris. Senza dimenticare che gli usi e i costumi dei «pellerossa» vengono descritti in innumerevoli testi di carattere etnoantropologico appartenenti a quel movimento di diffusione delle conoscenze scientifiche e tecniche noto nella Francia del XIX secolo come «vulgarisation scientifique», una delle tante incarnazioni del vasto progetto di educazione popolare nato nel secolo dei Lumi.

Oggetto di questo studio non saranno tanto le origini della figura del «pellerossa», quanto il valore morale e il ruolo ideologico ch'essa assume nell'antropologia della seconda metà dell'Ottocento. Ci si interrogherà quindi su cosa accade quando un'immagine (visiva e testuale) fondata su rappresentazioni tradizionali, fantastiche, artistiche, letterarie e via dicendo, viene utilizzata nel discorso scientifico; e su come e perché un cliché possa assumere lo stesso valore di un'osservazione diretta e di una descrizione oggettiva, se non addirittura un valore maggiore. Seguendo lo «stile» critico e filosofico starobinskiano (Starobinski [1985]: 9), alla ricostruzione storica della figura del «pellerossa» seguirà l'analisi del suo *movimento* dal campo estetico a quello scientifico e delle sue implicazioni *morali*. Saranno dunque esaminati il ruolo che il «pellerossa» assume nell'antropologia dell'epoca, il susseguirsi, sovrapporsi e trasformarsi delle sue espressioni, nonché lo sviluppo parallelo delle discipline che ne hanno sfruttato la disponibilità metaforica – la quale, vedremo in conclusione, è ancora oggi *attiva*.

2. IL BASTONE E LA PIUMA

La sintetica e non esaustiva ricostruzione della genealogia della figura dell'«indiano» d'America che segue ha innanzitutto lo scopo di mostrare ch'essa è fabbricata a partire da rappresentazioni dell'alterità. Di fronte all'ignoto, agli abitanti di quella differenza assoluta che si convenne di chiamare «America», la nudità, il sonaglio, il bastone, ecc. e soprattutto la piuma (Marrache-Gouraud [2016]) riemergono come attributi caratterizzanti una forma di vita reputata tanto miserabile e folle da non essere umana, e quindi ancora disponibile all'umiliazione, alla conquista e allo sfruttamento.

Ben prima che, nei testi attribuiti ad Amerigo Vespucci, e poi nelle raccolte di racconti e illustrazioni di esplorazioni europee realizzate da editori quali Theodor de Bry, Jean-Frédéric Bernard, ecc., i «selvaggi» del Nuovo Mondo venissero descritti, e anche ritratti in alcune incisioni, con gli attributi già menzionati, una figura in tutto e

per tutto simile era diffusa in Europa con un ben preciso significato. Nelle Bibbie latine miniate del XIII e XIV secolo, un uomo seminudo con delle piume sulla testa e un sonaglio e/o un bastone in pugno rappresenta l'*insipiens* descritto nel Salmo 52 (Gross [1989 e 2000]). L'immagine è talmente diffusa e di chiara interpretazione da venir riprodotta anche nell'allegoria della *Stultitia* realizzata da Giotto nella Cappella degli Scrovegni di Padova, nel 1306. Miseria, umiliazione e follia sono gli attributi sociali e morali impliciti in questa figura, e la follia è quella di non credere in Dio: «Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus» è difatti l'incipit di questo Salmo, tradizionalmente attribuito a Davide. *Insipiens* è chiunque non sia cristiano, quindi i musulmani, per certi versi gli ebrei – di sicuro i *popoli mostruosi* che vivono ai confini del mondo, descritti da Esiodo, Strabone, Plinio il Vecchio, ecc., che gli esploratori identificheranno con gli abitanti del Nuovo Mondo.

Un altro motivo iconografico che contribuisce alla fabbrica dell'immagine dell'«indiano» americano è quello dell'uomo selvaggio (*homo sylvestris*), che appare intorno al XII secolo in diversi contesti artistici e letterari (anche se già nell'antichità si narra di questi esseri, ad esempio in Erodoto, *Storie*, IV, 191) (Duviols [2017]). Eredi di una lunga tradizione che comprende centauri e fauni, ma anche la rappresentazione biblica della follia di Nabucodonosor (Husband [1980], Pouvreau [2015]), questi esseri sono cacciatori antropomorfi i quali, pur restando nascosti per la maggior parte del tempo, vivono ai margini della società umana, nudi ma ricoperti di peli e armati di un bastone. Uno dei loro attributi morali è, ancora una volta, una feroce follia. È ben noto che questa immagine artistica e letteraria sarà ripresa in contesto scientifico a partire dal XVII secolo, ad esempio da Edward Tyson, il cui saggio *Orang-Outan, sive homo sylvestris* (1699) influenzerà Buffon e Linneo (Tinland [1968], Gliozzi [1977]). Essa influenzerà anche le prime ricostruzioni dell'uomo preistorico, immancabilmente armato di una clava, il cui aspetto più o meno scimmiesco dipenderà dalla impostazione *materialista* (cioè trasformista, poi evoluzionista) o *spiritualista* (cre-

azionista) dello studioso che lo descrive (cfr. Boitard [1861] e Figuier [1870]).

La figura del «selvaggio» americano si precisa nella letteratura di viaggio francese del XVI e XVII secolo grazie ai racconti sulla Nouvelle-France di esploratori (per esempio Champlain [1619]) e missionari (per esempio Sagard [1632]), e il suo passaggio all'arte e alla letteratura del XIX secolo avviene attraverso una serie di testi del XVIII, tra i quali l'opera del missionario gesuita Joseph-François Lafitau, i *Mœurs des sauvages amériquains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724). Questo testo riccamente illustrato contribuisce a fissare definitivamente l'immagine del «selvaggio» americano, seminudo, col capo agghindato di piume, danzante con un sonaglio in mano, ecc., e costituisce una delle fonti per l'*Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France* […] di Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1744), la cui lettura ispirerà i romanzi di Chateaubriand tanto e forse più che i suoi stessi viaggi (Chinard [1911]).

Questa rapida genealogia della figura dell'«indiano» non ne esaurisce certo la polisemia: in essa confluiscono anche, solo per fare qualche altro esempio, le rappresentazioni d'idolatri e streghe (Petrella [2020]), la lunga storia del cannibalismo (Mason [1990]), le immagini contenute nei cataloghi di allegorie e nei dizionari allegorici del XVI secolo (Ripa [1603]), e la satira dei protestanti contro i cattolici all'epoca delle guerre di religione (Lestringant [1996]). Quando Montaigne evoca i «cannibales» d'America sulla scorta della lettura dei racconti di viaggio nella *France antarctique* di André Thevet (1557 e 1575) e Jean de Léry (1578), lo fa anche per criticare la crudeltà di cui sono capaci i cristiani in Europa (Montaigne [1992]). Persino l'asportazione dello scalpo, ritenuta una pratica tipica dei «selvaggi» americani, era già attribuita da Erodoto ai *barbari* guerrieri sciti (*Storie*, IV, 64). E non ci chiederemo ovviamente come sia possibile che elementi fantastici, artistici, religiosi, tradizionali, ecc. si mescolino a osservazioni fatte sul campo: la questione dell'oggettività è da tempo oggetto di analisi (Daston, Galison [2007]) e basti ricordare che nella letteratura di

viaggio e nella cartografia, ancora nel XVII secolo, diavoli volanti e mostri marini erano presenti nelle incisioni che, per altri versi, rappresentano luoghi, animali e piante che corrispondono alle attuali descrizioni scientifiche (Holtz, Maus de Rolley [2008]). Ciò che è importante sottolineare per il nostro percorso è che il carattere comune di tutte le figure chiamate in causa è la loro radicale alterità, cioè il loro essere ogni volta la negazione di uno specifico attributo considerato come caratterizzante l'umano *civilizzato*.

C'è tuttavia un ulteriore elemento da mettere in chiaro prima di procedere oltre. Alla fine del XVII secolo nasce un fiorente mercato di *curiosità* importate in Europa dal Nuovo Mondo, il numero di viaggiatori non fa che aumentare e il turismo in Nordamerica diviene sempre più alla moda. Alcuni oggetti sono prodotti (e alcuni costumi e gesti sono adottati) dai popoli autoctoni per rispondere alle richieste di questo nascente mercato globale già nel XVIII secolo (Phillips [1998]). Per quanto l'utilizzazione delle piume sia attestata nella cultura materiale di altri popoli autoctoni, per esempio in America del Sud, le riserve museali del Québec e dell'Ontario mostrano che, almeno nelle colonie francesi del Nord-Est, non esiste nessuna evidenza dell'utilizzazione di copricapi piumati prima del XVIII secolo, e che i popoli autoctoni iniziano ad autorappresentarsi acconciati in questo modo solamente negli oggetti creati per il mercato dei souvenirs del XIX secolo (Petrella, Trucchio [2018]). Con questo non si vuole affermare che la figura dell'«indiano» sia stata semplicemente imposta dai colonizzatori, quanto semmai ch'essa è l'effetto di storie che non possono essere più districate, il prodotto di secoli di scambi sociali ed economici tra popoli autoctoni e colonizzatori, ovviamente non esenti da conflitti e dalla distruzione sistematica di alcuni elementi della cultura autoctona (Gruzinski [1990]).

3. DALL'«INDIANO» AL «PELLEROSSA»

La complessità della figura dell'«indiano» è quindi destinata a permanere irriducibile a una

semplicistica separazione dicotomica tra immaginazione e *realia* anche quando, nella Francia della seconda metà del XIX secolo, le discipline che si occupano dell'umano adottano il modello quantitativo e sperimentale della scienza moderna.

La Société d'anthropologie de Paris fondata da Paul Broca e altri nel 1859 assume un ruolo centrale in questo passaggio. Broca e molti dei suoi sodali sono dei trasformisti, seguono cioè le idee che Lamarck aveva espresso mezzo secolo prima nella sua *Philosophie zoologique* (1809). Benché *fissista*, cioè oppositore di Lamarck sulla questione dell'evoluzione degli esseri viventi, l'altro naturalista di riferimento per Broca e i suoi colleghi è Georges Cuvier, a cui si deve la fondazione scientifica dell'anatomia comparata (Cuvier [1800-1805]), nonché della paleontologia (Cuvier [1812 e 1825]), la quale ha dato slancio anche immaginativo agli studi francesi del XIX secolo presentando le specie animali «distrutte» nel succedersi delle ere geologiche. In questo contesto teorico, la medicina sperimentale, la paleontologia umana, l'antropologia fisica, la neurologia sperimentale, le varie teorie trasformiste e poi evoluzioniste (comprese quelle sull'evoluzione delle lingue), nonché il darwinismo sociale, nascono ed evolvono parallelamente, talvolta sovrapponendosi.

Guardando al quadro sociopolitico più generale, l'emergenza di questi campi di studio è contemporanea alla seconda ondata coloniale francese, il cui inizio è solitamente associato alla conquista di Algeri (1830), e a un rinnovato interesse per il passato nazionale, che insiste sulle specificità dei Galli e dei Celti rispetto ai conquistatori romani e dà nuova linfa al fenomeno della «celtomania» (Demoule [2015]). Nella cultura popolare, come già accennato, il ciclo dei Natchez di Chateaubriand (che aveva ispirato delle opere divenute celebri di Girodet e di Delacroix), e i romanzi di Fenimore Cooper, che per di più vive a Parigi dal 1826 al 1833, conoscono un grande successo. Occorre poi citare la vasta eco che ha il passaggio, al Palazzo delle Tuileries nel 1845, del museo itinerante di George Catlin, nel quale, circondati da tele dipinte dallo stesso Catlin e da manufatti da lui raccolti durante i suoi viaggi in Nordamerica, autoctoni Ojibwa e Iowa inscenano dei *tableaux vivants*, cantano e danzano eseguendo i loro riti *autentici* al cospetto del re Louis-Philippe I, nonché di Charles Baudelaire, Champfleury, Delacroix, Théophile Gautier, Karl Girardet, Gérard de Nerval e George Sand (Kalifa [2002], Fabre, Macherel [2006]).

È in questo contesto che il cliché del selvaggio la cui genealogia abbiamo riassunto si diffonde nel linguaggio scientifico, caricandosi di un carattere ulteriore: la pelle rossa o «cuivrée» (ramata). L'origine dell'attribuzione del colore rosso alla pelle degli autoctoni americani è una questione controversa, ma viene solitamente fatta risalire a Linneo. Per di più, essa non ha probabilmente a che fare col colore della pelle, ma nasce dal fatto che alcuni viaggiatori avevano riportato l'usanza, da parte di alcuni popoli, di utilizzare dei pigmenti rosso ocra per decorare oggetti e per realizzare pitture corporali (Vaughan [1982], Shoemaker [1997]). In ogni caso, è sicuro ch'essa si diffonde e si attesta insieme alla nascita dell'antropologia fisica, cioè di quella scienza dell'umano che è stata a giusto titolo definita come una «raziologia» (Cohen [1999]). Con l'espressione «race rouge» possono dunque essere indicati, alla metà dell'Ottocento, tanto i popoli del Nordamerica, che gli autoctoni di tutto il continente senza distinzione, mentre il nome «Peaux-Rouges» viene attribuito piuttosto agli autoctoni di Stati Uniti e Canada.

Le discipline dell'umano, nello stesso momento in cui adottano il linguaggio e il metodo della scienza moderna, accettano quindi come scientifico e oggettivo anche il ritratto dell'«indiano» del quale abbiamo tracciato la storia, specificando stavolta il colore della pelle che caratterizza la sua «razza», come richiesto dall'antropologia fisica. Un colore descritto la maggior parte delle volte appunto come ramato, che viaggiatori ed esploratori *osservano* e raccontano in maniera pressoché identica dal Nord-Est fino alle Grandi Pianure e alla California, così come vedono e descrivono quegli attributi sui quali ci siamo soffermati.

La piuma sulla testa, il sonaglio, il bastone, la semi-nudità, ecc., che sono stati via via simboli, parti di un'allegoria, referenti realistici della con-

dizione «selvaggia» e infine elementi di espressioni artistiche e letterarie, divengono un fatto scientifico, proprio come la pelle «ramata». Di conseguenza, diviene un fatto scientifico anche il senso, il valore morale ch'essi portano con sé: la condizione umana più bassa concepibile, che non può che trarre oggettivamente vantaggio dall'incontro con degli esseri superiori, i colonizzatori.

Questo passaggio avviene attraverso una serie di agenti che contribuiscono a costituire quello che potremmo definire un «dispositivo» (Foucault [1977]), cioè una rete, un sistema che comprende affermazioni tanto scientifiche che morali, leggi, regole amministrative, istituzioni anche a fine umanitario, ecc., attraverso il quale il colonialismo agisce e si riproduce. Il fatto che il linguaggio scientifico si appropri di una figura appartenente al linguaggio estetico permette agli agenti di questo dispositivo di attribuire alla figura in questione un valore morale generale, il che sarebbe stato impossibile se si fossero attenuti alle norme della descrizione etnoantropologica, ch'essi stessi andavano peraltro stabilendo nella sua forma *scientifica*. Vedremo quindi nelle prossime pagine come la figura del «pellerossa», così come si è costituita in questo lungo percorso, venga regolarmente chiamata in causa, nell'antropologia dell'epoca, quando si tratta di descrivere un ritardo nell'evoluzione umana o – il che non è poi molto differente – un ostacolo al progresso. Come essa sia evocata al fine di rappresentare un residuo della preistoria; una forma di barbarie già vinta dall'avanzare della civiltà; e persino una forma di degenerazione, il ritorno dell'umano verso l'animale.

Il «pellerossa» si trascina mestamente in un'esistenza ormai vuota di senso, guardando sparire il suo popolo a causa della fame, dell'alcool e delle malattie. A proposito delle figure malinconiche di quest'epoca, Jean Starobinski considerava che lo «sguardo delle statue» fosse una delle migliori rappresentazioni possibili di quella «sensazione di perdita vitale» che accompagna la descrizione del soggetto malinconico (Starobinski [1994]: 46). La figura del «pellerossa» non sfugge a questa metafora. Essa è difatti descritta come silenziosa, impassibile anche nell'esercizio della violenza più

efferata, con lo sguardo di una vuotezza bestiale. L'«indiano» nordamericano è un essere bloccato in una immobilità che va ben oltre la debolezza o la pigrizia, metafora del suo esser già morto, già monumento funerario, statua che commemora un passato perduto per sempre. La sua fine, decretata dalla Natura stessa, può solo essere frenata dalla carità dei bianchi – o anche accelerata, con la stessa intenzione caritatevole, come vorranno gli adepti del darwinismo sociale.

4. UN «PELLEROSSA» COME ANTENATO?

Gli scienziati che riportano freddamente dei dati nelle relazioni alle varie *sociétés savantes*, spaziando liberamente dall'etnologia alla neurologia, dalla craniometria alla paleontologia, ecc., sono soliti utilizzare degli espedienti retorici e delle figure letterarie per divulgare le loro conoscenze: la nascita della preistoria in Francia, in particolare, è praticamente impensabile nelle sue implicazioni estetiche e morali senza tener conto della presenza della figura del «pellerossa».

Il 15 settembre del 1859, l'eminente geologo Charles Lyell annuncia solennemente, in una conferenza per la *British Association for the Advancement of Science*, di essersi convertito all'idea della «high human antiquity», riferendosi in particolare agli scavi che Jacques Boucher de Perthes, un botanico dilettante, aveva effettuato nella regione della Somme fin dagli anni 1820. La conferenza riscuote una vasta eco, tanto da essere pubblicata dal *Times* quattro giorni dopo, ed è considerata un punto di svolta nella nascita della paleoantropologia. Da questo momento in poi, sebbene con un gran numero di sfumature e interpretazioni differenti, la maggior parte degli studiosi francesi ripudia la cronologia biblica e accetta l'idea vertiginosa degli «hommes fossiles» o «antédiluviens», secondo la terminologia dell'epoca.

Questo evento dà nuovo impulso all'antica pratica comparativa occidentale che consiste nell'accostare popoli *antichi* e popoli *lontani* allo scopo di comprendere gli uni in relazione agli altri; una pratica che qui prende la forma di un confronto

tra popoli *preistorici* e *selvaggi*, i quali rientrano entrambi, in questo contesto storico, nella categoria di *primitivo* (Affergan 1997; Hartog 2005). Di conseguenza, il comparativismo sistematico e una prospettiva diacronica si affermano come principi fondamentali dello studio dell'umano.

Una volta accettata l'idea della grande antichità dell'umano, i primi paleoantropologi francesi si sono trovati di fronte al problema di ricostruire un mondo durato per centinaia e forse migliaia di secoli a partire da frammenti d'osso e pietre lavorate, e senza avere ancora a disposizione neanche il più semplice metodo stratigrafico. La figura liminare che abbiamo convenuto di chiamare «pellerossa», in questo momento e contesto storico, rappresenta l'esotico e il primitivo per eccellenza, ben più di ogni altra figura d'alterità nata in contesto coloniale, dall'Africa al resto delle Americhe. La memoria delle colonie in Nordamerica è ancora viva, anzi *ravvivata* dalla nascita del cosiddetto «secondo impero coloniale» francese; la letteratura di viaggio del XVIII secolo non solo è riedita (cfr. Lafitau [1839 e 1845]), ma fornisce anche la base per i romanzi di Chateaubriand. Si continua ovviamente a leggere *L'Ingénu* (1767) di Voltaire il cui protagonista è un Huron che sbarca in Bretagna dalle colonie della Nouvelle-France, e persino in *Le Père Goriot* (1835) di Balzac si trova un paragone tra i piccoli criminali di Parigi e gli Hurons (Balzac [1976]: 143). La «race rouge» è dunque evocata al fine di colmare questa lacuna nel passaggio dall'animale all'umano, avvenuto in qualche momento nell'epoca che prende il nome, appunto nella seconda metà del XIX secolo, di «preistoria».

Così Louis Figuier, medico e chimico, nonché il più conosciuto e prolifico divulgatore scientifico del XIX secolo, nel suo libro *L'homme primitif* (1870) utilizza i resoconti sugli «Indiens d'Amérique» presenti nella letteratura di viaggio per ricostruire il mondo preistorico (la fabbricazione delle armi e dei vari utensili, la caccia, i riti funebri, ecc.), e ne *Les races humaines* (1872) afferma che gli «indiani» (*Indiens*) sono gli ultimi rappresentanti del mondo preistorico. Più precisamente, Figuier distingue quanti si sono sottomessi ai «con-

quistatori» (e hanno dunque perso il loro statuto di *autenticità*) dagli «indiani che sono rimasti indipendenti [che] vagano per i boschi e le praterie, e sono gli ultimi rappresentanti dell'uomo allo stato selvaggio o semiselvaggio» (Figuier [1872]: 466).

La pratica di comparare la «race rouge» all'umanità primitiva è comune a tutti gli scienziati-divulgatori dell'epoca che partecipano della nascita della preistoria: solo per fare alcuni degli esempi più noti, la ritroviamo in Ernest Théodore Hamy e in Victor Meunier, per i quali la «race rouge» è rimasta all'epoca preistorica cosiddetta «della renna», nella quale cioè le renne costituivano fonte di cibo, vestiti e utensili (Hamy [1870], Meunier [1874]); e in Armand de Quatrefages, per il quale gli Algonchini (*Algonquins*, nome generico dato nella letteratura di viaggio francese ai popoli del Nord-Est) sono sostanzialmente dei Cro-Magnon che non hanno saputo progredire oltre le «il grado più basso della vita sociale» (Quatrefages [1877]).

Metafora ed espediente retorico, il cliché del «pellerossa» è sistematicamente confrontato a un'umanità preistorica ancora tutta da scoprire. Così facendo, i *préhistoriens* rappresentano il livello più basso sulla scala dell'umanità, la soglia che l'animale deve attraversare per non restare nel limbo del non-umano, che è poi quella dimensione morale (e, parallelamente, giuridica) dell'esistenza che giustifica ogni vessazione. La sovrapposizione di una figura letteraria e una d'immaginazione costituisce di fatto una sorta di schermo vuoto sul quale può venir proiettato, assumendo il valore di un fatto ben documentato, l'immaginario colonialista più crudo.

Alla fine del XIX secolo, anche grazie all'opera dei divulgatori ai quali abbiamo fatto riferimento, la preistoria affascina il grande pubblico e numerosi artisti e scrittori colgono l'occasione per dedicare a questo soggetto alla moda le loro opere. A caratterizzare le loro descrizioni dell'umanità primitiva, che spesso rivendicano come fondate su studi scientifici, appaiono tuttavia degli elementi che nessuno scavo archeologico poteva portare alla luce: ancora una volta si tratta della piuma sulla testa, dei coprisesso di pelle, del bastone, dell'ascia di pietra, di collane e orecchini di artigli

e conchiglie. D'altra parte, quale migliore modello del «pellerossa», questo essere primitivo malinconicamente destinato a sparire, per immaginare i popoli preistorici, le loro lotte, speranze e amori, che non hanno lasciato quasi nessuna traccia?

Vamireh (inizialmente pubblicato in una rivista nel 1891, versione ampliata di una novella del 1888) di J.-H. Rosny (pseudonimo dei fratelli Joseph Henri Honoré e Séraphin Justin François Boex) viene considerato il primo romanzo a soggetto preistorico. Uno dei gruppi di ominidi protagonisti del racconto è quello dei «mangeurs de vers», una «razza» che ha abbandonato la caccia per dedicarsi alla consumazione di molluschi e radici, il che ne ha causato l'indebolimento e di conseguenza la sottomissione ad altre razze più forti, e che quindi sopravvive in una esistenza miserabile e triste, destinata all'estinzione. Per esplicitare il loro ruolo nell'economia del romanzo, questi esseri vengono descritti come confusi e vinti come il «Rosso davanti l'Ariano» (Rosny [1892]: 187) al momento della conquista dell'America. Meno conosciuto, ma forse più interessante per noi, è il romanzo preistorico di Léonie Levallois, *Grandeur et misère de l'humanité primitive* (1889), che precede di qualche anno *Vamireh* e si situa tra la fiction e la scienza. L'umanità primitiva descritta da Levallois corrisponde ai racconti stereotipati della vita degli autoctoni nordamericani presenti nella letteratura di viaggio del XVIII secolo e nei romanzi sugli «indiani» dell'inizio del XIX secolo sia per quanto riguarda le caratteristiche fisiche che per le armi, le tecniche di caccia, gli ornamenti, i copricapi piumati e persino i nomi *à la* Chateaubriand (Aigle-Chauve, Frère-de-l'Ours, ecc.). Tuttavia, l'autrice sostiene che le sue descrizioni dell'umanità preistorica sono basate su ricerche scientifiche (alle quali aveva un facile accesso in quanto moglie di Stanislas Meunier che, con suo padre Victor, era tra i più noti giornalisti scientifici dell'epoca). La peculiarità dell'opera di Levallois è appunto quella di presentare, nella seconda parte del suo volume, le fonti scientifiche del suo racconto di fantasia. Scorrendola, risulta evidente che anche i testi di preistorici, antropologi, biologi, zoologi, ecc., propongono lo stesso confronto

tra l'umanità preistorica e i «pellerossa», la stessa immagine stereotipata e miserabile, «un flagello per la civiltà circostante» che occorrerà «distruggere completamente», come scrive Alfred Edmund Brehm in uno dei testi riprodotti da Levallois alla fine del volume (Brehm [1869], citato in Meunier [1889]: 300).

Ma è nei dipinti di Paul Jamin che la sovrapposizione *malinconica* tra il «pellerossa» e il preistorico si manifesta nella sua forma più evidente e iconica. Intorno agli anni 1880, Jamin, affermato pittore di soggetti storici, si consacra anche a rappresentazioni preistoriche. L'uomo preistorico di Jamin è straordinariamente somigliante al «selvaggio» americano delle incisioni di Lafitau (1724) e degli acquerelli di White (1585, in Hulton, Beers Quinn [1964]): piume sulla testa, collana di artigli, coprisesso di pelle e ascia di pietra in mano (Jamin [1886]). Si trova quasi sempre in situazioni di pericolo o violente, minacciato dalle fiere e da altri uomini: la sua esistenza spaventosa non può che rassicurarci sulla nostra fortuna a essere parte della civiltà, del progresso, insomma di essere dalla parte giusta della storia.

5. IL «PELLEROSSA» DAL NEUROLOGO

Tra le fonti principali di antropologi e *préhistoriens*, oltre che la letteratura di viaggio del XVIII secolo, troviamo anche i rapporti di potenti e oggi quasi dimenticati agenti della colonizzazione, ai quali veniva attribuito il titolo di *esperti* dalle comunità scientifiche. Un caso inedito o quasi (cf. Trucchio [2020]) è quello di Louis Laurent Simonin, un ingegnere che si dedica a visitare le miniere di tutto il mondo e a descriverne il funzionamento e la storia. Fervente sostenitore della colonizzazione come evento inevitabile e persino caritatevole, i resoconti di Simonin del 1862 sulle ricchezze del Madagascar (e sulla facilità di colonizzarlo) costituiranno una spinta ideologica e politica fondamentale per questa impresa, quando sarà realizzata, venticinque anni dopo.

Simonin è membro della Société d'anthropologie de Paris e, al ritorno dal suo viaggio in

Nordamerica del 1867-68, è invitato a tenere una conferenza (Simonin [1869]). Le sue esperienze sul campo e la sua formazione scientifica non gli impediscono tuttavia di presentare i romanzi di Chateaubriand e di Cooper come una fonte primaria sui costumi tradizionali di Huron, Natchez, e dei membri della Confederazione delle sei nazioni (Simonin [1875]: 398-399).

Nei suoi resoconti, Simonin si attiene a date, luoghi e nomi precisi, indicando con dovizia di particolari la sua partecipazione a eventi storici noti (ad esempio incontri diplomatici tra autoctoni e colonizzatori), e i suoi dialoghi con vari personaggi, descrivendo le caratteristiche peculiari di ognuna delle Prime nazioni. Tuttavia, gli individui effettivamente incontrati sono per lui definitivamente europeizzati e non più *autentici*, e ciò lo spinge a presentare la sua opinione generale, valida per tutti i popoli del Nordamerica ancora allo stato «selvaggio», come *più scientifica* di quelle riguardanti gli individui e gruppi effettivamente conosciuti di persona. In questa congettura, Simonin presenta una figura del «pellerossa» completamente corrispondente all'immagine oggetto di questo studio. Non solo egli ripete acriticamente e senza offrire prova alcuna le antiche accuse di praticare sacrifici umani, ma insiste anche su una serie di stereotipi che vengono riattivati e rafforzati dal nuovo contesto scientifico. La folle ferocia che viene attribuita al «pellerossa», ad esempio, nonché la pigrizia assoluta che lo porta ad accontentarsi di caccia e raccolta, sono ancora quelle dell'*homme sauvage*, ma stavolta divengono un dato scientifico.

Ancora più interessante è sottolineare un altro aspetto dei resoconti di Simonin (che Figuier e altri accolgono integralmente). La capacità di esprimersi nell'arte è una delle caratteristiche che, per i primi *préhistoriens* francesi, distinguono l'uomo dall'animale e quindi i primi veri uomini dai loro antenati ancora non-umani. Affermare, come fa Simonin, che l'«Indiano è meno avanzato del negro africano, che sa almeno tessere e tingere i tessuti» (Simonin [1868]: 57) significa, in questo contesto scientifico, revocare l'umanità delle popolazioni autoctone d'America, ponendole al di

sotto di quella soglia che per dei naturalisti come Tyson, Linneo e Buffon era stata appunto rappresentata dalle popolazioni dell'Africa subsahariana (Dorlin [2007], Sebastiani [2013]). Il linguaggio rudimentale che viene attribuito ai «pellerossa» è ancora quello che i greci attribuivano ai loro vicini *barbari* ma, alla luce della neurologia localizzazionista di Paul Broca (presente alla conferenza di Simonin), esso diviene un fatto *osservabile* e persino *quantificabile*, perché legato al mancato sviluppo di ben precise aree del cervello (Blanckaert [2009]).

La figura del «pellerossa» permette persino di trovare un punto d'incontro tra le concezioni *materialista* e *spiritualista*, che oppongono a quest'epoca due fazioni, i cui più noti rappresentanti sono Gabriel de Mortillet e Émile Cartailhac da una parte, e Armand de Quatrefages e il marchese di Nadaillac dall'altra. Pur nella grande varietà di ipotesi e congetture che si situano tra le due opposte concezioni dell'origine dell'umano, delle quali non è possibile rendere conto in questa sede, la figura del «pellerossa» è chiamata a indicare la frontiera col *non-umano* in entrambe le correnti di pensiero. In breve, tutti concordano sull'inferiorità del «pellerossa», ma se i materialisti considerano ch'egli è rimasto sulla soglia tra l'umano e il l'animale, forse perché costituzionalmente incapace di progredire come hanno fatto gli europei, o forse perché distinto da essi già all'origine (ipotesi poligenista), per gli spiritualisti è inconcepibile che Dio abbia creato un essere così abbietto e quindi l'unica spiegazione possibile è quella della *degenerazione*, cioè della graduale perdita dell'umanità che pure doveva caratterizzare i loro antenati al momento della Creazione.

Non è quindi difficile comprendere come la certezza scientifica intorno all'inferiorità assoluta del «pellerossa» non solo giustifichi le imprese coloniali del passato o in corso, ma partecipi al discorso ideologico coloniale in generale. Del resto, la figura del «pellerossa» risulta emblematica anche della nascita del darwinismo sociale. Clémence Royer, la prima donna ammessa alla Société d'anthropologie de Paris, è l'autrice della prima traduzione francese di *On the Origin of*

Species di Darwin, edita quattro volte a partire dal 1862 e diffusa rapidamente anche in Italia, Spagna e Russia. La sua introduzione all'opera di Darwin è la prima lettura del naturalista inglese nel senso del darwinismo sociale (Blanckaert [1991]). E difatti persino la sua traduzione non è fedele: Royer modifica il testo di Darwin per supportare la sua interpretazione. Anche se gli effetti specifici dell'impatto della sua traduzione/interpretazione delle tesi di Darwin non sono stati ancora studiati, è innegabile ch'esso fu vasto e duraturo nel tempo. Nei suoi testi, i «pellerossa» sono un esempio utilizzato per illustrare un popolo pericoloso e inferiore, utile per comprendere i costumi degli uomini preistorici e destinato a un'inevitabile estinzione. L'uso di questo stereotipo è tra l'altro l'occasione per Royer d'illustrare le conseguenze negative della protezione della società nei confronti dei «deboli» (malati, criminali, ecc.), nonché ovviamente di qualsiasi forma di rispetto ai nativi delle colonie in generale (Darwin [1862], Royer [1870]).

La figura del «pellerossa» in quanto destinato all'estinzione viene chiamata in causa persino nella retorica dell'evoluzione e della selezione naturale delle lingue, inaugurata da August Schleicher, che si diffonde rapidamente presso gli antropologi trasformisti francesi e porta a una notevole ascesa della dialettologia, legata all'epoca al dibattito sull'identità nazionale. Il binomio popolo/lingua diviene allora inseparabile, così come la classificazione delle lingue inferiori e superiori, viventi o destinate all'estinzione. Il confronto di André Lefevre tra baschi e algonchini (Lefevre [1893]), ha uno scopo euristico, ma ha anche un'implicita ricaduta morale. In effetti, le due lingue sono comparate a causa della povertà del loro lessico (come già in Hovelacque, Vinson [1878]), il che testimonia della loro inferiorità, così come dell'inevitabilità della loro estinzione a favore delle lingue superiori (quella dei colonizzatori all'estero e il francese in patria).

Le idee di evoluzione, di progresso e di civilizzazione forniscono, al discorso scientifico generale sull'umano, dei criteri assoluti per una valutazione morale dell'umano e per la sua gradazione. In fondo a questa scala, non possono che esserci degli «hommes fossiles» (in ritardo nell'evoluzione) e quindi dalle capacità cerebrali ridotte (come attestato dalla neurologia), che sono allo stesso tempo degli ostacoli al progresso e dei nemici della civilizzazione. Nelle scienze dell'umano francesi al momento della loro costituzione, la figura del «pellerossa» è chiamata a rappresentare questo limite verso il basso.

6. EPILOGO

All'inizio del XX secolo, la specializzazione e la separazione crescenti delle scienze che si occupano dell'essere umano rendono sempre più difficile operare quelle generalizzazioni unanimemente accettate solo un decennio prima. Gli etnologi cominciano ad accogliere delle idee come quelle di James George Frazer sulla complessità e originalità delle civiltà «primitive» che porteranno al relativismo culturale (Frazer [1890]). Parallelamente, si diffondono gli studi statistici di Franz Boas che mirano a distogliere l'antropologia fisica dai suoi obiettivi tassonomici e a proporre un pensiero della relazione basato sulla variazione e su fenomeni di correlazione (Boas [1896 e 1911]). Ben prima, tuttavia, già alla fine del XIX secolo, in Francia il paradigma trasformista era entrato in crisi e una nuova generazione di preistorici e antropologi aveva cominciato ad ammettere la complessità delle civiltà «primitive».

Il riconoscimento dell'esistenza di riti religiosi e di forme d'arte che trascendono la creazione d'oggetti di uso quotidiano s'impongono così progressivamente anche tra i paleoantropologi. Nel 1902, ad esempio, Émile Cartailhac pronuncia il suo *Mea culpa d'un sceptique* e, dopo averla confutata a lungo, accetta l'antichità e l'autenticità delle pitture rupestri di Altamira, e quindi la capacità dell'uomo di Cro-Magnon di fare dell'arte (Cartailhac [1902]). Anche il cliché del «selvaggio americano», dunque, scompare gradualmente dai sistemi comparativi scientifici per far posto ai paradigmi più complessi dell'antropologia culturale. Nuove maniere di distinguere un'umanità inferiore da una superiore si fanno certo strada. Ma

la nostra figura seminuda agghindata di piume, conchiglie e artigli, sembra essere ormai relegata ai film e ai fumetti, pur senza mai essere stata oggetto di alcuna revisione dal punto di vista epistemologico ed etico.

La scienza non ha però abbandonato la questione della soglia tra umano e animale. Negli anni '60 del XX secolo, si fa strada l'ipotesi che più specie d'ominidi siano vissute nelle stesse epoche remote e che l'ultima di queste ad aver incontrato i nostri antenati *Sapiens* sia stata quella dei Neanderthal, che vengono rappresentati, riprendendo l'*homo sylvestris* di Linneo e Tyson, come esseri scimmieschi armati di un bastone, come nelle celebri illustrazioni di Zdeněk Burian che, tra gli anni '60 e gli anni '80, hanno arricchito i libri di scuola di mezzo mondo. Il Neanderthal, anche se forse non-più-animale, è indubitabilmente non-ancora-umano.

Tra la fine degli anni 2000 e l'inizio del decennio successivo, tuttavia, alcuni archeologi rinvengono nei rifugi dei Neanderthal dei pigmenti, delle piume e degli artigli (Soressi, d'Errico [2007]). Ovviamente questi oggetti potevano avere una origine o utilizzazione ben diverse da quelle ipotizzate da questi ricercatori (Devièse [2021]), ma tali indizi li hanno portati a credere che questi ominidi fossero in grado di concepire degli ornamenti con un valore simbolico, e quindi capaci di un pensiero astratto. Di conseguenza, le rappresentazioni del Neanderthal come quelle di Burian sono state rimpiazzate da figure più *umane*.

Recentemente, questa prossimità del Neanderthal al *Sapiens* è stata sancita, anche nella cultura popolare, grazie all'esposizione *Néandertal, l'expo*, inaugurata nel marzo 2018 al Musée de l'Homme di Parigi e in seguito portata in vari musei del mondo. Uno degli artefatti più rappresentativi di questa esposizione è la ricostruzione del busto di un Neanderthal realizzata dal paleoartista e tecnico paleontologo Fabio Fogliazza tra il 2011 e il 2012 (oggi parte della collezione permanente del Museo de la Evolución Humana di Burgos). La scultura si basa su di un cranio scoperto in Dordogna, nonché sui ritrovamenti di siti archeologici italiani e irakeni. In questa scultura, significativa-

mente intitolata *Neandertal emplumado*, l'ominide è appunto adornato con delle piume nelle orecchie bucate e sulla cresta di capelli che sormonta il cranio rasato, nonché con una collana di artigli: ancora una volta gli stessi attributi dell'«indiano» di John White e dell'uomo preistorico di Paul Jamin. L'opera di Fogliazza è la più nota, ma non l'unica rappresentazione del Neanderthal ad avere queste caratteristiche (cfr. per esempio Young [2019]).

Parafrasando una delle definizioni che Starobinski aveva dato della malinconia, possiamo quindi affermare che il «pellerossa» non è altro che «una metafora che s'ignora, e che pretende di imporsi come un fatto sperimentale» (Starobinski [1970]: 70). La figura del «pellerossa», intesa come insieme degli attributi che la caratterizzano, è riemersa nel discorso scientifico contemporaneo a indicare ancora una volta una soglia morale ed epistemologica. Di nuovo, il discorso scientifico ha avuto bisogno, per (ri)definire l'umano, di fabbricare un essere liminare, una figura d'alterità, facendo ricorso a metafore, simboli e immagini legati alle tradizioni popolari, all'arte e alla letteratura, e ormai anche, indissolubilmente, all'ideologia colonialista.

Per di più, anche il Neanderthal, in fin dei conti, costituisce un soggetto malinconico. Per quanto umanizzato rispetto al passato, egli resta la rappresentazione di un'umanità appena abbozzata, che ha lasciato poco o nulla dietro di sé, forse assimilata o forse sterminata da degli esseri superiori, proprio come la «race rouge» di Royer e Simonin. Ricoprirlo d'attributi umani, immaginarlo coabitare con gli eleganti *Sapiens* vivendo la fine inevitabile della sua specie, non fa che renderlo una figura ancora più goffa, balbettante e mesta. Il Neanderthal, l'umanità preistorica, il folle, il «selvaggio» del Nuovo Mondo, rappresentano un Altro prossimo e assieme infinitamente distante, *unheimlich* in senso freudiano. Coprire il loro volto con una maschera nota e quindi rassicurante permette di distogliere lo sguardo dalla loro radicale differenza e di creare, per contrasto, l'illusione di un'identità stabile e ben distinta dalla loro, di alimentare l'inganno del *normale*.

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Immagine, con(testo) e performatività tecnologica. Joan Jonas, Krzysztof Wodiczko e Antoni Muntadas

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Abstract. The main theme exposed in this article is articulated on the centrality that the new media have assumed in the academic research of contemporary art theory. The case studies analyzed derive from a direct knowledge of the experiments conducted at the Comparative Media Studies, the Media Lab and the Program in Art, Culture, and Technology (ACT) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), one of the state-of-the-art institutions on contemporary debate that sees new media and artistic creativity relating in a single field of research. Some of the visual artists examined here were members of the MIT community, contributing not only to the prestige of the institution, but also to a paradigm shift in the method by which a work of art is created, designed and perceived. Joan Jonas, New York artist and lecturer emeritus at ACT, has conducted avant-garde visual experiments aimed at combining the relationship between language and image, always using new performatic and digital aesthetics with which to narrate her personal visions. The artists Krzysztof Wodiczko and Antoni Muntadas, for over forty years at ACT have dedicated part of their research to the analysis of the interrelation between technology, artistic languages and social communication. Their artistic production stems from the use of new technologies that make it possible to overlap between literary and visual codes, thus proposing an alternative to the long tradition that separates the arts relegating them to autonomous practices.

Keywords: Performativity, Contamination, New media, Image/text.

INTRODUZIONE

Nel libro *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, W.J.T. Mitchell e Mark B.H. Hansen introducono la questione dei *new* media con la nota frase formulata dallo scienziato tedesco Frieddrich Kittler: «*media determine our situation*» (Mitchell, Hansen [2010]: VII)[1]. Seguendo in linea generale l'idea che i media costituiscano la base infrastrutturale e la condizione quasi-trascendentale per l'esperienza, Kittler

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[1] Gli autori si riferiscono al noto libro di Friedrich Kittler *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986).

aveva considerato i media come un tema centrale per la comprensione della nostra contemporaneità (ibidem). A loro volta, Mitchell e Hansen hanno sostenuto che i media non possono più essere considerati subordinati o semplicemente complementari alle informazioni che esse comunicano, piuttosto rappresentano un topico centrale della ricerca su temi sociali e culturali. Questo ricorso concettuale costituisce l'intuizione che motiva lo studio dei media non solo nel campo della comunicazione e delle politiche dell'informazione, ma in vari ambiti disciplinari e interdisciplinari della cultura, quali il materialismo antropologico, gli studi comparativi, le scienze sociali, la teoria dell'arte contemporanea, l'estetica e i *cultural visual studies*. Per tale motivo, l'influenza delle tecnologie sulla società, sulla formazione delle identità e sulla riconfigurazione della creatività è un tema centrale di ricerca accademica condotta in diversi dipartimenti universitari di tutto il mondo, tra cui il *Comparative Media Studies* del Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) e il *Literature, Communication, and Culture* del Georgia Tech.

Gli intrecci e le contaminazioni tra le arti, la scienza e la letteratura, hanno motivato Mitchell e Hansen a individuare alcuni "termini critici" con cui designare concettualmente importanti intuizioni nate dalle sperimentazioni creative attuali. Tali contaminazioni, oltre a fomentare un'alleanza alternativa tra le arti, hanno cambiato la maniera convenzionale di intendere e contemplare la creazione artistica. Mitchell e Hansen nel libro sopra citato, hanno individuato all'interno di tre principali agende disciplinari – *aesthetics*, *technology*, *society* – alcuni termini critici che, se ben introdotti all'interno di un discorso teorico-estetico, orientano la riflessione teorica sulla condizione dell'arte contemporanea e sull'inevitabile rottura che alcune forme artistiche hanno stabilito tra il passato e il presente, tra l'autonomia del linguaggio dell'arte visiva e l'intermedialità dei linguaggi artistici contemporanei. Sotto l'agenda *aesthetics* si annoverano, per esempio, parole quali "arte", "corpo", "immagine", "materialità", "tempo e spazio"; in *technology* si enumera "comunicazione", "cibernetica", "new media", "tecnologia"; e infine in *society*

si includono "scambio", "linguaggio", "mass media" e "scrittura" (cfr. Mitchell, Hansen [2010]: VXIII). Da questo schema generico di termini possiamo stabilire non soltanto i temi della ricerca condotta dai *media studies*, ma anche quelli centrali nell'ambito dell'estetica e la teoria dell'arte contemporanea, sempre più legati al contesto tecnologico e sociale che le alimentano concettualmente ed empiricamente. Inoltre, com'è facile da intuire, il linguaggio dell'arte si è arricchito grazie alla lettura incrociata di questi termini (per esempio il corpo, la materialità, i *new media*, la scrittura, l'immagine), rendendo necessarie nuove metodologie e nuovi approcci interpretativi, per comprenderne appieno la carica osmotica che le arti hanno assunto negli ultimi decenni. I new media, tra l'altro, hanno arricchito anche le prassi discorsive intorno alla figura nascente del "pubblico/lettore" delle opere d'arte, sempre più legate alla scrittura e alla performatività delle immagini offerta dai mezzi tecnologici. Il pubblico, oltre ad essere in grado di interagire con l'opera e trasformarla, è anche in condizione di leggerla grazie alla sovrapposizione del testo e dell'immagine in un unico *medium*, per cui la relazione tra artista, opera d'arte e pubblico/lettore diviene performativa, spontanea e spesso casuale.

La relazione che l'arte tesse con i *new media* (video, digitalizzazione, realtà aumentata, laser, etc.), soprattutto con i «media dell'era elettronica» (Popper [1993]) ha moltiplicato in modo esponenziale le pratiche artistiche, obbligandoci a parlare di una nuova materialità dell'opera. Nello stesso tempo ci ha indotto a riflettere sul rapporto che si stabilisce tra artisti e scienziati, e soprattutto sul comportamento che il pubblico assume dinanzi a un'opera d'arte sempre più legata a supporti digitali e sull'interattività[2]. Il pubblico dell'era elettronica, secondo Popper, è un utilizzatore dei sistemi

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[2] Nel 2005, in occasione del 93esimo congresso realizzato dal College Art Association di Atlanta (CAA) si sono discussi i topici della relazione tra arte, scienza e tecnologia. Una selezione dei papers presentati durante il Convegno, intitolato *Hybridity: Arts, Sciences and Cultural Effects,* sono stati pubblicati sulla rivista *Leonardo*, Vol. 39, No 2, 2006.

intelligenti, per cui non si limita a contemplare l'opera d'arte quanto piuttosto è propenso all'intervento diretto e alla partecipazione attiva. Il pubblico, quindi non più lo spettatore, è in grado di attivare l'opera con un atto performativo, iniziarla e terminarla con un gesto, condurla e gestirla secondo decisioni volontarie. Con il termine «interazione – afferma Popper – diamo quindi un ruolo fondamentale allo spettatore, poiché grazie alle nuove tecnologie l'artista è in condizione di poter creare situazioni in cui l'opera d'arte reagisce (o risponde) alle azioni (o domande) dell'utilizzatore» (Popper [1993]: 8).

Non sorprende quindi che Mitchell, uno dei massimi esponenti sul dibattito delle pratiche culturali visuali e interartistiche, abbia citato proprio il MIT come modello di istituzione all'avanguardia sulle ricerche artistiche che s'interconnettono alle scienze e ai *new* media. Artisti come Joan Jonas, Krzysztof Wodiczko e Antoni Muntadas interessandosi all'articolazione tra parola, immagine e uso delle tecnologie digitali nella creazione di nuove forme artistiche intermediali, offrono strumenti concettuali con cui differenziare le forme artistiche che si avvalgono dei new media ma, allo stesso tempo, ci inducono a rivelarne gli elementi comuni, quali il rifiuto della forma necessariamente oggettuale, la processualità del "fare" artistico, la casualità dell'azione e il tempo necessario affinché artista e pubblico intervengano nell'opera.

Jonas nel campo della performance e della video arte, Wodiczko e Muntadas nel campo dell'arte pubblica, nella videoinstallazione e nell'arte digitale e Borsuk nella produzione della letteratura visuale elettronica, aprono possibili canali d'interpretazione dell'evento creativo intermediale e la possibilità di stabilire nuove relazioni tra parola e immagine.

1. IMMAGINE E PAROLA. IL FENOMENO ECFRASTICO NELL'ARTE PERFORMATIVA

Le contemporanee forme dell'arte spesso accompagnano nuove categorie concettuali che tendono ad essere classificate in base al loro sup-

porto tecnologico, come nel caso della video arte, dell'arte digitale e della net art. Negli ultimi tre decenni del XX secolo, il progresso tecnologico ha condotto il linguaggio mediale a nuove espressioni e fomentato la crescita smisurata di nuovi lessici che, modificandone il messaggio, tendono a contaminare il modo convenzionale di percepire le opere d'arte. A loro volta, le opere d'arte si sono articolate in linguaggi, mezzi ed espressioni che le hanno conferito un'identità poliedrica e complessa, rendendo spesso anche ambiguo il compito degli storici dell'arte di distinguere un oggetto artistico da altri inerenti la produzione digitale di immagini fuori dalla sfera artistica. Sebbene il fenomeno dei new media sia di recente acquisizione storica, si rischia comunque di inciampare in obsolete classificazioni artistiche: una nuova forma artistica potrebbe essere infatti già superata da una tendenza tecnologica ancor più recente. I new media degli anni ottanta segnavano l'apparizione della video arte e dei suoi derivati ibridi (come nel caso della videoinstallazione e la videoscultura); il multimedia e l'ipermedia sono stati termini applicati alle forme d'arte digitale e alla computer art tra gli anni ottanta e novanta, mentre intermedia è stato spesso usato per descrivere le interrelazioni tra diverse forme artistiche mediali quali il video e le tecnologie digitali, soprattutto la televisione e Internet (Paul [2002]). Oggi si preferisce parlare di forme d'arte elettronica (*electronic art* e *electronic literature*) per riferirsi ai lavori artistici che si avvalgono dei supporti digitali, dello spazio virtuale e della realtà aumentata. In riferimento ai *new* media applicati all'arte visiva, la teorica Johanna Drucker della University of California di Los Angeles (UCLA) ha affermato che la produzione artistica non può più essere identificata in base al media o servire a uno scopo specifico o essere circoscritto a una specifica credenza:

The definition of art in an era of mass media depends on our ability to distinguish works of art from other objects or imagines in the spheres of media and mass visual production. Art serves no single purpose, cannot be circumscribed by agendas or beliefs. But it provides a continuing space for renewing human imagi-

nation and giving expression, in any form, ephemeral or material, to that imaginative capability. Finally, the practice of art become independent of objects or things, even of ideas or practices. Art becomes a way of paying attention. (Drucker [2010]: 17-18)

In un momento storico in cui le opere d'arte hanno perduto il loro statuto trascendentale, modificando la loro morfologia a causa dei mezzi tecnologici adoperati per la loro rappresentazione formale, i teorici si sono soffermati a riflettere sui nuovi circuiti intermediali che ne producono senso e significato. Da qui nascono le elaborazioni teoriche sulle «metaimmagini» (Mitchell [1994]), sugli «iconotesti» (Wagner [1996]) e sulle «opere complesse» (Català [2005]) che, pur nelle loro accezioni singolari, ricorrono a differenti mezzi di comunicazione, presentandosi come forme composte e ibride. La produzione di oggetti interartistici e intermediali (films, documentari artistici, poster, fumetti, riviste, libri d'artista, etc.) ha demolito le gerarchie convenzionali e i canoni della Storia dell'arte, mettendo in crisi la figura dell'artista/autore e obbligando l'oggetto artistico a essere ridefinito.

L'importanza di tale fenomeno, che sempre più consolida la relazione tra letteratura e arte visuale, si mostra nella terminologia usata tanto da linguisti che da teorici dell'arte visiva. Parole come "lettura" e "testo" si applicano ai segni visivi per riferirsi alla "visione" e all'"opera". Il teorico spagnolo Josep M. Català, analizzando fenomenologicamente le immagini prodotte nella nostra contemporaneità, rivelava che l'era delle specializzazioni è terminata mentre i registri metodologici tendono a fondersi «dunque – afferma Català – è del tutto improduttivo pretendere che esista un regime della testualità e un altro della visualità separatamente, quando l'evidenza empirica mostra il contrario» (Català [2005]: 454). Secondo Català, il legame tra entrambi i media, lungi dal seguire il cammino tradizionale dell'*ut pictura poësis,* si è complicato in tal misura che i due codici percettivi coincidono nella stessa configurazione. Qualsiasi accentuazione di complessità di una struttura visiva comporta quindi un aumento proporzionale di narra-

tive euristiche, ermeneutiche, cognitive ed epistemologiche della stessa, per cui non può più interessare una metodologia atta alla separazione dei registri di produzione, ma bisogna trovare il modo di integrare diverse letture della singola opera per renderla maggiormente comprensibile (cfr. Català [2005]: 455).

Alcune forme d'arte tra cui l'happening e la performance, la video arte e la computer art, l'arte digitale e il net art e infine alcune rappresentazioni della più recente letteratura elettronica, hanno reso i confini disciplinari ancora più osmotici. La comparazione interartistica (Hagstrum [1958]; Heffernan [1993]; Hollander [1995]; Sonneson [1989]) ha cercato di dimostrare le analogie formali tra le arti e rivelare le omologie strutturali rappresentative dentro il campo del visibile e del leggibile. La stessa pratica dell'*ekphrasis* si è recentemente convertita in una forza performativa che colloca il pubblico/lettore in uno spazio sinestesico nel quale testo e icona, retorica e visualità divengono indistinguibili (cfr. Fimiani [2004]: 47).

2. JOAN JONAS E LA ROTTURA DEL CODICE LESSINGHIANO NELLA VIDEOPERFORMANCE

L'atto performativo che fluisce dall'uso delle nuove tecnologie rende possibile la sovrapposizione della parola e dell'immagine rompendo il tradizionale concetto che da Lessing ai giorni nostri ha separato le arti relegandole in pratiche autonome. Le pratiche dell'happening (Gutaï, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, George Brecht, Wolf Vostell) e della performance (soprattutto le azioni Fluxus) hanno creato le prassi discorsive per un'estensione dei codici artistici contemporanei: continuità della visione, processualità dell'azione, protagonismo tanto dell'artista quanto del pubblico, uso della parola o addirittura d'interi brani letterari.

Il lavoro di alcuni artisti nordamericani tra gli anni '60 e '70 ha enfatizzato la presenza del tempo e il ruolo dello spettatore nella produzione di performance artistiche in cui la visione si combinava con la parola, il suono e il disegno. La performance ha generato una tensione tra la tradizione dell'arte

visiva, che l'annovera nel campo spaziale, e la poesia come forma d'arte temporale, in quanto si basa sull'azione che si sviluppa nel tempo e crea un'immagine viva che non lascia nessuna traccia della sua esistenza. Con l'apparizione del video e del computer, l'interrelazione tra l'artista e il pubblico e tra il pubblico e la performance ha arricchito la relazione tra arte e tecnologia, aprendo nuove vie di sperimentazioni come la videoperformance[3].

Nella performance *Delay Delay*, realizzata dall'artista americana Joan Jonas nel 1972, con un cast di attori non professionisti che includeva Gordon Matta-Clark (cfr. Mignot [1994]: 9), l'obiettivo principale è stato quello di creare un linguaggio teatrale enigmatico in cui gesti, suoni e pittura coabitavano in un determinato spazio urbano, durante un unico tempo di rappresentazione. Il pubblico collocato sul tetto di un edificio percepiva le forme a una distanza alternativa da quella convenzionale, fornendogli una visione bidimensionale dell'immagine. La prospettiva dall'alto verso il basso creava dunque un effetto schiacciato che disegnava figure "vive", corpi in movimento ed elementi geometrici.

L'interesse per la componente temporale e per l'immagine in movimento ha condotto Jonas ad appropriarsi delle nuove tecnologie, estendendo il tempo storico della perfomance. Il suo lavoro si caratterizza, infatti, per l'uso del video e del computer che le permettono di perpetuare il momento della percezione performativa. La teorica Tracey Warr afferma che la performance di Jonas è caratterizzata da mezzi misti, quali il testo, il disegno, la musica, le arti sceniche e il costume utilizzati dall'artista in base agli strumenti tecnologici adoperati per la loro realizzazione:

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[3] *Mapping the Intermediality in Performance* esplora la performance in relazione ai new media dalla prospettiva della teoria e delle pratiche dell'arte. Gli argomenti proposti spaziano dalla performatività al linguaggio corporale, il tempo e lo spazio, la cultura digitale e il post-umanismo, il networking e la prassi pedagogica. Questo volume disegna le complesse trame discorsive che si stabiliscono tra il corpo fisico dello spettatore e i media digitali quali immagine, suono, video e parole trovare sul web (Bay-Cheng, Kattanbelt, Lavender, Nelson [2010]).

Another striking feature of Jonas' work is her use of mixed media. It is impossible to apply any straightforward categorization to her work. Her performances employ time, rhythm, pace, text, costume, video, sound, drawing. Their concern with space and volume is sculptural and their use of composition and color is painterly. (Warr [2004]: 20)

Le sue performance interagiscono con immagini proiettate in diverse superfici, urbane o teatrali, e con suoni a loro volta programmati o improvvisati da musicisti presenti sulla scena. Jonas mescola alla performance dal vivo la mediazione tecnologica, per cui schermi e monitor sono proposte quali alternative scultoriche e parte integrante dell'azione e del set. Quando la performance si avvale delle nuove tecnologie, si evince il tentativo esplicito di voler rompere le tradizionali tendenze della rappresentazione visuale e narrativa. Jonas ha convertito le tecniche applicate all'arte visiva in strumenti di un'opera complessa che si muove in un territorio ibrido, come nel caso di *Mirror Pieces*, una serie di performance ispirate al tema del labirinto presente in molti testi di José Luis Borges. In esse gli specchi, i riflessi e le trasparenze creano una struttura labirintica che mette in scena la metafora della ripetizione. La presenza di una videocamera, che secondo Borges rappresentava una variazione simbolica dello specchio, durante le attuazioni performative prolunga il processo ripetitivo, trasformando la finzione dentro la finzione in un gioco ironico tra realtà, verità e sogno. La letteratura, così come gli elementi segnici della parola scritta e verbale, è presente in molte delle sue performance. In *The Juniper Tree* (1976) si crea un immaginario in cui coabitano la finzione e la realtà per mezzo della rilettura di una fiaba che ricorda i fratelli Grimm (cfr. Jonas [2003]: 127), mentre *Lines in the Sand* (2002) è una performance realizzata sul poema epico di Elena in Egitto scritto da Hilda Doolittle. Legata alla documentazione storica è invece la videoperformance *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* (2004-2006) in cui Jonas interpreta l'immaginario Hopi descritto da Aby Warburg nel saggio scritto durante il suo viaggio nel sud-ovest degli Stati Uniti.

Attraverso dispositivi differenti, come l'uso dello specchio, la telecamera e il monitor, Jonas è in grado di oggettivare la distanza che separa la finzione dalla realtà. Tale distanza si ridimensiona notevolmente nel linguaggio teatrale adoperato da Jonas, un'altra costante fonte d'ispirazione del suo lavoro, un elemento attivo, concettuale e funzionale della sua performance. Il teatro, con i suoi accessori, concede una dimensione concreta alle sue performance, tanto da plasmarsi in elementi scultorei funzionali e simbolici con cui fissare le parole e le immagini in movimento. Nella serie *My New Theater*, il teatro si ridimensiona fino a raggiungere le dimensioni di una cassa con un piano d'appoggio che permette di collocare piccoli oggetti scenici e uno schermo che proietta in *loop* la documentazione delle performance originali. Il "teatro in scatola" (cfr. Natalicchio [2007]: 73) rappresenta la volontà artistica di trasporre un media in un altro, un linguaggio artistico in linguaggio verbale, e meditare su forme interartistiche e intermediali in cui linguaggi e media operano attraverso la parola, la scrittura, il suono e la codificazione visiva.

I Want to Live in the Country (And Other Romance) è una videoperformance ispirata alla letteratura classica. *The Wind Sleepers* (1916) è uno dei poemi della scrittrice nordamericana H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, nota paziente di Sigmund Freud) inserito nel libro *Sea Garden* del 1916. Si tratta di un'installazione video che riproduce la perfomance originale, in cui una voce di fondo recita i versi del poema di H.D.:

> *WHITER*
> *than the crust*
> *Leith by the tide,*
> *we are stung by the hurled sand*
> *and the broken shells.*
>
> *We no Langer sleep*
> *in the wind –*
> *we awoke and fled*
> *through the city gate[4].*

Secondo la teorica Susan Morgan, questi versi riescono a creare una presenza fisica, una chiara «pittura negli occhi della mente» (Morgan [2006]: 75). Potremmo quindi parlare di un'immagine dentro l'immagine, che inverte il senso ecfrastico dell'opera: la recitazione del poema crea un'immagine nella mente del pubblico, mentre il video descrive un'attuazione poetica per mezzo di un'immagine in cui coesistono parole, poesia, arte e danza. L'atto ecfrastico dunque sembra raggiungere la sua massima espressione grazie all'interconnessione tra il mezzo tecnologico e i linguaggi artistici: «I didn't see a major difference between a poem, a sculpture, a film, or a dance. A gesture has for me the same weight as a drawing: draw, erase, draw, erase-memory erased» (Jonas [2003]: 8).

Jonas assorbe, reinterpreta testi poetici, culture lontane, viaggi e narrazioni personali. Le sue performance si manifestano per mezzo di un linguaggio performativo, teatrale poetico e visuale che, rompendo le regole e gli schemi classici della percezione, si delinea attraverso la contaminazione dei media.

3. NARRATIVE VISIVE E CONTESTI SOCIALI. KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO

La ricerca sulla narratività visuale e performativa attraverso l'arte digitale continua nell'opera di Krzysztof Wodiczko, interessato come pochi artisti del XX secolo, al connubio tra ingegneria, design, urbanistica e *new* media per narrare i soggetti inerenti alle contemporanee "estetiche della paura", soprattutto quelle legate al fenomeno della violenza urbana, l'immigrazione e il controllo massmediatico. Tornare alla città come simbolo per decostruire l'epicentro della modernità è una prerogativa dell'artista polacco che attraverso l'interpretazione, l'analisi e l'incontro è orientato alla ricerca di una "narrativa del monumento come critica sociale". Contro l'indifferenza urbana, Wodiczko ha creato una serie d'interventi pubblici atti a dar voce alla città stessa, lasciar parlare piazze, strade ed edifici storici a cui la contemporaneità ha spesso negato la propria capacità di una narrazione

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[4] Versi citati da Susan Morgan in Morgan [2006]: 75.

simbolica. Per mezzo della narrazione, ha cercato quindi di alterare la percezione del pubblico, proiettando immagini nelle facciate degli edifici storici e dei monumenti più rappresentativi di una città: mani gesticolanti, volti e corpi di individui che compongono una comunità e danno testimonianza delle proprie esperienze. In questo modo, l'artista crea una sovrapposizione tra la narrazione storica del monumento moderno, puro simbolo di contemplazione, commemorazione e decoro cittadino, e il presente della vita quotidiana sociale e comunitaria. Da qui il suo interesse per gli edifici pubblici e i monumenti storici urbani, utilizzati come sfondi per le sue proiezioni, e capaci di concentrare l'attenzione del pubblico sui modi in cui l'architettura e i monumenti riflettono la storia e la memoria collettiva.

L'informazione massiva plasma forme d'occultazione e diversione popolare, per cui diviene sempre più facile detenere il potere di manipolazione sul pubblico, modellare opinioni, sincronizzare stati d'animo e orientare norme di condotta e di genere. Com'è stato evidenziato da molti teorici, l'arte sembra essere in grado di riutilizzare a proprio favore le potenzialità dei media per farne materia di riflessione. Gianni Vattimo sostiene che l'arrivo dei mezzi di comunicazione accentua la mobilità dell'esperienza grazie alla quale l'arte si configura come una via possibile per la creatività e la libertà (Vattimo [1998]: 153). La manipolazione del consenso e degli orrori, infatti, non è l'unica strada possibile nell'era della comunicazione generalizzata dei *mass-medi*a e della riproducibilità (ivi: 153-154).

Dalle sue prime videoinstallazioni, realizzate durante gli anni '80, e contemporaneamente a una serie di oggetti d'arte quali veicoli e strumenti urbani, Wodiczko si è interessato criticamente alla presenza della cultura della negazione nella metropoli contemporanea. Alcuni dei suoi più noti progetti – *South African War Memorial* (Toronto, 1983), *AT & T Building* (New York, 1984), *Nelson's Column* (London, 1985), *Campanile di San Marco* (Venezia, 1986), *The Homeless Projection. Civil War Memorial* (1987), *The Hiroshima Projection* (1999), *Arco de la Victoria* (Madrid, 1991), *The*

St. Louis Projection (2004), *If You See Something* (Galerie Lelong, 2005) e *Goscie/Guests* (Biennale di Venezia, 2009) – sono la realizzazione formale di immagini perturbatrici proiettate su edifici pubblici che hanno lo scopo di scuotere la coscienza critica del pubblico di fronte alla realtà sociale in cui vive. Immagini di simboli bellici, ingiustizie sociali, povertà e indifferenza, vengono proiettate anche attraverso testimonianze di personaggi reali che ci ricordano i sinistri e perversi crimini commessi dalla Ragione e dalla Modernità.

Questa è la chiave di lettura di *Tijuana Projection* (2002), un intervento realizzato nel Centro Culturale di Tijuana (CECUT), un edificio conosciuto come *La Bola* e costruito dagli architetti Pedro Ramírez Vázquez e Manuel Rossen Morrison nel 1982. Quest'edificio, che si struttura su una grande sfera ispirata ai progetti utopici di Ledoux, si progettò per dinamizzare la vita culturale di Tijuana e promuovere il turismo culturale. Come noto la città messicana è un luogo di forte repressione e controllo da parte della polizia antiimmigrazione del Nord America. La frontiera militarizzata con gli Stati Uniti nel tempo ha modificato il paesaggio della città. Tale trasformazione ha colpito non solo il luogo fisico ma anche lo spazio interiore della gente che vive nella comunità di Tijuana, il loro stato d'animo, le speranze, l'orizzonte mentale, le utopie e l'identità collettiva. In *Tijuana Projection* l'artista rende visibili gli effetti fisici e mentali prodotti dalla costruzione di una frontiera, che disegna il territorio in modo drammatico. La frontiera incide nell'esperienza, nel linguaggio, nello spazio del vivere, nel corpo, nella psiche e nelle scelte politiche, nell'Io e la pluralità, i frammenti e le faticose ricomposizioni, le società e le sue divisioni, nell'economia e nel pensiero dell'ordine. Wodiczko, interessato all'immigrazione come uno dei temi che affligge la comunità di Tijuana, oltre alle caratteristiche fisiche del luogo analizza anche il significato simbolico della frontiera, proiettando sulla forma sferica dell'edificio l'immagine dei volti che raccontano in diretta il dramma delle loro esperienze di esuli e immigrati. In tal modo l'artista contestualizza e arricchisce il concetto di spazialità con strati di umanità e di tensione psicologi-

ca. Il suo interesse si concentra, dunque, su un fare artistico che dia voce alla cittadinanza e, attraverso il silente monumento, affronti i conflitti sociali. Da tale posizione ideologica s'intende quindi un rifiuto dell'immagine della sfera pubblica pacifica, in quanto, secondo Wodizcko, la pace non è un concetto pacifico, poiché implica tensioni e contraddizioni dinamiche (Serra [2001]). In tal modo Wodiczko riformula le pratiche dell'arte pubblica che alludono a ciò che Mitchell chiama «arte pubblica critica», ovvero un'arte attraverso cui un artista provoca una riflessione che rinnova e attualizza la funzione originaria dell'architettura, trasforma e manipola il suo messaggio iniziale con l'intenzione di produrre nell'opinione pubblica un sentimento di sconcerto e allo stesso tempo di solidarietà.

Tra il 1986 e il 1987, Wodiczko inizia a maturare l'idea di un progetto che, tanto nella proiezione quanto nella creazione di un veicolo-casa, potesse visualizzare attraverso azioni performative gli individui che rimangono nascosti socialmente. La città cosmopolita di New York, con un'alta concentrazione di stranieri, immigranti e senza tetto, spesso con i loro "veicoli" improvvisati che si spostano da un luogo ad un altro della città, simbolicamente gli permette di meditare sul "movimento" (o l'assenza di sedentarietà) come un mezzo per esporre qualcosa che è nascosto. Questa condizione di vita apparentemente nascosta, appare in generale come qualcosa di estraneo alla società, quando in realtà è il risultato della società stessa: un prodotto legittimo di una condizione urbana specifica. *The Homeless Projection. Civil War Memorial* (1987) realizzato a Boston, proiettando immagini di un senzatetto sul *Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Memorial*. Anche qui Wodiczko si concentra sui problemi sociali mostrando un senzatetto con i suoi averi che durante la maggior parte del tempo si ripiega su se stesso, ricordandoci la posizione dell'orante cosí come appare nelle immagini religiose. Altre proiezioni simili sono state realizzate proiettando sulle statue di Lincoln, Washington, o Lafayette della *Union Square* di New York, immagini con attributi comunemente associati ai senzatetto, quali per esempio carrelli, valigie e sacchi di plastica.

Lo spazio pubblico, con i simboli urbani che gli uomini hanno creato per dar memoria ai loro atti e ideali, è il garante dell'identità e parte essenziale nell'appropriazione simbolica di tale identità nelle coscienze dei cittadini. Quando però i simboli decadono a causa dell'indifferenza, la coscienza e la cultura collettiva rimangono senza voce. Il silenzio del monumento è per Wodiczko un pretesto per reclamare l'attivazione degli elementi contro i diritti umani, la democrazia, la non alienazione e inumanità che sottendono all'urbanizzazione sociale. A tal scopo l'artista unisce l'ideologia impiegata nella realizzazione delle immagini mediatiche sui monumenti storici come strumento tattico per trasformare i suoi interventi, in effetti di spaesamento che diffondono messaggi critici.

La video installazione diviene dunque una forma di spettacolo mediatico il cui obiettivo è quello di invertire il senso del messaggio unilaterale del potere e sensibilizzare lo spettatore sulle problematiche sociali. La comunicazione empatica attraverso la parola si plasma in materia visiva critica. In questo senso la sua opera ricorda ciò che Virilio nei suoi discorsi sulla città contemporanea descrive come "creare l'evento": rilanciare un pensiero refrattario alla mentalità cibernetica che sincronizza i tempi delle emozioni e completa la standardizzazione del comportamento dell'era industriale (Virilio [2004]: 41).

4. PAROLA, IMMAGINE E TRADUZIONE NEGLI ARTEFATTI DI ANTONI MUNTADAS

La realizzazione di opere ibride in cui immagine, testo e tecnologia co-esistono si deve indubbiamente all'utilizzo del video, definito da Paul Virilio la «terza finestra» (Virilio [1981]). Con la commercializzazione della videocamera portatile da parte della Sony, è stato possibile incorporare facilmente il video nella prassi artistica, che si situa in uno spazio intermedio tra il cinema sperimentale e la televisione commerciale. L'uso del video, infatti, si deve alla critica, spesso sotto forma di denuncia sociale, e alla ricerca intertestuale da parte degli «artisti del assemblage, del hap-

pening, del fluxus, etc., che rifiutavano la nozione di arte esistenziale derivata dall'espressionismo astratto e che mettevano in discussione la nozione di arte elevata» (Guasch [2000]: 441).

In un ambito meramente sperimentale e di denuncia sociale, dunque, i linguaggi e le espressioni del video, quali la videoscultura, la videoperformance e la videoinstallazione, hanno creato le loro premesse fondamentali. Più recentemente si è passati alle derivazioni del video quali la computer art e il net art che, mostrandosi in schermo e monitor, risultano comunque essere le eredi dirette delle sperimentazioni realizzate per mezzo della televisione e dunque della videocamera. Tali mezzi tecnologici hanno accompagnato diverse situazioni artistiche nella produzione di complesse trame concettuali e narrative da parte di artisti interessati a rinnovare linguaggi e rompere le tradizionali regole della percezione. Tra poetiche e denunce sociali le nuove tecnologie sono state il supporto ma anche il simbolo di una nuova era artistica in cui i diversi linguaggi (scientifico, letterario e artistico) hanno abbattuto le vecchie frontiere della visione testuale. Un esempio di tale comportamento si evince nell'opera dell'artista spagnolo Antoni Muntadas, significativo già dal titolo: *Watching the Press/Reading Television* (1981).

Quasi agli inizi della sua carriera artistica Antoni Muntadas definiva «soggettività critica» (Huffman [2002]: 123) una pratica individuale e personale che lo orientava a segnalare attraverso i suoi interventi artistici notizie e fatti dell'epoca contemporanea. La realtà filtrata dai mezzi di comunicazione di massa, che Muntadas definisce «*media landscape*»[5], gli offre gran parte del materiale d'analisi e interpretazione per la realizzazione dei suoi artefatti[6]. Come ha affermato Somaini, i media vengono sempre più riconosciuti come

fattori d'importanza nell'evoluzione delle forme d'esperienza, di conoscenza e di socializzazione. I linguaggi tecnologici conducono alla produzione di forme di comunicazione che definisce certe abitudini e automatismi e che dunque riconfigurano il nostro orizzonte sensibile e il nostro modo di intendere il nostro stesso corpo (Somaini [2001]). Queste considerazioni sono state riconosciute e analizzate da Muntadas già negli anni '70, periodo in cui trasferitosi a New York sperimentava in prima persona le tensioni di un'arte politica spesso radicale e di controtendenza. In linea generale, e omettendo le peculiarità di ogni lavoro, si tratta di progetti artistici in cui per mezzo della visione critica Muntadas individua direttamente alla fonte (*media landscape* e il territorio urbano) l'informazione che lo turba o lo incuriosisce: temi legati per esempio all'identità (come nel caso di *On Subjectivity* del 1978), alla censura politica (*Cadaques – Canal Local* del 1974 e *Barcelona Districto Uno* del 1976 in cui Muntadas cercava di sovvertire la manipolazione dell'informazione sotto il regime dittatoriale di Francisco Franco), al costante bombardamento di notizie nelle televisioni e nelle strade cittadine per mezzo della pubblicità (*This Is not an Advertisement* del 1985 e *Media Eyes* del 1981).

Tale atteggiamento soggettivo critico è ciò che Muntadas propone al lettore della sua opera. Lettore, poiché chi osserva i suoi artefatti deve anzitutto tradurli e comprenderli. La percezione dell'artefatto richiede quindi un atto d'interpretazione e, conseguentemente, d'azione poiché dovrà essere attivato da un pubblico partecipe e dinamico, interessato ad analizzare la realtà con le sue complessità e contraddizioni. Muntadas, infatti, chiede al pubblico un'attenzione concreta verso temi contemporanei, quali la globalizzazione e il glocalismo, il capitalismo transnazionale, la ramificazione dei poteri, i dispositivi di controllo, i procedimenti che manipolano la comunicazione e l'informazione, e così via. Non casualmente proprio negli anni settanta, Muntadas propone l'ideogramma *arte-vita*, che appariva in schermi televisivi o altre superfici in vetro, proprio per rivelare la tendenza dell'arte a non separarsi dalla vita, compenetrarla e comprenderla nelle sue varie

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[5] Con *media landscape* Muntadas si riferisce al vasto territorio audiovisuale, dai giornali classici alla televisione e ai diversi supporti comunicativi situati nel contesto urbano.

[6] L'artista definisce i suoi lavori artefatti per risaltarne la forte carica antropologica, sociale e culturale. Per una maggiore conoscenza dell'argomento si suggerisce la lettura del libro *L'arte che traduce. La traduzione visuale nell'opera di Antoni Muntadas* (Di Paola [2017]).

manifestazioni morali, naturali e massmediatiche.

Con tali pratiche artistiche, che potremmo considerare dei veri e propri "testi visivi", il lavoro di Muntadas ha potuto ampliare i confini disciplinari unendo, alle classiche tipologie della visualità, forme letterarie quali il racconto, la cronaca, l'intervista, le memorie, le storie di viaggi e addirittura la raccolta dei detti popolari. Attraverso questo ampio spettro di comunicazione letteraria, l'artista ha potuto documentare visualmente concetti quali l'estraneità, l'alterità, la diaspora, l'immigrazione, il nomadismo e in generale i fenomeni che testimoniano l'esperienza personale interculturale. L'uso della parola nel suo lavoro può ampliare quindi con nuove definizioni sia la nota figura retorica dell'*ekphrasis*, che oggi più che in qualsiasi altro momento storico condivide un forte isomorfismo con l'immagine audiovisiva, in cui è addirittura l'opera d'arte ad auto descriversi, sia il concetto meno conosciuto di "traduzione visiva", ossia la lettura di situazioni culturali e linguistiche estrapolate dal contesto sociale e riscritte per mezzo della visione artistica. Superando il campo della linguistica e della letteratura, la traduzione ha assunto un carattere polivalente che utilizza la ripetizione di un codice – quella della traduzione e dei suoi sinonimi (riscrittura, trasformazione, trasferire, ri-creazione, con-creazione) – per interrogarsi e riflettere su temi di tipo culturale, sociale, antropologico, politico, architettonico e urbanistico.

La lunga serie *On Translation,* iniziata nel 1995, forma una mappa concettuale che ci permette di situarci e orientarci dentro i discorsi culturali contemporanei. Nel complesso questi progetti artistici formano spazi di concertazione utilizzando linguaggi e lessici verbali, visuali e artistici, nonché media diversi per la loro trasmissione. Ognuna delle opere *On Translation* plasma ciò che Emily Apter ha definito «zone di traduzione» (*translation zone*), in cui l'oggetto tridimensionale si materializza tra media, concetti e linguaggi, e crea spazi di tensione e negoziazione tra vari soggetti. Con le parole di Emily Apter: «Muntadas takes the media environment itself, along with its second-order transposition to other media

systems, as subject to translation» (Apter [2005]: 205). L'opera che rivela una ricerca linguistica diretta rispetto al campo della traduzione, al linguaggio e alla visione è *On Translation: The Internet Project*[7], un progetto net art realizzato interamente tramite il supporto Internet, in cui ci troviamo dinnanzi ad un enunciato: *Communication systems provide the possibility of developing better understanding between people: in which language?* Tale enunciato è sottoposto a una serie di traduzioni automatiche e meccaniche in cui la stessa domanda si va trasformando fino a convertirsi nella risposta: *The essence of the problem depends upon the search for the correct answers to common questions.* Formalmente il progetto si sviluppa grazie alle potenzialità del software e della linguistica computazionale, per cui si mostra una spirale a elica, metaforicamente simile alla forma tridimensionale della torre di Babele, che grazie al cursore del mouse offre la possibilità di leggere la frase in ventisei lingue diverse. Presentato alla Documenta X di Kassel nel 1997, questo progetto artistico mette in risalto da un punto di vista linguistico e artistico la problematica intrinseca a qualsiasi processo di comprensione culturale e, allo stesso tempo, mette in questione la sovranità tecnologica come unico canale che accoglie tali scambi. Infatti, l'evoluzione dei sistemi di comunicazione, più che permettere una maggiore comprensione tra individui, maschera dubbi relativi alla recente degradazione dell'informazione dovuta a una sempre maggiore manipolazione a livello politico ed economico.

Da una prospettiva teorica Manuel Castells ha rivelato nella logica della rete e del link, il naturale risultato di un processo economico e politico, che modifica sostanzialmente la produzione e l'esperienza culturale. *Internet project* mostra l'alienazione che le tecnologie, in special modo Internet, producono sull'essere umano (tema questo proposto da teorici quali Jean Baudrillard, Edmond Couchot, Philippe Quéauy e Paul Virilio) e allo stesso tempo analizza da una prospettiva meramente tecnica anche le possibilità aperte dal mez-

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[7] http://adaweb.walkerart.org/influx/muntadas

zo elettronico, dall'ipermedia e dall'ipertesto nella configurazione di una nuova sensorialità (cfr. Jones [2010]), che obbliga a parlare di estensione dello sguardo e lettura infinita.

6. CONCLUSIONI

Dalla videoperformance alle proiezioni video, dalle sculture ibride alle sofisticate pratiche di net art e scrittura elettronica, l'arte contemporanea ha mostrato una apparente tendenza a smaterializzare le tradizionali forme dell'arte visiva. Per usare una ormai classica terminologia viriliana, si è creduto di passare da un'estetica dell'apparizione (propria della pittura, della scultura e della scrittura) a un'estetica della sparizione in cui ciò che è "*fisso*", come nelle arti plastiche e nella scrittura, secondo Virilio, corre il rischio di sparire proprio a causa dei multimedia e le nuove tecnologie. La persistenza dell'immagine in supporto materiale è stata sostituita dalla persistenza cognitiva della visione:

Qui la questione non è dunque più solo quella del "figurativo" e del "non-figurativo" come nel XX secolo, bensì quella della rappresentazione nello spazio reale dell'opera e della pura e semplice presentazione, in tempo reale, di eventi o incidenti intempestivi e simultanei che alcuni artisti chiamano, a volte, performance oppure installazioni… (Virilio [2007]: 84)

Citando Maurice Blanchot, secondo cui «parlare, scrivere, non è vedere», Virilio (ivi: 85) ha anche argomentato che la differenza tra persistenza retinica, necessaria a captare le immagini in movimento, e la persistenza cognitiva, stia proprio nella parola e nella sua fugacità. Tale differenza viene però neutralizzata nelle azioni performative in cui si combinano scrittura, linguaggio, materia, corpi, *new media*, informazioni massmediatiche e una serie di altri termini critici, anteriormente analizzati. È indubbio, infatti, che una delle caratteristiche principali che accomuna le arti elettroniche sia l'azione performativa in tempo reale, dal vivo, in cui differenti soggetti (artista, attori, comparse e pubblico) s'interconnettono tra loro e con i media. Nell'era della performatività tecnolo-

gica, la creatività artistica si fonda su una serie di sovrapposizioni di persistenze, in quanto gli agenti sono molteplici e assumono differenti ruoli. I casi studio da noi analizzati confermano che tali persistenze non agiscono solo a livello retinico o cognitivo, piuttosto attraversano la percezione su più livelli grazie alla nuova materialità dell'opera performante e interattiva. Per circa quaranta anni di sperimentazioni pratiche, che a loro volta hanno favorito un'estesa letteratura critica sui fenomeni interartistici e intermediali, la relazione tra immagine, parola e media, ha creato nuovi ibridi che hanno provocato, emozionato e scosso lo "spettatore", rendendolo partecipe di azioni poetiche e denunce sociali. Lì dove i teorici del sospetto hanno visto la fine dell'autonomia delle arti, altri vi hanno scorto la possibilità dell'azione performativa come un fenomeno nuovo e democratico. Seguendo Mitchell e Hansen, piuttosto che determinare la nostra situazione, i media sono la nostra stessa situazione.

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Aisthesis

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Individuation, Art, and Interactivity Starting with Gilbert Simondon

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to show the fruitfulness of Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation as a tool for analysing the aesthetic-artistic experience made possible by new technologies. Interactivity is the category to qualify those works based on computer systems whose form is determined by the intervention of the user or by signals coming from the environment. The reflection under the profile of aesthetics has long since begun to reckon with Simondon's thought, developing his analyses on the mode of existence of technical objects. Here we intend rather to show how the concepts and expressions at the centre of his theory of individuation are also rich in ideas for the study of an aesthetic-artistic experience in which the category of relation assumes a constitutive value and in which the processual aspect of the artwork prevails over its object dimension.

Keywords: Digital art, Technologies, Interactivity, Individuation, Relation.

FOREWORD

As dendrochronology teaches us, trees are capable of recording what happens in their environment through the annual formation of rings within their xylem. The measurement of their amplitude together with an analysis of their histological constitution represent a code that, if well deciphered, tells the story of the tree and the ecosystem in which it lives: they are thick and distant if the year is favourable, while they are thin and irregular if the living conditions are adverse. The analysis of the signals contained in the series of woody rings therefore documents the state of health of the tree while providing information on those climatic factors – such as forest fires, drought and pollution levels – that most affect it. This is the phenomenon that inspired *Voice of Nature*, the interactive installation designed by Dutch artist Thijs Biersteker[1] which

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[1] Founder of the Woven Studio, Thijs Biersteker creates interactive art installations, also referred to as «eco» and «awareness art», which aim to spread a

uses a tree as an interface between environment, viewer, and work. Exhibited in 2018 in Cheng-du, one of the most polluted cities in China, the installation is made by applying to the roots, branches, and leaves a system of sensors that monitor environmental conditions through a series of parameters: the level of carbon dioxide, temperature, soil and air humidity, photosyntheti-cally active radiation, and the amount of fine dust. The data collected is then subjected to an algo-rithm that generates digital rings projected onto a circular screen placed behind the tree every sec-ond instead of every year. In this way, the slight-est irregularity in the profile of each ring shows in real time the impact of environmental conditions on the health of the plant. For example, increased pollution or traffic jams cause the tree to react immediately, as documented by the sudden rip-ples that deform the rings projected on the screen as well as the illumination of a red warning light. Moreover, every time viewers touch the bark of the tree, the work reacts, decreasing or increas-ing its energy level, suggesting how even the most common gesture can affect the climate, such that, according to the artist, «change is at hand».

The work described represents only a possible example of the transformations produced in the contemporary aesthetic-artistic experience by new technologies. These have gone from being simple tools for action to becoming forces which pro-foundly and relentlessly shape our environmental, anthropological, and social realities, thus modify-ing our reciprocal relations as well as our under-standing of the world and of ourselves. Now, we should avoid two extremes which excessively sim-plify the matter at hand: on the one hand, those who euphorically claim the centrality of digital worlds, and on the other, those who limit them-selves to recognizing their purely recreational and commercial function. Rather, it is a matter of con-

sidering the ways in which artistic experimenta-tion critically explores their resources and enhanc-es their creative potential. Indeed, it is in this con-dition that art, to quote Mikel Dufrenne, reveals itself to be «impregnated with a possible world» (Dufrenne [1981]: 46). A possible world not opposed to the real world as an alternative one, but pervading its texture as a «possibility of the world» itself, which finds in art an ever-renewed actuality, by gathering knowledge, experimenting on perceptions, and soliciting new forms of crea-tivity and fruition.

Interactivity is in this regard the specific cat-egory to qualify those artistic operations based on computer systems whose form is determined from time to time by the intervention of the user or by signals coming from the environment[2]. No longer just, or exclusively, an object to be contemplated, the work becomes an open space of encounter and participation which takes shape and evolves thanks to the relationship of mutual exchange with all who access it. An aesthetic-artistic expe-rience emerges in which the category of *relation* assumes a structural value to be investigated in its conditions of possibility and in its implications, starting from the dialogue with those projects that, abandoning the artificial effect typical of sim-ulative and spectacular perspectives, make them-selves an inexhaustible *source of the possible*[3].

1. ART AND INTERACTIVITY

Before tackling the issue from a philosophical point of view, it would be appropriate to outline the main characteristics of interactive art, also tak-ing into account some lines of reflection that ani-

more acute sensitivity to issues such as climate change, air pollution, presence of plastic in the oceans and Anthropocene. At the following link we can see a short video that documents some moments of the installation: https://thijsbiersteker.com/voice-of-nature.

[2] Samuel Bianchini and Erik Verhagen suggest calling such artworks «practicable», meaning with this term their capacity to encourage and welcome the concrete involve-ment of the viewer to generate and activity that may transform the works themselves as well as their audience (Bianchini, Verhagen [2016]: 1-22).

[3] In the field of aesthetics this conceptual core has been developed with originality by Roberto Diodato, who has devoted pioneering studies to the phenomena of interac-tivity and virtuality. See Diodato [2012; 2015; 2021].

mate the debate between artists and theorists. A practice now consolidated in experiments open to technological innovations, it began in the 1950s, finding fertile ground in *cybernetics*, which was the first to combine a theoretical analysis of interaction processes with their reproduction by means of machines (Kwastek [2008, 2016]).

Wiener defines cybernetics as the study of «control and communication in the animal and the machine» (Wiener [1965]). This definition contains the very foundation of the discipline, proposing a method that can be applied in a uniform way to the analysis of the behaviour of both living organisms and machines, both considered systems governed by the same physical laws. More precisely, it is a question of elaborating a linguistic code that makes it possible to deal with phenomena such as *generation*, *processing,* and *transmission of information* in space and time, which intervene in the natural and artificial mechanisms responsible for the self-regulation of machines and living organisms. Of great interest in this respect is the principle of *negative feedback*, i.e. the signal that allows a system to adjust its action according to the results obtained. It is based on information that from the output of a circuit returns to its input, transmitting the system's state of operation: if this differs from the established objectives, the system is able to modify its operation until the desired result is achieved. Now what is important for the discussion is the fact that in the study of a technical system, cybernetics is interested in its *operational* aspects rather than in its internal composition or the properties of its constituent elements. The technical object is considered as an organised whole, capable of regulating itself and evolving, reacting to the impulses coming from the external world according to an active exchange of energy, and establishing with it relationships similar to those that a living organism has with its environment. As William Ross Ashby states, cybernetics «is a "theory of machines", but it treats, not things but *ways of behaving*. It does not ask "what *is* this thing?" but "*what does it do*?"» (Ashby [1957]: 1).

It is precisely from the concept of «behaviour» that the reflections of Roy Ascott, one of the pioneers of interactive art, began in the 1960s (Ascott [2003]: 109-157). He credits cybernetics with having brought about a radical change of scenario in the aesthetic experience. Compared to traditional forms of fruition – defined as *deterministic* in that they are based on a plot of meanings clearly defined by the artist and transmitted to a more or less passive user – cybernetics, according to Ascott, introduced a *behavioural tendency*, sanctioning the passage from the work's typical characteristics of completeness and unity to a mode of existence that requires from time to time activation by the user's intervention. The work thus loses its *thing* connotation and becomes more and more an «open-ended process», suspended «in a perpetual state of transition, where the effort to establish a final resolution must come from the observer» (Ascott [2003]: 112). In fact, if the general setting of the aesthetic experience remains in the hands of the artist, «its evolution in any specific sense is unpredictable and dependent on the total involvement of the spectator» (Ascott [2003]: 112) which is all the more decisive the greater the degree of variability provided by the technical system. Described according to the coordinates of cybernetics, the aesthetic-artistic experience is thus configured as a «retroactive process of human involvement» (Ascott [2003]: 112). The principle governing the interaction of the artist-work-spectator system is the cybernetic principle of *feedback*:

> *The artefact/observer system furnishes its own controlling energy: a function of an output variable (observer's response) is to act as input variable, which introduces more variety into the system and leads to more variety in the output (observer's experience). This rich interplay derives from what is a self-organising system in which there are two controlling factors: one, the spectator is a self-organising subsystem; the other, the artwork is not usually at present homeostatic. (Ascott [2003]: 128)*

Now, the distinction proposed by Ascott between *deterministic art* and *behavioural tendencies* is certainly reductive as well as open to criticism in several respects. First of all, it could be

argued that any artistic operation reaches its full completion in the presence of an audience. It realises its expressive value by offering itself to perception, is enriched by the plurality of meanings attributed to it, and grows in depth in the judgements it is subjected to. However (and this is what the essay in question intends to underline), what is important is the *reciprocal* and *dialoguing* relationship that arises between the work and the user, transforming the latter from a simple subject of a contemplative experience into a priority term directly involved in the realisation of the work. In fact, there are at the basis of the interactive event not only systems of meaning to be interpreted or forms of empathy with the work, but also *process calls* to which the user is called to respond with his own initiative. For Ascott, two conditions are necessary to produce behavioural art: «that the spectator is involved and that the artwork in some way behaves» (Ascott [2003]: 129). This practice would later find its chosen medium in the computer, which should be understood as a *set of behaviours* rather than as a mere thing.

The advent of digital technologies has further extended the possibilities of participation, which have become the subject of constantly updated taxonomies designed to measure the degree of interactivity of different technical systems. Under what conditions does an installation receive stimuli from the user or the surrounding environment? To what extent is the evolution of the work determined in advance and to what extent is it possible for the user to influence it? Does his or her intervention limit itself to selecting a series of options predefined by the technical system, or does it, on the contrary, affect the very parameters that govern its development? These and similar questions guide the attempt to establish a classification scale that, on the basis of technical and structural conditions, establishes the limits and potentialities of interaction processes.

Without alluding to the appropriateness of these taxonomies, let us take the example proposed by Ernest Edmonds, an artist and pioneer in the field of digital studies (Candy, Edmonds [2011]). He divides works of art into four catego-

ries based on the intensity of the relationship that can be established between the work, the artist, the viewer and the surrounding environment. The first category includes «static» works, such as a painting or sculpture, which are characterised by the fact that they do not change in relation to the behaviour of the viewer or environmental stimuli. In another group are «dynamic-passive» works, so defined because, although tending to change, they do not react to the actions of the user, who in turn is relegated to the passive role of witness. In contrast, environmental factors such as temperature, sound, and light are responsible for the change; their influence is however regulated by mechanisms within the work and therefore predictable. It is only with «dynamic-interactive» works that the contribution of digital technologies becomes evident, offering the viewer the possibility of directly influencing the evolution of the work. A feedback relationship is formed between the work and the user, whereby the latter's actions provoke a direct and immediate response from the work, as occurs at an elementary level thanks to the techniques of recording body movements and sound. Like Ascott, Edmonds also believes that is possible, on the basis of algorithmic scripts or the set of rules used to instruct the computer programme, to introduce a component of *unpredictability* within the general scheme of action and reaction[4]. This is what happens in «dynamic-interactive-varying» systems capable of recording interactions with users, learning their gestures and movements and, on the basis of this experience, modifying not only the rules in the stimulus-response relationship but also its own

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[4] A classification of interactivity based on the degree of unpredictability provided by the computer system has also been developed by the artists Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer, who define as «non-linear, multi-layered, multi-modal» that interaction which, instead of being programmed and therefore predictable, is produced in a new way each time the user comes into contact with the work. This is made possible by *growth algorithms*, capable of recording every variation in the intensity of the user's intervention (Sommerer, Mignonneau [2005]: 837-851).

evolutionary behaviour. If the work is constantly changing on the basis of past interactions, its configuration at a given moment can never be completely predictable.

In the wake of Edmonds' analysis, the study of interactivity related to the degrees of unpredictability of the technical system has also been addressed by the concept of «emergence» (Seevink [2017]). It is correct to allude to *emergence* whenever formal or conceptual novelties arise that were not foreseen by the system of origin, such that the emerging totality does not coincide with the sum of its component parts. *Novelty*, *unpredictability*, *heterogeneity* and *non-deductibility* with respect to the context of origin are the distinctive features of emergence. Now, it may certainly seem odd to speak of an *emergent phenomenon* in reference to the interactive work of art, i.e., to attribute such properties to the computer system, an entity endowed with a finite and above all determined nature. However, it demonstrates an attempt, worthy of attention from a conceptual point of view, to interpret those unprecedented forms of aesthetic experience made possible by interactive digital technologies.

Through this brief exposition, it is already possible to see how the debate coming from media studies proposes an in-depth *theoretical analysis*. In particular, there are three points to be fixed in the examination of the phenomenon of interactivity. First of all, the *relational structure* of the work, to be understood more clearly as a system that is constituted and develops in the interaction with a user. The work thus becomes a field of relations between elements, individuals, and events, both real and virtual. The individual parts of the system, i.e., the artist, the viewer, and the work, have no value outside the organized totality to which they give rise, but only in relation to each other. Secondly, far from having a stable and regular structure, the relational fabric that makes up the system presents an intrinsic dynamism. It takes the form of a constantly evolving *event*, produced by the elements that occasionally are received by the technical system or that emerge unplanned. A third point is the fact that this dynamic process

is *not entirely predictable* in its development, let alone its outcome.

2. INDIVIDUATION AND INTERACTIVITY

The relevant place where the above concepts find an effective synthesis is Gilbert Simondon's philosophy[5]. In short, it is characterized by an understanding of reality as *process* and *relation*. From his perspective, everything that exists must be interpreted as something that occurs and this occurrence is in turn determined as an inexhaustible process of interaction. «Realism of relations» is the expression used in his doctoral thesis entitled *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, where Simondon specifies that by «relation» one is not referring to «an *accident* relative to a substance but a *constitutive, energetic and structural condition that is extended in the existence of constituted beings*» (Simondon [2020]: 75-76). It is a question of rethinking the relationship between *relations* and *individuals*: whereas in the classical paradigm of ontology individuals with their properties are put before the relations that derive from them, the approach proposed by Simondon gives relations the possibility of establishing individuals themselves. In other words, there is no autonomous and self-sufficient substance capable of undergoing changes or establishing accidental relations with other individuals. Rather, the processes of relation underpin it and bring it into being.

What arguably makes this speculative framework applicable to the study of the *aesthetic-artistic experience based on interaction* is the fact that the concepts developed by Simondon make use of his research in the field of *technique*[6]. It is pre-

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[5] On Simondon's *theory of individuation*, see the monographs by J-H Barthélémy [2005; 2014].

[6] Reflection under the profile of *aesthetics* has long since begun to reckon with Simondon's thought, especially developing his analyses of the mode of existence of the products of technology, the focus of his complementary doctoral thesis. Exemplary in this sense is the resumption made by Pietro Montani [2007; 2014]. For a con-

cisely this that accounts for the originality of the French thinker in the context of twentieth-century philosophy. Far from any Heideggerian suggestion, Simondon relinquished the well-known interpretation of technology as a means subordinate to knowledge or as an instrument of action, opting to study it, rather, as an original form of human participation in the world as well as a fundamental dimension of collective existence. From this point of view, technical reality deserves to find a place within culture and even to be integrated into philosophy, thus becoming a fertile *seed of thought*. It must be made clear, however, that this approach does not lead to a simplistic *philosophy of technology*. Here, a genitive circumscribes a scholastic knowledge that renounces, in the name of the analysis of a specific set of entities, its ambition of universality and its reflective spirit. On the contrary, as stated in a text written with the aim of creating a research group on cybernetics:

> *Philosophy is not a domain of thought separated by borders from other neighbouring domains, with which it coexists in harmony or in contrast. […] The philosophical programme entails as its only obligation the opening up of the reflexive system: it is thus a welcoming function thanks to which the domains that human existence discovers to be affected by a problematic character are recognised, made to emerge and subjected to the test of thought. (Simondon [2016]: 35-36)*

The opening up of the reflexive system allows technique to be understood in terms of its own conceptual apparatus along with its ontological implications. Consequently, what has mostly been expelled from reflection, being considered in a prejudicial way as a simple servant devoid of problems, interiority, and autonomy, now reappears equipped with a philosophical character. This obliges philosophy to modify its basic notions and to redefine itself using what technology teaches it. Indicative of this approach is the fact that

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cise account of the applications of Simondon's thought in the field of aesthetics, see article of V. Bontemps [2018]: 37-59.

Simondon finds in *information theory* «a notion that would be valid for thinking individuation in physical nature as well as in living nature and, afterwards, for defining the internal differentiation of the living being that extends its individuation by separating vital functions into physiological and psychical functions» (Simondon [2020]: 244). The notion of information has the merit of highlighting the dynamic character of form, overcoming both the *hylomorphic dualism* of a substantial form applied to an external matter and the tendency towards stability and degradation of the potentialities studied in *Gestaltpsychologie*. Here, on the contrary, individuation is understood as *energy modulation*.

As a next step, an examination of the sequence of arguments is needed through which Simondon justifies the recourse to informational categories for the analysis of individuation[7]. In practice, his strategy comprises the separation of the notion of information from its original technological context, where it is conceived as the transmission of a message between two distinct poles – the *sender* and the *receiver* – on the basis of a pre-established code. Consequently, it becomes *genesis* or the *taking of form*. This, in turn, takes place when heterogeneous and incompatible orders of magnitude enter into communication with each other. Information occurs when «that which emits signals and that which receives them form a system. Information is between two halves of a system in a relation of disparation. This information does not necessarily pass through signals […]; but it can pass through signals, which allows for realities distant from one another to form a system» (Simondon [2020]: 393).

In the above passage, we can observe the attempt to attribute a *constitutive value* to *relation*. More precisely, it is a question of removing the relation from the static order of predication, which presupposes the existence of already constituted individuals, and of assigning it an *ontogenetic function*. To do this, Simondon hypothesizes

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[7] For a detailed reconstruction of the reform of the concept of *information*, see Bardin [2015]: 21-35.

a sphere in which neither individuals nor relations yet subsist in a fixed form. *Pre-individual* is the term that qualifies this sort of degree zero of being, from whose womb individuation springs in an interminable process of correlations. Using the conceptual apparatus of thermodynamics, Simondon defines the pre-individual state of being as *metastable*. As is well known in thermodynamics, an equilibrium of relative stability is referred to as metastable, where a system remains so until it is supplied with a sufficient quantity of energy capable of breaking its initial conditions. Similar to a system in metastable equilibrium, the pre-individual is populated by potentialities and dynamic forces in tension with each other; it possesses a reserve of energy that guarantees becoming, but at the same time requires an efficient cause to generate transformations: «the original being is not stable, it is metastable; it is not one, it is capable of expansion starting from itself; the being does not subsist relative to itself; it is constrained, tensed, superposed on itself, and not one. The being is not reduced to what it is; in itself, it is accumulated, potentialized» (Simondon [2020]: 369). Within the pre-individual being, energy potentials are distributed asymmetrically, characterized as they are by an original duality of orders of magnitude and an initial absence of interactive communication.

With respect to this *potentialized incompatibility*, information is that which initiates a mediation between the disparate orders of magnitude, resolving the pre-individual heterogeneity and creating a system that integrates what was initially incompatible: «The polarizing singularity initiates in the amorphous milieu a cumulative structuration that spans the initially separated orders of magnitude: the singularity, or information, is that in which there is communication between orders of magnitude; as the initiator of the individual, it is conserved in the latter» (Simondon [2020]: 94). This is the essence of the aforementioned *realism of relations*. In extending by analogy the informational categories to the study of individuation, Simondon shifts the focus from a purely statistical analysis (aimed at calculating the possibilities of reproducing in a given point a message formu-

lated in another point) to the consideration of the interaction between the signals produced by the sender and the receiver. The latter, unlike what happens in the technical model, does not exist in isolation as a pole waiting to receive signals regulated by a code from a sender. Rather, it is a sphere in metastable equilibrium, which is structured when information puts the forces in tension within it into communication, actualising their potential and thus initiating a real change of state. Hence, individuation lies in the passage from an initial incompatibility to the progressive creation of relations and compossibility between terms, which only by connecting in a state of interaction achieve their individuality.

Following this description of Simondon's theory of individuation, some clarification is helpful before addressing this model in the analysis of *interactive aesthetic experience*. Firstly, the interactive dynamic that Simondon places at the origin of individuation corresponds to a form of causality that is completely foreign to deterministic mechanism. In order to be received by a system in a metastable state and trigger a process of interaction within it, the incoming signals must be *compatible*; at the same time, «the state of entelechy is not fully predetermined in the bundle of virtualities that precede it and preform it» (Simondon [2020]: 258). It should also be emphasized that the tensions that populate the pre-individual being are not completely exhausted in the emergence of the individual, but remain in it as a «charge of undetermined, i.e. of pre-individual reality that has passed through the operation of individuation without being effectively individuated» (Simondon [2020]: 352). The expressions used by Simondon are significant in this regard: «critical», of «relative indeterminacy of the result», «of highest uncertainty» describe the instant in which singularities that function as information encounter a system charged with potential energies (Simondon [2020]: 258)[8]. This charge constitutes a residual potentiality, i.e., an energy reserve responsible for constantly

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[8] On the relationship between *chance* and *determinism* in individuation processes, see Morizot [2016].

nourishing the development and transformations of the individual through the exchanges it has with the environment. As a result, the individual is, prior to establishing relations with other individuals, in himself the «theatre and agent of an interactive communication» (Simondon [2020]: 50).

3. ART AND INDIVIDUATION

Simondon's indisputable merit is in having rethought the traditional theme of individuality in an innovative way, refuting the ontological primacy of the category of substance in favour of a theory of *relations*. Here are the principal steps of his argument: far from being a term constituted in itself, the individual is identified, rather, as a provisional result, as a moment of arrest of a permanent process of individuation. This, in turn, is nothing more than an *interactive communication* between different orders of magnitude of the same system in a state of metastable equilibrium or between different metastable systems. Thus, what originally constitutes an inessential category and a non-defining predication of an autonomous substance now becomes that which sets the conditions and mode of existence of individualities. Instead of succeeding the terms it links, it is itself the operation through which the individual terms, entities, or subjects take shape.

Now, following Simondon in his theory of individuation makes it arguably conceivable to achieve a precise understanding of the phenomenon of *interactivity* at the *aesthetic* level as well. It goes without saying that we do not intend to superimpose Simondon's concepts on the main components of interactive aesthetic experience, arbitrarily transporting a thought operation from one sphere of reality to another, but rather to investigate their *heuristic value*. This working hypothesis is based rather on a method that Simondon himself defines as «analogical», i.e., a thought that detects *identities of relations* and not relations of identities, specifying that these identities of relations concern identities of *operative relations* and not identities of structural rela-

tions. It is therefore by overcoming theoretical and structural rigidities, replacing them in turn with processual equivalences, that it becomes possible to describe interactive *aesthetic experience* in terms of *individuation*.

The aesthetic-artistic sphere is an experiential horizon in which the meaning of experience itself, which emerges in the encounter between the user and the work, takes place. The work of art, indeed, does not impose itself self-referentially as a mere spectacle offered to an inert contemplation, but requires rather a receptive attitude which, called into question by the work, enters into intimacy with it, understanding its language and penetrating its expressiveness. Therefore, neither subject nor object is at the basis of aesthetic experience, but rather the *chord* between subject and object; not a term, but a relationship, necessary and always presupposed, outside of which the individual terms are devoid of meaning. It is therefore by virtue of its constitutive interactivity that it is possible to speak of aesthetic experience in terms of *individuation*, conceiving it, more precisely, as the privileged place of individuation of meaning. The user and the work, existing only within the mediation that unites them, represent, to say it again with Dufrenne, «the conditions of the advent of a sense, the instruments of a *Logos*» (Dufrenne [2000]: 16).

Now, this general scheme acquires an operational character in the field of those computer environments such as interactive installations, whose dynamic structure is nothing more than the product of a relationship. Roberto Diodato notes that such artistic operations exist only «as the encounter between digital writing and bodies that are sensitive to it, hence as constitutive interactivity. This allows to conceive of the relation (i.e. the encounter) as in itself capable of constituting entities – independently of specific relation properties – hence to develop a – until know mostly uncharted – ontology of relations, as acknowledging an addition to the world's furnishings» (Diodato [2021]: 62). In such a configuration of aesthetic experience, relation becomes the main category, assuming a value of being: on closer inspection, in

fact, it is not a question of a relation *between* individuals, or between substantial terms (however dynamic and internally enhanced), but of a relation that *individuates*.

From a technical point of view, the interactive work of art is based on the exchange of information and energy between the users and a computer system made sensitive to human intervention and to signals coming from the environment in which it is located. The user communicates with it through peripherals and sensors and this exchange is made possible by time-sharing programs, thanks to which interaction with the central processing unit of the system can take place in real time. The work thus acts as a mediator of a relationship that it establishes, integrating the intervention of users or environmental signals within its own energy regions, putting into communication different orders of magnitude and scales of reality, which only in it and through it are organized to form a system. Let us reconsider in this perspective the case studies examined at the beginning. The technical system receives input from atmospheric phenomena and puts them into communication with the intervention of the public, according to a process programmed to be very flexible, so that the images projected on the screen are not predetermined but evolve in an ever new and different way depending on the interaction between the tree, the surrounding environment, and the users. At least two types of individuation can be grasped in it which are firmly intertwined: that of the plant organism – which achieves within itself a mediation between an environmental order (composed of soil and atmosphere) and a molecular one – and that of the technical system – which amplifies this identification and puts it in communication with the users and the surrounding public space. At the same time, in integrating the ecological process with the technical one, the artwork functions as «theatre» and as an «agent» of ever new individuations, encounters, and interactions, thus opening the horizon of a *possible* way of life, more conscious and respectful towards the environment.

Communication, *structural becoming*, *metastability*, and *selectivity* of the technical system

are all characteristics that allow us to think of the aesthetic-artistic experience in terms of individuation and to bestow on *interactivity* the role of *individuating principle*. Let us consider now the last aspect, *unpredictability*. This character represents a fundamental requirement for both the creation and the fruition of the interactive work. The relative unpredictability of the technical system is, in fact, the factor that makes it possible to distinguish a form of interactivity that is superficial, in which the evolution of the work is determined in advance and the intervention of the user is limited to selecting a series of pre-established options, from a more sophisticated form which instead renders the work incomplete, always awaiting the intervention and constructive collaboration of the spectator. We have seen with Simondon that the interactive communication at work in the processes of individuation is subject to a *margin of indeterminacy* which simultaneously subtracts it from necessity and makes its outcome unpredictable. With this expression, he defines the becoming connected to individuation as an intermediate operation between *determinism* and *indeterminism*. In a fully determined system, there is no exchange between structure and energy; it remains identical to its initial state and cannot serve as a theatre for further individuation. In other words, it is a system with no potentialities and no internal resonance, i.e., no exchange between the orders of magnitude that constitute it, and therefore incapable of individuation. On the contrary, an indeterminate system has such a high internal resonance that changes occurring at one level extend to all the others, each time triggering a structural change that deprives the system of any form of identity or unity. Determinism and indeterminism, however, are only abstractions or opposing cases. The becoming of a system is instead given by the way in which it modifies its structure over the course of time. This is possible when the system possesses a relative identity and coherence in relation to itself and if its structure is in metastable equilibrium: only in this case, Simondon argues, «the system can *diverge*, i.e. it can receive information» (Simondon [2020]: 389).

Is it possible to find a similar margin of indeterminacy in the interactive communication at work in digital environments? The problem is far from being fully developed and indeed requires a study that combines conceptual analysis with a comparison that is always open to contributions from new technologies. According to Diodato, «the philosophical word referring to said unpredictability is contingency: interactivity is given if the environment is contingent, and conversely the environment is contingent if interactivity is actually given», where, taking up the Scotist meaning, contingent is said to be «an entity or event which in the very moment it is could also not be» (Diodato [2021]: 67). With this assumption, it is not currently possible to attribute an effective contingency to those interactive systems produced by the most recent experiments. The evolutionary behaviour of the system is not only conditioned by the perturbing agents but also and above all by its internal organization, i.e., by the way in which the computer programme occasionally selects, registers, and processes user interventions or the environmental signals. Although the influence of the user interactions on the technical system is not entirely predictable, its internal principles of evolution and variation are in any case governed by an algorithmic component that defines the rules according to which the inputs are processed and transformed into outputs. Once established, this component is not subject to change; it is rather the stimuli that vary over the course of time, which, as we have seen, can be of a different nature as well as undergoing potentially infinite combinations. In this way, each interaction does no more than actualize a *possible future* of the system, which, although bringing novelties that cannot be completely calculated or foreseen, is nevertheless within the range of performances allowed by the system itself. This still partial and relative unpredictability, that is this margin of chance at work in interactive systems, is nevertheless a question that still needs to be explored. This is in fact the primary objective of interactive digital art, which is increasingly aimed at fostering interaction between the user and the computer environment – not only in real time, but also capable of modifying the initial state of the technical system in a non-premeditated way. It is not, however, a question of achieving a simple technological prodigy, designed to simulate a living thing by means of technical individuation, but of the necessary condition for the increase of the *relation's* institutive power.

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The spatiality of sounds. From sound-source localization to musical spaces

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Abstract. The proliferation of and interest in concepts of musical space make the question of why composers, philosophers, and musicologists have used spatial concepts for music – which is typically considered a temporal and ephemeral art form – a relevant issue in the multidisciplinary research on music. In this paper, I suggest distinguishing between a literal and a metaphorical meaning of the term "space" when applied to music and sounds. Thereafter, I investigate the reasons that might have lain behind the metaphorical use of spatial concepts for music, focusing on the concept of movement in music and examining relevant studies in the field of audiovisual correspondences which show that listeners consistently match certain acoustic features to spatial features. Finally, I claim that both the metaphorical and the literal uses of spatial concepts for describing music are rooted in the way people perceive the dynamic change of acoustic features in terms of a (pseudo)spatial phenomenology.

Keywords: Auditory perception, Crossmodal correspondences, Musical space, Phenomenology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question about the spatial vs temporal nature of sounds has drawn the interest of psychologists, philosophers, and musicologists throughout centuries. In psychology of perception, sounds conceived of as auditory objects have been often discussed in comparison to visual objects. When looking for principles of perceptual organization, therefore, a number of researchers put forward the allegedly natural analogy between the spatial dimension of vision and the temporal dimension of audition (e.g., Kubovy [1988]). In such accounts, auditory perceptual units are assumed to emerge from the parsing of the continuous auditory flow into identifiable fragments thanks to some kinds of temporal *Gestalt*-like principles (e.g., Tenney, Polansky [1980]). By contrast, visual objects are mainly perceived thanks to spatial principles, for instance, the ability to detect change in texture, which is crucial for object segregation in

visually-complex environments. Although such view does not necessarily imply that sounds lack spatial dimension, it seems to suggest, at least, that they are primarily defined and perceived as temporal entities.

Beyond psychologists, philosophers have largely agreed on the priority of time over space in the conceptualization of sound. For example, Hegel defined sound as the «cancelling of the spatial situation» (Hegel [1835], vol II: 890), and Schopenhauer wrote that music «is perceived entirely and only in and through time, completely excluding of space» (Schopenhauer [1818], vol I: 294). More recently, Adorno (1995) claimed that «music is a temporal art (*Zeitkunst*)». In these characterizations, the dynamic change of sounds over time seems to override any other perceptual feature, including spatial localization. Such a idea is in line with relevant traditions in the philosophy of perception, in which auditory perception is conceptualized in terms of a temporal process. Starting with Husserl's writings on time consciousness (Husserl [1928]), in which immanent phenomenological time is seen as the special domain of music (Chatterjee [1971]), and extending to more general accounts of auditory perception, time is widely retained as the constitutional factor for the existence of auditory objects, including sounds (e.g., Nudds [2014]; O'Callaghan [2008]; see also Schaeffer [1966]).

In addition to psychologists and philosophers, composers have often stressed the temporal nature of musical sounds. For example, Stravinsky assumed the intimate relationship between music and time as foundational when he wrote: «Music is a *chronologic* art, as painting is a *spatial* art. Music presupposes before all else a certain organization in time, a chrononomy» (Stravinsky [1947]: 28). For Schoenberg as well, music was temporal at different levels: «in a manifold sense, music uses time. It uses my time, it uses your time, it uses its own time» (Schoenberg [1950]: 40).

Notwithstanding such a wide range of consensus on the priority of temporality in music perception, other accounts have stressed the importance of the spatial dimension of sounds (see Harley

[1994] and Macedo [2015a], [2015b], for reviews). As pointed out by Juha Ojala in his doctoral dissertation *Space in musical semiosis* (2009), the term «space/spatial» has been associated to music/sound in an impressive number of different occurrences, such as acoustic space (e.g., Tohyama, Suzuki, Ando [1995]), auditory space (Blauert [1997]), composed space (Smalley [2007]), compositional space (Morris [1995]), conceptual musical space (McDermott [1972]), instrumental space (Emmerson [1998]), listening space (Smalley [2007]), melody space (Todd [1992]), multidimensional music space (Juhász [2000]), notational space (Morgan [1980]), pitch space (Lerdahl [1988], [2001]), sound space (Barrass [1996]), sonic space (Wishart [1996]), spectral space (Smalley [1986]), timbre space (Wessel [1979]).

Most philosophical approaches traced the question of spatiality of sounds back to the localization of sounds and the spatial region occupied by the sounding object (see Casati, Dokic [1994]: 44). For example, Nudds (2009) started his investigation over sound with the question: «Where are sounds and where do we experience them to be?» (Nudds [2009]: 69). McDermott (1972) elaborated on the notion of musical space as a conceptual structure that allows us to distinguish between pitches sounded simultaneously that do not blend together indissolubly, i.e., that occupy different places in musical space (McDermott [1972]: 490). The concept of a unitary, «two-or-more dimensional space» has been related to musical ideas by Schoenberg ([1951]: 113). In such space, as Schoenberg noted, «there is no absolute down, no right, or left, forward or backward» (Schoenberg [1951]: 113). More formalized spatial accounts of musical sounds have also been proposed by musicologists, who tried to develop metrics for assessing the distance between sounds within musical space (e.g., Lerdahl [1988]; Reybrouck [1998]). Finally, spatiality has been used as original creative tools in live performances of sonic arts and electroacoustic music since the introduction of multichannel audio, utilized by artists like Schaef-

fer, Stockhausen, Xenakis or Boulez[1].

In this paper, I try to show that the concept of space has been applied to sounds according to two main different meanings. First, literally, in reference to the external localization of the sound-source(s) (Section 2). Second, metaphorically, the concept of space has been used to describe a perceptual and non-material environment where sounds we listen to are placed and move about (often labelled as «sound space» or «music(al) space») (Section 3). Then, I show that the metaphorical reference to space in music might be rooted in perceptual processes and, ultimately, in the phenomenology of sounds, i.e., in the way we perceive the dynamic change of acoustic features in terms of a (pseudo) spatial phenomenology. To do this, first, I examine how the allegedly natural association between movement and sounds has contributed to shape the conceptualization of sound in spatial terms (Section 4). Then, I consider relevant literature in audiovisual research, which strengthens the idea of the perceptual origins of spatial concepts of sounds (Section 5).

2. LITERAL MEANING: MUSICAL SPACE AS SOUND LOCALIZATION

In our daily life, most of our auditory perceptions are essential as they allow us to gather information about the space in which we move. Environmental sounds are often naively perceived as being essentially located at the place where they originate. Interestingly, we are not only informed that the sound was generated *there* but also that it was generated *by* a specific material object (O'Callaghan [2009]). For example, the sound of a plate which fall to the ground and break will inform us not only about the localization of the event but also on the dimension of the plate. For

this reason, Matthen (2010) noted that sounds are not merely located but are *object*-located events. Distinguishing between the when and where subsystems in auditory perception, Kubovy and van Valkenburg (2001) claimed that the where subsystem is mainly devoted to auditory localization and is therefore in the service of visual orientation. Thus, they concluded that space enters the conceptualization of auditory perception mainly due to its relationship with source localization[2].

Most philosophical accounts of sound perception agree on the crucial role of the question about the localization of sounds and the spatial region occupied by the sounding object (e.g., Casati, Dokic [1994]; Nudds [2009]). The (spatial) relationship between the perceiver and perceived sounds has been conceived differently based on their reciprocal distance. Casati, Dokic and Di Bona (2005) classified sound theories into three groups, namely the distal, the medial and the proximal theories. The distal theories hold that sound is located at distance, i.e., where we hear sound source to be localized. To put it with Pasnau, «we do not hear sounds as being in the air; we hear them as being at the place where they are generated» (Pasnau [1999]: 311). In this view, sounds that are generated at a distance are perceived by the subject as though they *are* at a distance. The medial theories include different subsets of theories which holds that sound is properly located in the medium between source and subject. For example, Sorensen suggests to identify sounds with acoustic waves which travel from the source to the perceiver ([2009]: 10). Finally, the proximal theories (e.g., O'Shaughnessy [2000]) claim that sound can be located either in (or very close to) the perceiver[3].

Whereas the distal and the medial accounts

[1] For example, in the mid-fifties, Stockhausen started to use several loudspeaker groups surrounding the audience for some of his performances working with spatial effects like static and moving auditory objects. However, in this paper, I will not delve into spatial-based musical practices and performances.

[2] Such conclusion is apparently confirmed by the «cocktail party» phenomenon (Cherry [1953]), in which a distinct stream of auditory information can be identified also thanks to the spatial localization of the source.
[3] An additional account considered by Casati, Dokic and Di Bona (2005) is the a-spatial theory, which paradoxically claims that sound is an a-spatial item which we hear as occupying no location whatsoever.

seem to align with the commonsensical understanding of sound localization more straightforwardly, i.e., to the fact that we hear sounds that are located at their source (distal) or soundwaves that travel from their origin to our hears (medial), the proximal theories might be less clear and seemingly deny our phenomenological ability to localize sound sources in space, which must be rooted in the sensory information we gather from sound perception. Thus, in what follows, I briefly discuss Nudds' proximal position, which holds that the sounds that we hear are instantiated where we are.

To understand Nudds' claim we must distinguish between the *fact* that we can locate sound (sources) in space and how we actually *experience* sounds. Nudds observed that, although we might be aware of places in virtue of hearing something located there, space in *itself* is no way the object of our auditory experience. Moreover, sounds essentially lack space: «We do not hear sounds as having spatial parts or as having spatial structures» (Nudds [2009]: 81). By contrast with visual experience, Nudds stresses that «our auditory experiences represent space in a way that is often far less determinate» (Nudds [2009]: 88). In fact, whilst visual experience might inform us of space in itself, for instance, about dimension or shape, our auditory experience of space is reduced to the mere awareness of (spatial) relations between sound sources and us, and between sound sources and other sound sources (e.g., distance). In other words, according to Nudds, we experience the *sound sources* as located, but not the *sound* in itself: «When we hear the alarm clock ringing, we can hear where the clock is – that it is on our left-hand side. Do we also hear where the sound of the alarm clock is? In other words, does the sound of the alarm seem to be where the alarm clock seems to be?» (Nudds [2009]: 90). Such phenomenological distinction between sound and sound sources can ultimately ground Nudds' claim to conclude that it barely has no meaning to say that sounds are located at their sources, but more precisely they are experienced where perceivers are.

To summarize, the concept of spatiality of

sounds, taken in its literal meaning, is evoked both in philosophy and psychology to discuss issues related to the localization of sound sources, for instance, whether the distal, the medial, or the proximal theory better accounts for the way space is phenomenologically relevant in sound perception (see Di Bona [2019]). However, as Section 3 will make clear, the concept of space has been applied to sound also in an alternative, non-literal, and peculiar manner. In such metaphorical use, space is essentially conceptualized as an autonomous or independent perceptual environment that is intrinsic to musical sounds and in which sounds can be placed and move about.

3. METAPHORICAL MEANING: SPECIFICALLY MUSICAL OR SONIC SPACE(S)

When metaphorically used in reference to sound, the term «space» loses some of the essential features that characterize it in the visual domain, such as being physical and three-dimensional. Moreover, according to Zuckerkandl, what makes musical space different from visual material space is its complete indivisibility: «The ear knows space only as an undivided whole [...] the space we hear is a space without places» (Zuckerkandl [1956]: 276). However, as Lippman noted, sound perception can be still conceived of as a different kind of spatial experience «whose nature is open to question» (Lippman [1952]: 112). In what follows, starting from the pioneering contribution of Hermann von Helmholtz, we try to go deeper into Lippman's question, providing an overview of how the concept of space has been metaphorically applied to sound.

Helmholtz was among the first to clearly emphasize the relationship between space and musical tones, when he observed the analogy between musical scale and space. In his treatise *On the sensations of tones*, we read: «It is an essential character of space that at every position within it like bodies can be placed, and like motions can occur. Everything that is possible to happen in one part of space is equally possi-

ble in every other part of space and is perceived by us in precisely the same way. This is the case also with the musical scale. Every melodic phrase, every chord, which can be executed at any pitch, can be also executed at any other pitch in such a way that we immediately perceive the characteristic marks of their similarity» (Helmholtz [1954]: 370). Such structural similarity is seemingly based on the properties that music and space phenomenologically exhibit. As we perceive the motion of physical objects in the empirical space, we (can) perceive sounds changing in pitch as if they were moving from one place to another. Few years later, the German philosopher and psychologist Carl Stumpf stated that we express the sensation of tone «with a certain psychological necessity» in spatial metaphors, most evident in the height of a tone: «The power of spatial imagery of tones is indeed remarkable» (Stumpf [1883]: 189). After Helmholtz and Stumpf, several philosophers and musicologists have elaborated on spatial accounts of musical sounds. Among the issues discussed in the early literature there are the comparison of musical space to the three-dimensional geometrical space, the spatial character and representation of pitch and pitch relationships, and the spatial features of musical time (see Harley [1994]).

Echoing the observations made by Helmholtz, the philosopher and musicologist Ernst Kurth defined musical space as essentially manifested in and through movement. Inner musical geometry is similar to, but not identical with, the geometry of the external space; it is linked to the structure of the intervals, chords, and forms of melodic motion (Kurth [1931]: 121). Kurth noticed in particular the spatial qualities of pitch, melodic line, contrary and oblique motion, as well as the distance of notes in an interval (*Zwischenraum*). Few years later, the distinctions between various types of space in music were refined in the thought of Albert Wellek, who tried to distinguish between hearing space (*Gehörraum*), tonal space (*Tonraum*), and musical space (*Musikraum*) (Wellek [1963]). Hearing space is the aurally mediated spatial orientation, an incomplete "image" of the objective and physical space. Tonal space is an

unsteady, indistinct structure or ordering schema in three dimensions. Musical space is a "pure" feeling space idiosyncratic of music, feeding itself from the previous (the tonal space, but also the hearing space), substantially though based on expression of feelings in (absolute) music as such. Of the suggested three dimensions of the tonal space, as described by Wellek, the first, "vertical" one corresponds (primarily) to pitch, while the second, "horizontal", to time and temporal order (see Riedel [2019]).

Kurth's and Wellek's descriptions of musical space remain largely obscure. A certain degree of conceptual obscurity was admitted by Kurth himself, who stated that musical space «is not visible, not touchable, and really hardly conceivable» (Kurth [1931]: 119). Thus, he referred to the idea we have of space in music more as a *space-feeling* than a space-conception. Nevertheless, as Kurth himself recognized, conceptual unclearness is no argument against the existence of musical space, but merely against its identity with external space, which on the contrary rests on the clearest perceptual and intellectual realization (see Kurth [1931]: 127)[4].

A couple of decades later, the fundamental contribution of Edward Lippman explicitly assumed the apparent contradictory nature of the conceptualization of spatiality in music: «The explanation of the spatial aspects of musical experience is obviously not to be found directly in perceptual or empirical space, but there is apparently no meaningful concept of space other than this» (Lippman [1952]: 135). Lippman evidenced that the intrinsic spatiality of music is phenomenologically evident, and grounded on structural similarity, i.e., the many identical formal elements that characterize the experiences of music and of empirical space. For Lippman, the fundamental nature of musical space consists of a spatial con-

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4 A three-dimensional model of musical space (with the axes of pitch, time, dynamics) has been also proposed by the German musicologist and composer Hans-Joachim Moser (1953). This model includes four beats in common time as units on the time axis, and standard dynamic levels (*p*, *mf*, *f*) as units on the dynamic's axis.

tinuum of sensations in a direction which we call by preference "low-high", though there is a feeble connection with the same terms when used to refer to perceptual space (cf. Lippman [1952]: 236). The need to use concepts elaborated for describing empirical space, for Lippman, unavoidably generates the conceptual complexity (if not vagueness) of the notion of musical space itself, which can hardly be explained in analytical terms: «The tendency of musical space to seek embodiment in conceptions of empirical space is so readily understandable as not to require explanation; an identity of structure and of sensational character, and the dominance of utility in establishing meanings are the chief underlying reasons» (Lippman [1952]: 235).

Key reflections on the notion of musical space were provided by Vincent McDermott and Thomas Clifton. McDermott introduced the notion of musical space as a conceptual structure that allows us to individualize objects and distinguish them from one another. According to him, pitches sounding simultaneously that do not blend together indissolubly, maintain separate *positions*, i.e., they occupy different places, in nothing other than a musical space (McDermott [1972]: 490). McDermott grounded his notion of musical space on pitch and depth or masking[5]. The latter dimension is introduced to account for the fact that pitches are perceived as moving not only according to vertical direction, i.e., high-low scale, but also in depth: «Pitches often do not appear on a single plane in our mind's image of the piece, as it grows and as we comprehend it. On the contrary, one sound or group of sounds tends to stand out, to demand more of our attention. Other sounds recede, become obscured by still other sounds» (McDermott [1972]: 492). McDermott referred to this perceptual phenomenon with the psychoacoustical concept of masking. In his view, space is a conceptual tool that we implicitly use when listening to music we are aware of relations of height,

interval, depth, or counterpoint. Such relations are, according to McDermott, all conceived of as spatial. However, when it comes to the articulation of such musical space and the positioning of sounds, McDermott explanations become much elusive (as highlighted above for Kurth and Wellek): «Every pitch, timbre, dynamic, every group of tones, every formal intricacy, every durational emphasis, even every rest – in sum, everything about a piece of music – contribute in some manner, substantially or only slightly, to the spatial organization of the work» (McDermott [1972]: 491).

Delving into the phenomenology of sounds, Cliftons' study of «music as heard» touches upon various aspects of the perceptual experience including musical space. For Clifton, musical space is one of the four essential features of musical experience, together with time, play and feeling and understanding. Such notion of musical space is rooted in the peculiar experience of hearing tones as «occupying certain positions of a purely phenomenal, nonphysical nature» (Clifton [1983]: 143). Therefore, the musical space has nothing to share with listener's or sound's localization: «To be in musical space means more than mere existence at a particular place, and therefore has nothing to do with one's physical location» (Clifton [1983]: 141). The notion of space embraces diverse aspects of the perceptual experience of music, for example, line and surface among others. Line is defined as «the narrowest, if not the simplest form of musical space is the single line» (Clifton [1983]: 143). The musical line exhibits some of the properties of geometrical lines, for instance, thickness. Whilst the association of melody with the concept of line seems to be intuitive (e.g., see the common description of melodies as melodic lines), Clifton's characterization of surfaces as elements that vary according to several musical parameters, such as dynamics, intensity, timbral complexity (Clifton, [1983]: 155) seems vague. In this respect, I must agree with Macedo (2015b), who observed that Clifton's notions of line and surface seem to be unclear and unclearly differentiated. In fact, although they seem to be modeled after empirical space, their distinction does not seem to cor-

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[5] In line with Helmholtz, McDermott conceives pitch perception as intrinsically spatial: «Pitch change is somehow spatial change» (McDermott [1972]: 489).

respond to a similar distinction in empirical space. Therefore, the impression is that the use of geometrical/visual terms in musical context is exclusively based on metaphorical mapping, that nevertheless remains unclear, and thus fails in clarifying how space can be conceived of as an organization principle for sounds perception.

More formalized accounts of spatiality in sounds perception have been proposed by Fred Lerdahl and Mark Reybrouck. Lerdahl (1988) introduced the notion of pitch space to identify a formal, nongeometrical, layered structure that actually resembles an incomplete matrix of values (Lerdahl [1988]: 8). Such nontopological space accounts for several phenomena, such as pitch and chord proximity, in a highly formalized way, thus assuming the concept of space in a very technical meaning. Grounded in an algebraic approach, Mark Reybrouck (1998) defined the metrics of musical space together with its psychological constraints. Reybrouck conceived musical space-time as a topological space allowing every discretization of the sonorous universe by selecting sets of points, and every possible transformation of sets of points to other sets of points.

Finally, the work of the philosopher and composer Dimitri Tymoczko is worth mentioning here, as he proposed a sophisticated spatial conceptualization of harmony based on geometry (Tymoczko [2011]). Tymoczko talked in terms of «musico-geometrical spaces» as ways of representing musical structural properties (Tymoczko [2011]: 20). Starting from basic elements, such as pitches on a line, he created complex spatial structures (containing twists, mirrors, Möbius strips) that are used to investigate the relations between conjunct melodic motion, harmonic consistency, and acoustic consonance. While gaining in clarity and rigour, such highly formalized models might appear to lose proximity to actual, first-person listening experiences.

The various spatial accounts of sounds summarized here (see, also, Morgan [1980] and Zbikowski [2002]) have a certain number of common features. First, they assume the spatial quality of pitch (from Helmholtz onwards) and make an important

distinction between the peculiarly musical and the auditory types of space. The auditory space is the external, physical place where sounds sources are perceived to be located (see Section 2). By contrast, sound space is a phenomenal and non-empirical space to which listeners (might) refer to when describing sounds or music they listen to. It might rely on musical or acoustic features of sounds, such as dynamics and pitch, but it resists to the definition in mere psychoacoustic terms. Second, they highlight the crucial role of the notion of movement in grounding the conceptualization of auditory perception on a spatial basis. Third, they necessarily fail when trying to provide the notion of musical space of a solid and rigorous definition, so that the nature of such musical spaces remains controversial if not unclear (Kania [2015]). Reflecting on the non-literal use of the term 'space' in similar contexts, thus, Lippman (1952) observed that such musical space is rather a *pseudo-space*. To properly understand this notion, we must not restrict *a priori* the notion of space to the commonsensical idea of physical space, i.e., a geometrical structure in which objects exist as material entities[6]. On the contrary, exploiting the rich variety of different conceptualizations of space in different fields, such as physics, mathematics, and geometry (see Jammer [1993]), we can admit the existence of a peculiar sonic, or musical, space as a non-empirical and phenomenologically experienced space whose perceptual features can be, at least to some extent, described. To explore the phenomenology of such space, I will first delve into the association between sound and movement (Section 4) and then, leveraging on literature on audiovisual correspondeces, between acoustic and spatial features (Section 5).

4. MOVEMENT IN MUSIC (SPACE)

If, as Strawson claimed, «a purely auditory concept of space is an impossibility» (Strawson [1959]:

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[6] See Mattens (2018) for a phenomenological analysis of the problem of spatiality and the multiplicity of constructs of space.

66), then one might be tempted to ask what has fostered the creation of so many spatial concepts of music/sounds. Several scholars have claimed that movement has allegedly played a role in mediating the metaphorical conceptualization of auditory perception on a spatial basis (e.g., Larson [2012]). For instance, Larson (2012) suggested that the metaphor of musical flow as physical motion is key to our conceptualization of music. Indeed, listeners verbally describe music as something that *moves* over time, saying, for example, that a succession of tones of increasing frequency is an *ascending* melody. Many of the words we use to describe music are also used to describe physical movement, e.g., *ascending* or *descending*, or to refer to situations that imply movement, e.g., *scale*, *steps*. Additionally, a core concept in music theory, namely, rhythm, is often labelled with two different words, i.e., "tempo" and "velocity", both of which relate to movement. Therefore, musical language itself encourages a dynamic of motion. However, puzzlingly, nothing actually moves when we perceive music, and the only movement that allows for music to exist, i.e., the physical movement of acoustic waves, is not the movement we typically refer to when using that language. How to account then for the metaphorical talk of music in terms of movement?

Relying on Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory, Cox claimed that «how musical motion and space emerge from the same logic that gives us temporal motion and temporal space» (Cox [1999]: 192). If, as Gärdenfors ([2000]: 176) proposed, «a metaphor expresses an identity in topological or geometrical structure between different domains», then the metaphoric use of terms for describing movement in musical context might be rooted in our perceptual (visual) experience of the motion of physical objects. In this line, Hubbard (2017) suggested that our conceptualization of musical succession in terms of movement is influenced by our perceptual experience of the movement of physical objects through space.

Going deeper into the analogy between musical and physical movement, Larson (2012) holds that musical movement is perceived to be susceptible to forces that are analogous to those that operate the movement of physical objects in space. In particular, he distinguished among three forces that are experienced in tonal music: musical gravity (i.e., the tendency of a note to descend), musical magnetism (i.e., the tendency of an unstable note to move towards the closest stable pitch), and musical inertia (i.e., the tendency of pitches or rhythms to continue in the perceived pattern) (Larson [2012]). Evidence of these perceptual or phenomenological forces might be found in empirical research. For example, musical inertia might be related to findings on sensorimotor synchronization and prediction showing that participants are capable of predicting the next auditory event on the basis of the acquired momentum of previously perceived stimuli (see Repp [2005] for a review). A confirmation of the analogy between musical momentum and physical inertia mediated by movement might come from Friberg and Sundberg (1999), who compared runners' deceleration to the final *ritardandi* from two examples from Bach's works and one sequence of two alternating notes. The results showed that runner deceleration patterns are strikingly similar to the curve representing the final *ritardando* of a musical performance, thus suggesting the existence of motor patterns that govern temporal changes both in music and locomotion.

The metaphorical use of terms that are usually employed to describe physical movements to describe auditory perception thus suggests a structural analogy between the way in which we conceive physical space and auditory space. This analogy appears from the representation of the three-dimensional auditory space, as well as from the reflections on physical forces and momentum put forward by Larson and Hubbard, respectively. The fact that diverse accounts of sound perception converge with the identification of movement as a crucial concept provide a basis for the spatial nature of auditory perception and its objects, herein conceived of not only as the place where sounds originate but also as the nonphysical environment from which perceptual properties emerge. Further insights into the metaphorical/literal use of spatial concepts for describing sounds might derive

from literature on crossmodal associations between auditory stimuli and spatial features, such as elevation, distance, and size. In the next section, I thus provide a brief overview of some of the most relevant findings in the field in order to delve into how humans conceive spatiality in music.

5. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE: THE CROSSMODAL ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN ACOUSTIC AND SPATIAL FEATURES

Auditory-spatial correspondences have drawn special attention in the growing field of crossmodal associations. With the term «crossmodal association», researchers use to refer to those deliberate and consistent matchings between perceptual dimension from different sensory domains that are observed in normal perceivers (i.e., non-synaestheses) (see Spence [2011] for a review). One of the most famous audiovisual associations was discovered almost a century ago by Köhler (1929), who observed that people tend to associate the term «maluma» to curved lines, while the term «takete» to angular lines.

Several studies have demonstrated that non-spatial attributes of perceived sound (e.g., pitch) are consistently associated by listeners with aspects of space and motion (see Eitan [2013] for a review). Importantly, such associations do not seem to be prompted, or influenced by, source localization. In fact, studies showed that listeners consistently associate higher-pitched sounds with higher locations, regardless of the actual source location (Pratt [1930]; Roffler, Butler [1968]; Cabrera, Ferguson, Tilley, Morimoto [2005]). Thus, regarding the suggested distinction between literal and metaphorical use of space concepts in music, these studies can be interpreted as shedding light on the latter use.

Studies on adults demonstrated that perceived pitch direction affects the visual perception of the direction of vertical motion. For instance, Maeda, Kanai, and Shimojo (2004) showed that ambiguous motion generated by two horizontal gratings (parallel bars) moving simultaneously in contrast-ing directions (up and down), is judged as ascending when accompanied by an ascending pitch, and as descending when accompanied by a descending pitch. Studies showed also that larger physical size is consistently associated with lower pitch (Mondloch, Maurer [2004]). In a dynamic context, people tend to perceive sounds increasing in pitch as becoming thinner, and sounds decreasing in pitch as becoming larger (e.g., Bonetti, Costa [2019]). Pitch-size correspondence is shown to affect also perceptual discrimination tasks. Gallace and Spence (2006) showed that when adult participants were asked to rapidly judge whether a visual stimulus was larger or smaller than a standard stimulus preceding it, responses were faster when the comparison stimulus was accompanied by a sound congruent to it in pitch (i.e., larger size-lower pitch, smaller size-higher pitch) than for incongruent stimuli (larger size-higher pitch, smaller size-lower pitch) (see also Evans, Treisman [2010]). This suggests that the pitch/size correspondence might be based on perceptual processing. Similarly, people tend to judge high-register music as «small» and lower register music as «large» (Eitan, Timmers [2010]).

Loudness has been related to size, as well as to distance. While the association between loudness and distance can be easily explained in terms of environmental auditory experience (i.e., increasing loudness means that the source is getting closer) more interesting is the association between loudness and size in non-dynamical context. Smith and Sera (1992) found that children matched larger objects with louder sounds, and similar results do not apparently depend on culture, language, or musical expertise (Walker [1987]; Lipscomb, Kim [2004]). The loudness-size association may well be based on experiential correlations between the size of objects (including humans and other animals) and the loudness of the sounds they can produce (Carello, Anderson, Kunkler-Peck [1998]).

Evidence thus supports the relationship between music and space by evidencing a perceptual link between the way we perceive spatial and acoustic features. Studies also seemingly confirm that motion plays a crucial role in mediating the

association between music and space. In particular, they suggest that the metaphorical use of spatial terminology for describing sounds is rooted in some perceptual process, i.e., it depends on the natural tendency to ascribe movements to sounds that change over time. Noteworthily, studies on infants provided evidence of such crossmodal interaction from as early as 6 months of age, prior to language acquisition (Wagner et al. [1981]; Walker et al. [2010]; Jeschonek et al. [2012]). Similar conclusions are in line with the early intuition by the eminent psychophysicist Stevens (1934), who suggested that sound is phenomenologically experienced as endowed with spatial features. According to Stevens, we perceive sounds as occupying more or less (musical) space, i.e., volume, in such a way that volume increases as sounds intensity increases and as frequency decreases. Thus, for example, to make a sound more voluminous, we can increase its intensity or lower the frequency.

Crossmodal research also demonstrates, however, that the relationship between sounds and motion remains complex, with each of the musical parameters being associated with several spatio-kinetic attributes, and viceversa (see , e.g., Spence, Di Stefano [2022], for a recent review of colour-sound associations). For example, pitch direction was shown to be associated with motion, as well as size, while spatial height and motion along the vertical axis were associated with pitch and loudness. This confirms that, as Lippman suggested, spatiality of music is rather a "pseudo"-spatiality, with some salient features, such as motion, bridging the way we experience music and space, while other features being not univocally perceived (for instance, pitch direction is strongly associated with motion in the vertical axis when pitch descends, but not when it rises).

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tackled the issue of spatiality of music combining philosophical and musicological sources with psychological literature on crossmodal associations. Based on such literature, I

have suggested that the concept of space has been applied to sound in two different ways, namely literally and metaphorically. The literal meaning generally refers to the external localization of the sound source, while the metaphorical meaning refers to an allegedly different context, that is, a perceptual, non-physical space peculiar to musical sounds. Exploiting findings from crossmodal research, I tried to show that the two different meanings have similar origins, as they both rely on perceptual processes. The metaphorical use of terms that are typically used to describe physical movements to describe auditory perception is likely rooted in the phenomenological similarity between the way in which we experience physical space and auditory (pseudo-)space (Larson [2012]; Hubbard [2017]). To conclude, it might be worth going back to the pioneering observation by Helmholtz, who early noted that the dynamic change of pitch over time «has a readily recognised and unmistakable resemblance to motion in space, and is often metaphorically termed the ascending or descending motion» (Helmholtz [1954]: 370).

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Aisthesis

Note e recensioni

Martin Buber, *Communauté (Gemeinschaft)*, traduit de l'allemand par Gaël Cheptou, Paris, Éditions de l'éclat, 2018, 157 pp., ISBN: 9782841624324

> «notre communauté ne veut pas la révolution; elle est la révolution»
> (Buber, *Communauté*, p. 32)

> «Depuis que nous sommes un dialogue. Et que nous pouvons entendre les uns des autres»
> (Friedrich Hölderlin, «Fête de paix (*Friedensfeier*)», traduit de l'allemand par Philippe Jaccottet, dans *Œuvres*, Paris, Pléiade, 1967, p. 1212)

> «Hölderlin ne dit pas que nous menions un dialogue, mais que nous le sommes nous-mêmes. Nous *sommes* un dialogue»
> (Buber, *Communauté*, p. 134)

Peut-être que chaque œuvre du passé ne parvient à une compréhension complète qu'à certains moments de son histoire. Dans ce cas, il ne faut absolument pas négliger le rendez-vous. Les six essais rassemblés dans *Communauté (Gemeinschaft)*, rédigés entre 1900 et 1956, font surgir à la lumière du jour des questions qui nous interpellent directement. Il semble donc se dessiner entre la réflexion de Martin Buber (1878-1965) et notre époque un dialogue intime que nous ne devons à aucun prix manquer. Sa philosophie du dialogue, qui suscite actuellement un intérêt grandissant dans le monde francophone comme anglophone, a pour lieu d'inscription la communauté (*Gemeinschaft*): idée sur laquelle Buber nous invite à sérieusement réfléchir; les implications politiques sont considérables. Communauté et dialogue sont intimement liés: nous, en formant la communauté, *sommes* ce dialogue.

La traduction – fine et subtile, à la vue péné-
trante – de l'allemand par Gaël Cheptou des six
essais inédits (traduits ici pour la première fois
en français) dévoile une facette négligée mais
essentielle de la philosophie de Buber: à savoir
sa réflexion politique autour du concept de com-
munauté, lieu de réalisation de sa philosophie
du dialogue. Trois grands moments dans l'itiné-
raire intellectuel de Buber en témoignent: (i) ses
réflexions sur le monde hassidique au sein duquel
il identifie un vivre-ensemble – communauté des
plus dynamiques – regroupé autour d'un *Tsaddiq*
(קידצ désignant cet homme juste; maître spirituel
servant d'intermédiaire entre Dieu et le peuple
juif) et permettant ainsi au *Je* d'entrer en dialogue
avec le *Tu*, au *Nous* de dialoguer avec *Il*; (ii) la fré-
quentation des cercles anarchistes autour de son
ami Gustav Landauer; (iii) l'expérience du kib-
boutz en Palestine (*communautés-révolutions*).

Communauté et *Je et Tu* (*Ich und Du*, 1923)
s'illuminent mutuellement. Les deux ouvrages
engagent l'anthropologie bubérienne qui s'arti-
cule autour de l'interhumain. Qui plus est, l'action
commune des hommes – qui est véritablement
le fil conducteur du présent ouvrage rassemblant
les six essais – se présente aux yeux de Buber
comme la réalisation d'une essence qui se trouve
déjà dans l'individu même: en déployant un *agir*
dialogique collectif, les individus font émerger un
ordre qui les dépasse, sans pour autant les effa-
cer. L'individualité est alors débordée par une
supra-individualité. Il y a comme une permanence
dans la pensée de Buber – du début du XXᵉ siècle
jusqu'après les deux grandes guerres mondiales –
quant au souci de réfléchir la communauté, ce qui
dans une certaine mesure revient à penser non pas
uniquement ce que nous *faisons* mais aussi qui
nous *sommes* (un *Je* qui devient *Je* au contact du
Tu). À cet effet, Buber oppose société et commu-
nauté. Fondé sur des *affinités électives*, «une bien-
heureuse communion, qui harmoniserait infinité
et liberté» (p. 17), l'esprit communautaire prend
la forme dans l'horizon philosophico-politique
bubérien d'une alternative concrète aux forces
sociétales. Malgré l'expansion de la société sur la
terre, forme insuffisant et suffocante de la mise

en commun entre individus, Buber resta persuadé
qu'«il y a encore assez de place sur la terre pour
bâtir de nouveaux foyers et de nouveaux sanc-
tuaires» (p. 31).

À cet effet, il est frappant de constater la
diversité des exemples politiques et culturels sur
lesquels Buber s'appuie dans le présent ouvrage
afin de déplier la question de l'expérience com-
munautaire: il explore la doctrine taoïste, la pen-
sée d'Héraclite, les Upanishad, et naturellement le
modèle grecque. L'originalité d'une telle approche
mérite donc d'être soulignée. L'ampleur de l'entre-
prise herméneutique bubérienne témoigne, entre
autres choses, d'une grande sensibilité à l'égard de
la diversité des expériences humaines. Depuis le
vaste horizon de sa réflexion sur la communauté,
Buber repère deux mouvements contrastés (l'un
souterrain, l'autre apparent) qui semblent curieu-
sement s'accompagner sur deux niveaux différents:
alors que le modèle sociétal froid et chosifiant
exerce une influence de plus en plus écrasante
sur les sphères d'activités humaines, ouvrant sur
la grande catastrophe à venir, un certain mouve-
ment souterrain (*communauté*) semble également
prendre forme:

> ne se livrant qu'au regard pénétrant, encore peu effi-
> cace dans le monde des choses, exprimant son rêve
> dans d'étranges balbutiements, fondé sur le primat
> de l'esprit comme manifestation créatrice du désir de
> Dieu, porté par l'effort de toute humanité authentique
> vers la véritable communauté considérée comme une
> révélation de Dieu toujours inconnu (p. 44).

Certes, les forces de la société avancent de
manière conquérante sur le champ de bataille: or,
en retrait, à l'abri de certains regards pour ain-
si dire, des communautés prennent forment, ici
et là – l'esprit de communauté bien que discret
demeure vivant dans le cœur de certains indivi-
dus. En dépit de fortes rafales violentes, cette étin-
celle – aussi petite soit-elle – persiste. Buber, en
tant que penseur profondément religieux, davan-
tage hétérodoxe qu'orthodoxe, lie intimement
le dialogue du *Je* et du *Tu* qui s'enracine dans la
communauté avec le dialogue à portée divine
entre *Nous* et *Il* (Dieu). Cette communauté tissant

un lien dynamique entre individualité, supra-individualité et divinité qui émerge alors fait exploser la simple imbrication sociétale d'une vie collective mutilée sur le modèle de «l'un *avec* l'autre»: la vie en communauté se caractérise pour sa part par une juxtaposition accommodante de «l'un *à côté de* l'autre», ouvrant sur la disponibilité réciproque de «l'un *envers* l'autre» (p. 42). Ainsi le *Tu* donne miraculeusement naissance au *Je*. Dans cette perspective, la communauté juxtapose en son être le profane et le sacré: la communauté verticale des hommes exprime le désir d'un Dieu qui se dérobe à l'homme et de ce fait enracine, ici-bas, la communauté verticale nous liant à Dieu.

C'est pourquoi la marche du monde inquiète Buber. Il constate avec amertume que le déclin – et la disparition qui va s'en suivre – de ces communautés hassidiques qu'il pose en modèle communautaire, organisées d'une manière dynamique autour d'un *Tsaddiq*, n'est absolument pas un fait isolé: c'est tout le monde qui s'oriente vers «toujours moins de communauté» (p. 61). La communauté juive, «qui représente peut-être un cas unique parmi toutes les communautés, en étant à la fois et indissociablement communauté de destin et communauté de foi, un peuple en vertu d'une révélation et une révélation portée par un peuple» (p. 74), est particulièrement menacée dans cette conjoncture; en témoigne l'expulsion sanglante que subiront les Juifs de la communauté comme de la société.

Buber s'efforce d'extirper le concept de communauté loin des approches abstraites afin de l'inscrire dans *l'ici et maintenant*: le chemin du *Je* vers le *Tu* répond à une exigence pratique. Il fait alors sienne la question des conditions pratiques d'une vie en communauté. Aujourd'hui, dans une société atomisée et éclatée, il s'avère urgent de penser ces conditions en vue d'un *autre* modèle politique, renouvelé.

Dans la *Préface* (p. 7-20) de *Communauté*, Dominique Bourel procède en trois temps. D'abord, il tisse la toile de fond de l'itinéraire humaniste de la vie de Buber, né le 8 février 1878 à Vienne et mort à Jérusalem le 13 juin 1965 (p. 7-12). Ce faisant, Bourel a pour objectif de jeter un éclairage important sur la manière dont la vie

de Buber «est exemplaire de l'histoire juive du XXᵉ siècle, du moins pour les rescapés» (p. 7): c'est-à-dire précisément en ce qui concerne le rapport du Juif à la communauté. Autrement dit, le problème (la question) communautaire se présente à Buber et aux autres Juifs de langue allemande – ou Allemands d'origine juive? – telle une épreuve à laquelle ils sont confrontés. Qui plus est, le Juif fait l'expérience de la communauté comme ce à quoi il se *heurte* constamment: peut-être qu'il faudrait plutôt parler de ce à quoi *il n'est jamais assuré de ne pas se heurter*, même quand cet individu pense être assimilé et intégré. Dans cet ordre d'idées, les textes de Bourel (*Martin Buber, sentinelle de l'humanité*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2015) et de Michael Löwy (*L'utopie communautaire de Martin Buber*, dans *Juifs hétérodoxes*, Paris, Éditions de l'éclat, 2010) se présentent comme des sources complémentaires qui éclairent la vie de Buber et se réflexion politique sur le concept de communauté, respectivement. Ensuite, l'auteur de la préface plonge le lecteur dans le contexte historique et intellectuel qui a vu naître les six essais qui composent *Communauté* (p. 12-20). La thèse avancée par Bourel est la suivante: la philosophie bubérienne du dialogue et sa réflexion en matière de philosophie de la communauté sont intimement liées. Plus encore, ces six essais prolongement et illuminent le grand texte *Je et Tu* en dévoilant la pensée d'un philosophe se présentant d'une façon bien moins abstraite et beaucoup plus pratique qu'il n'y paraît. Par exemple, souligne Bourel, l'essai de 1956, *Dem Gemeinschaftlichen folgen* (*Suivre ce qui est commun*, p. 95-134), offre «une avancée à la problématique développée dans *Je et Tu*, en ce qu'il [Buber] montre que le *Nous* est le produit d'une parole, du langage entre l'homme et l'*Autre*. Tout comme il avait affirmé « nous *sommes* la Révolution», il écrit, citant Hölderlin, «nous *sommes* un dialogue» (p. 134)» (p. 19). C'est précisément l'ambition du présent ouvrage que de mettre en lumière comment dans la pensée de Buber *dialogue*, *communauté* et *révolution* se nouent. Nous avons là les trois grands piliers de la philosophie politique bubérienne qui a eu pour infatigable ambition pratique d'œuvrer concrè-

tement pour «la croissance d'une communauté nationale nouvelle et transformée» (p. 143-144), comme le rappelle Bourel. Enfin, la préface se conclut par une invitation:

Ces textes, fort bien traduits par Gaël Cheptou, parleront non seulement à ceux que l'histoire des idées du XXe siècle intéresse, à ceux qui savent que cette génération de penseurs juifs de langue allemande a encore à nous parler, mais aussi à tous ceux qui veulent essayer de penser une nouvelle forme de rapports sociaux, communautaires, qui deviendra indispensable dans la période de mondialisation que nous connaissons et de l'atomisation qui en résulte (p. 20).

Alte und neue Gemeinschaft (*Ancienne et nouvelle communauté* [1901], p. 21-34)[1] pose la question des contours d'une «nouvelle communauté» *post*-sociétale qui émerge néanmoins depuis la société:

Quand, au milieu d'hommes engourdis dans le confort, apparaît une chose nouvelle grosse d'avenir, d'une espèce qui leur est inconnue, pour laquelle ils n'ont ni nom ni étiquette et qui, en regard de ce qu'ils appellent la «vie», se présente comme la vraie vie dans toute sa puissance et sa beauté, leur

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[1] «Ancienne et nouvelle communauté (*Alte und neue Gemeinschaft*) est une conférence rédigée en 1900 et tenue en 1901 dans le cadre d'une cercle d'hommes et de femmes, aussi élitiste qu'éphémère, nommé « Nouvelle communauté». Ce cercle, fondé sur des *affinités électives*, était issu d'un premier groupe de poètes qui se réunissaient à partir de 1890 à Friedrichshagen, à l'Est de Berlin. Un second groupe d'artistes se réunit par la suite dans la banlieue Ouest, à Schlachtensee, dans une immense maison de près de 30 pièces. On y trouvait le peintre Fidus (*i. e.* Hugo Höppener), les écrivains Peter Hille, Julius et Heinrich Hart, Else Lasker Schüler et Gustav Landauer, que Buber rencontrera dans ce cadre, et qui deviendra son plus cher ami et dont il sera l'exécuteur testamentaire. Outre une vie presque commune, on écoutait et discutait des conférences de ce type. Restée longtemps inédite, on en doit la première édition allemande à Paul R. [Mendes-]Flohr, mentor des études bubériennes, professeur émérite de l'université hébraïque de Jérusalem et à Chicago, et à Bernard Susser, professeur à Bar Ilan. Elle a paru dans l'*AJS Review* I, en 1976 (p. 41-56). Les notes et variantes du manuscrit sont de Mendes-Flohr et Susser» (p. 154).

méfiance hostile s'exprime généralement par la question: quelle est la finalité de tout cela? Et bien souvent le nouveau, s'il veut rendre raison, ne peut rien répondre à cette question. C'est que le pouvoir créateur qui enfante des mondes nouveaux est incapable de comprendre les vieilles finalités et le vieux langage utilitaire, car il porte en lui quelque chose qui veut dépasser toutes les finalités. S'il répond tout de même à cette question, il dira ce que peut dire aussi l'art le plus haut: sa finalité, c'est lui-même et c'est la vie. Et c'est là notre réponse à la question que beaucoup se posent: Quelle est la finalité de la «Nouvelle communauté»? Elle-même et la vie (p. 21).

La thèse défendue par Buber dans le présent essai s'articule ainsi: en étant sa propre finalité cette nouvelle forme de communauté est en rupture avec les anciennes formes de communauté, qui avaient une finalité extérieure (utilité économique pour un groupe; utilité pour un groupe dans l'au-delà). La réciprocité (dialogue) vivante entre les individus au sein de cette nouvelle espèce de communauté œuvre à la réalisation de l'être même des hommes et des femmes qui la forment, d'où le fait que la «Nouvelle communauté» a la communauté (vie) pour finalité – union vitale des uns envers les autres. Une telle communauté est la source d'une vie pleine et entière – non pas telle ou telle vie particulière.

Dans la philosophie politique bubérienne, vie et communauté se présentent comme les deux faces d'un même être (p. 24). Alors que la société – édifiée sur les fondations posées par les anciennes communautés qui ne cherchaient que l'utilité, sous la forme économique ou religieuse (p. 24) – se présente selon Buber comme le lieu où les individus sont «liés» par une position commune, la communauté renouvelée, pour sa part, s'enracine dans l'expérience vécue véritablement en commun (p. 27). Ce faisant, le philosophe inverse la conception théorique traditionnelle du schéma linéaire qui situe la société comme l'étape suivante de l'évolution quasi-«naturelle» de la forme communautaire. La communauté est alors arrachée à ce schéma: plutôt que *pré-sociétale*, la nouvelle communauté est *post-sociétale*, se situant «au-delà de la société et de ses normes» (p. 31). Concrète-

ment, l'attitude bubérienne envers la société n'a pas pour horizon la destruction et la réforme, mais sa transformation:

> *Elle [la nouvelle communauté] n'entend pas réformer; pour elle, il s'agit bien plutôt de transformer. [...] On nous a suffisamment ressassé qu'il fallait renverser avant de construire. Désormais, nous avons pris conscience que cette thèse était fausse dans son essence la plus profonde. Il y a encore assez de place sur la terre pour bâtir de nouveaux foyers et de nouveaux sanctuaires. Nous ne voulons pas établir notre monde dans le tourbillon des villes où, pour construire de nouvelles maisons, il faut commencer par démolir les vieux débris ; c'est loin de tout cela que nous voulons aller [...]. C'est là que nous pouvons construire sans être préalablement obligés de renverser les choses, avec la profonde et tranquille conviction que, tant qu'il y aura des hommes qui ont la volonté de construire, il existera toujours un espace libre pour la construction – quel que soit le moyen par lequel cet espace sera rendu libre. Donc notre communauté ne veut pas la révolution ; elle est la révolution. Mais elle a surmonté le vieux sens négatif de la révolution ; pour nous la révolution, ce n'est pas de renverser de vieilles choses, c'est vivre de nouvelles choses. Ce n'est pas l'esprit de destruction qui nous anime, mais un enthousiasme créateur. Ce qui fait le caractère de notre révolution, c'est que, en petit groupe, dans une pure communauté, nous fassions naître une vie nouvelle (p. 31-32).*

Loin d'être englouti par la société – cette dernière se constitue en l'absorbant –, l'individu dans la communauté nouvelle réalise sa liberté selon Buber en vivant «simultanément en lui-même et dans les autres» (p. 34). En articulant ainsi individualité et communauté, le philosophe ouvre la voie à la pleine réalisation du *Je* (communauté intérieure de l'homme individuel) en dialogue avec un *Tu*. Au milieu d'une société qui sombre, le *Nous* vivant de la communauté peut alors discrètement s'épanouir.

Gemeinschaft (*Communauté. Paroles pour les temps actuels*, [1919], p. 35-57)[2] prolonge la

réflexion sur la thèse sociologique selon laquelle «la culture moderne occidentale a parcouru la voie qui mène de la communauté à la société; c'est-à-dire que le type organique de vie collective a été refoulé et dissout par un type mécanique de vie collective» (p. 36). Ainsi dans la première partie de l'essai, Buber approfondit l'écart qui sépare communauté et société en insistant sur le sens des divergences de fond. Si la communauté a pour horizon le lien, la société pour sa part est préoccupée par les intérêts: la cohésion interne de la première – en tant qu'union organiquement constituée – repose sur «la possession commune (en particulier de la terre), le travail en commun, des mœurs et des croyances communes» (p. 36-37), alors que la deuxième incarne «un état de séparation bien ordonné, dont la cohésion externe repose sur la contrainte, le contrat, la convention et l'opinion publique» (p. 37); la cité médiévale est la forme représentative de la communauté, la ville moderne démesurée est celle de la société (*ibid.*). Cela étant dit, la dissolution de la communauté par la société n'a pas été totale selon Buber. Au sein même des sociétés modernes, «échappant à son emprise ou à sa vigilance, la communauté, tel le divin enfant, a été préservée dans le secret giron des alliances et des camaraderies fraternelles» (p. 39). La thèse que défend le philosophe, dans ces conditions, est la suivante: nous ne pouvons certes pas revenir à une époque pré-sociétale – communauté originelle ; ce que nous pouvons faire c'est tenter de la dépasser vers une nouvelle forme de communauté, d'«organicité» (p. 41). Dans les mots de Buber, il s'agit de passer de «l'un avec l'autre» vers «l'un à côté de l'autre» en vue de «l'un envers l'autre» (p. 42). Le philosophe distingue alors entre socialisme moderne (p. 38-40) – forme dominante – et un *autre* socialisme (p. 43), plus discret. Si le premier vient accélérer et accomplir le processus de développement menant de l'anéantissement de la communauté à la puissance de la société embrassant toutes choses (État fort), le deuxième s'efforce pour sa part de maîtriser et ainsi dépasser cet élan. Cet autre socialisme est religieux aux yeux de Buber. Dans cet ordre d'idées, en appendice (p. 151-153) du présent ouvrage, le

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[2] «Communauté. Paroles pour les temps actuels (*Gemeinschaft*) parut dans la série publiée par Buber, *Worte an die Zeit*, 2e cahier, Munich 1919» (p. 154).

lecteur découvre de larges extraits d'un important texte de Buber (*Drei Sätze eines religiösen Sozialisme*, *Neue Wege*, vol. 22, 1928, p. 327-329) dans lequel il expose trois thèses sur le socialisme religieux: (i) que socialisme (*socialitas*) et religion (*religio*), par leur essence, sont intimement liés et dépendent l'un de l'autre pour la réalisation et l'accomplissement de leur essence (p. 151) ; (ii) que la véritable *religio* – «véritable attachement de la personne humaine à Dieu [...] laquelle implique la réponse et la responsabilité concrètes de l'homme dans l'ici et le maintenant» – et la véritable *socialitas* – «un véritable développement solidaire de l'humanité [...] laquelle implique la coexistence et l'entraide immédiates des hommes dans l'ici et le maintenant» – entretiennent un dialogue (p. 152); (iii) que le lieu de ce dialogue (rencontre des essences) est ce que Buber appelle la «vie personnelle concrète», c'est-à-dire là où précisément «l'homme [...] prend au sérieux les faits fondamentaux de cette vie: le fait que Dieu est, le fait que le monde est, et le fait que lui, cet être humain, se tient devant Dieu et dans le monde» (p. 153). Le «là-bas et l'après» se refusent à nous quand «l'ici et le maintenant» sont négligés. La vie de l'homme élevée à la vie communautaire engage à la fois la pleine réalisation de sa vie spirituelle (p. 48-49) et sa vie publique (p. 51-54), politique. Ainsi, verticalement et horizontalement, l'individu transcende la société en son sein, depuis l'intérieur même. La communauté ainsi vécue ouvre sur l'élan libérateur de la volonté humaine, vers un autrui non plus froidement chosifié (*Cela*) mais vers l'autrui de la réciprocité (*Tu*), et vers Dieu. Cet élan est conçu chez Buber dans sa double dimension: «élan de la volonté humaine vers Dieu et élan de la volonté divine vers l'homme sont inséparables» (p. 56). Dans l'humanité libre et réalisée le divin émerge, «veut venir à maturité» (*ibid.*). Sa présence se révèle chaque fois «qu'un homme tend la main à un autre homme dans la vérité»: ainsi, les «hommes qui désirent la communauté désirent Dieu [;] [t]out désir de véritable attachement mène vers Dieu; et tout désir de Dieu mène à la véritable communauté» (p. 57). Si Dieu ne veut pas être possédé mais réalisé, la voie pro-

metteuse que nous présente Buber dans les termes de la communauté nouvelle apparaît dès lors tel un tournant politico-métaphysique crucial.

Le constat sur lequel Buber s'appuie dans *Wie kann Gemeinschaft werden?* (*Comment une communauté peut-elle advenir?*, [1930], p. 58-89)[3] est implacable: la pire des expériences que l'homme moderne tente de dissimuler est la douloureuse expérience du «toujours-moins-de-communauté» (p. 61); qui est dans une certaine mesure inversement proportionnelle au «toujours-plus-de-société». Or, souligne Buber, elle semble être camouflée au moyen de pseudo-communautés:

l'époque où nous vivons est une époque où l'espèce humaine tente d'oublier cette douloureuse expérience, la pire de toutes, [...] en fondant toutes sortes de communautés illusoires, toutes sortes d'unions illusoires entre ou plutôt par-dessus les peuples ; des unions illusoires qui, malgré tout ce qu'elles peuvent avoir de bénéfique, ne parviennent pas à fonder de véritables communautés de vie ; des unions qui ne sont pas à même de surmonter le conflit qui réside non seulement à la surface, mais aussi au cœur de cette espèce humaine. À une époque, précisément, où l'espèce humaine se flatte d'avoir fondé, du moins de nom, une Ligue des nations [la Société des Nations (1919-1946), précurseur de l'Organisation des Nations Unies (1945-)] pour la première fois de son histoire, tout homme qui a deux yeux pour voir et une intelligence pour penser sait que cette même espèce humaine, toute fière qu'elle est, est menacée par l'autodestruction. [...] c'est à nous de bien comprendre, en gardant la tête froide et calme, ce qu'est une communauté et ce qu'elle n'est pas (p. 61-62).

La philosophie bubérienne appelle donc à ne plus nous mentir, nous satisfaire d'illusions. Penser sans fléchir la crise de la communauté, aussi douloureuse soit-elle, est la seule voie sérieuse qui se présente à nous afin d'engager notre être vers une

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[3] «Comment une communauté peut-elle advenir? (*Wie kann Gemeinschaft werden ?*) est un discours prononcé au congrès de l'Union des associations de jeunesse juives d'Allemagne à Munich en juin 1930. Il fut publié dans la revue *Jugendbund* de Düsseldorf (Juillet-Août 1930), p. 3-7» (p. 155).

autre communauté, renouvelée, «laquelle ne saurait venir si nous continuons à nous mentir sur la problématique de notre temps» (p. 66). C'est pourquoi, en s'appuyant sur la distinction opérée par Max Weber entre socialisation sociétaire (*Vergesellschaftung*) – fondée sur des intérêts – et socialisation communautaire (*Vergemeinschaftung*) – fondée sur des sentiments –, qu'il estime néanmoins insuffisante (p. 62) en raison du fait que «le sentiment n'est pas suffisant pour fonder ce qu'est une communauté» (p. 63) mais un simple groupement, le philosophe propose de distinguer plutôt entre union d'intérêts (société) et union de vie (communauté). En associant leur *vie*, dans tout ce qu'elle engage, non seulement dans une certaine partie de son être, les hommes éprouvent de toute leur existence (être) cette union communautaire; l'être étant alors entièrement engagé. Cet être communautaire Buber le localise d'abord dans la cellule communautaire familiale (p. 65). C'est elle qui est la première touchée par la crise de la communauté: la décadence de la famille témoigne de la décadence de la communauté (*vice versa*). Dans ces conditions, le renouveau de l'être communautaire passe dans la pensée politique bubérienne par une renaissance de la cellule communautaire familiale. Il n'est absolument pas suffisant que l'union de vie entre ses membres existe simplement *de facto*, elle doit être pleinement vécue comme telle. À partir de là la volonté vitale de l'être communautaire se trouve libérée en direction de la communauté-à-venir. Sur ce point, c'est-à-dire sur la manière dont la communauté puisse advenir, Buber précise sa pensée: on ne peut *fabriquer* une communauté (p. 67); la plus sûre voie pour justement rater l'avènement de la communauté, c'est la vouloir à tout prix. «Une communauté se forme donc quand les hommes n'ont précisément aucune intention de réaliser une «communauté», quand ils ne prétendent pas qu'il suffit de tendre la main à son voisin de droite et à son voisin de gauche pour que les hommes dansent autour du monde» (p. 68). C'est en faisant ensemble l'expérience des choses «et qu'ils réagissent ensemble à cette expérience par leur vie concrète» (*ibid.*) – nuant alors des liens mutuels –

que les hommes forment une communauté. Disposés autour d'un «centre vivant» (*lebendige Mitte*) qui les réunit organiquement, harmonisant une place pour chacun d'entre eux, les hommes la font apparaître. Ainsi cette communauté prend forme en traçant « non pas un cercle, mais des rayons vers un centre» (*ibid.*).

La thèse avancée par Buber dans le présent essai est donc la suivante: pour faire advenir la communauté, il faut non pas la vouloir à tout prix – ou pire, se contenter d'illusions et d'apparences de communautés –, mais se montrer *capables de communauté* (p. 75). Vivre en commun dans un même espace ne peut pas suffire. À ce titre, la vie en société témoigne d'un paradoxe fondamental: entouré de millions d'individus, l'homme vivant en société ne s'est jamais senti aussi seul et isolé. La capacité de vivre en communauté, dans ces circonstances, repose sur la capacité de l'être individuel à écouter autrui, non pas à simplement prêter l'oreille le temps d'un bref instant aux revendications d'un adversaire, mais à être sensible, ouvrir l'oreille et le cœur à autrui. C'est alors que «l'authenticité des relations immédiates et entières entre l'homme et l'homme» (p. 77) ouvre sur la possibilité de communauté. La situation du judaïsme (p. 80-81) qui préoccupe la jeunesse judéo-allemande et l'auditoire de Buber dans le cadre de la présente conférence doit donc être appréhendée depuis *ici et maintenant*, c'est-à-dire «précisément le fait de partager l'expérience de la situation dans laquelle on se trouve historiquement et d'y répondre collectivement» (p. 80). Pour faire communauté, la jeunesse judéo-allemande doit selon Buber se montre capable de communauté, à savoir dans une vie authentique et dialogique entre le *Je* et le *Tu*, pour faire apparaître un *Nous* renouvelé; dans le temps de *maintenant*.

Gemeinschaft und Umwelt (*Communauté et environnement*, [1953], p. 90-94)[4] attire l'attention

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4 «*Communauté et environnement* (*Gemeinschaft und Umwelt*) est le texte de la préface au livre de Erich A. Gutkind, *Community and Environment. A Discourse in Social Ecology*, Londres, Watts, 1953, p. vii-ix. C'est l'année où Buber se rend en Allemagne pour recevoir le prix Goethe de la Hanse de Hamburg (attribué en 1951),

du lecteur sur une idée forte de la philosophie bubérienne: la réalité humaine essentielle ne se réduit ni à la réalité de la vie individuelle, ni même à celle de la vie collective; elle se déploie plutôt entre le *Je* et le *Tu* (p. 92). Derrière cette idée fondamentale de la pensée de Buber se dissimule un secret, à savoir que ce que l'homme désire du plus profond de son être c'est d'être confirmé dans son existence par autrui, mais aussi qu'autrui lui permette de le confirmer à son tour (p. 93). Ainsi, note Buber, ce «secret désir de l'homme pour une vie dans la confirmation mutuelle et réciproque doit être développé par l'éducation, mais il faut également créer les conditions externes dont on a besoin pour qu'il se réalise » (p. 93-94). L'architecture, à cet effet, a pour rôle de façonner un espace adéquat pour le *Je* et le *Tu*.

L'avant-dernier essai *Dem Gemeinschaftlichen folgen* (*Suivre ce qui est commun*, [1956], p. 95-134)[5] du présent ouvrage a pour point de départ la philosophie d'Héraclite tel qu'exprimée dans le fragment DK 22B89. «Cette sentence nous dit que ceux qui sont éveillés ont un seul et unique *cosmos* qui leur est commun, c'est-à-dire une seule et même structure du monde à laquelle ils prennent part en commun» (p. 95). Rappelant l'interprétation de Plutarque selon laquelle «chaque dormeur se détourne du *cosmos* commun pour se tourner vers quelque chose qui lui est exclusivement propre, vers quelque chose, donc, qu'il ne partage et ne peut partager avec

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ainsi que le prix de la paix de la librairie allemande. Paraît alors *L'Éclipse de Dieu*, un des rares textes où il thématise la Shoah. Erich Gurking (1877-1965), né à Berlin, est le célèbre auteur de *Siderische Geburt-Seraphische Wanderung vom Tode der elt zur Taufe der Tat* (1910), 'bible' des cercles mystico-pacifistes allemands. Exilé aux États-Unis en 1933, il enseignera à la *New School for Social Research* et jouera un grand rôle dans la redéfinition du judaïsme traditionnel, entre l'orthodoxie et le libéralisme. Il deviendra l'un des prophètes du New Age» (p. 155).
[5] «*Suivre ce qui est commun* (*Dem Gemeinschaftlichen folgen*) fut publié dans *Die neue Rundschau* LXVII/4 (1956), p. 582-600. Cette revue, fondée par Samuel Fischer en 1890, puis sous ce nom à partir de 1893, est encore aujourd'hui une des plus prestigieuses revues culturelles en Europe» (p. 155).

aucun autre» (p. 96), Buber attire l'attention du lecteur sur «l'idée fondamentale que le déroulement rythmique de notre vie quotidienne n'est pas un changement entre deux états, mais un changement entre deux sphères dans lesquelles nous nous trouvons alternativement et dont l'une d'elles se voit conférer par Héraclite le nom de *cosmos*» (*ibid.*). Ce faisant, Buber engage une réflexion sur la dualité entre le sommeil et la veille à partir d'Héraclite. Plus précisément, c'est le *cosmos* humain qui l'intéresse – c'est-à-dire la structuration du monde –, dans la mesure où les hommes éveillés œuvrent collectivement à son édification en entrant en relation: ils y parviennent, souligne le philosophe, «que si, et dans la mesure où, ils sont véritablement éveillés, s'ils ne dorment pas en étant éveillés, s'ils ne se font pas des illusions rêveuses – en un mot, s'ils existent en commun» (p. 98). Le *cosmos* n'est *cosmos* que du moment où nous l'éprouvons mutuellement (p. 99). Formulée autrement, l'idée est la suivante: la tâche de l'esprit est d'œuvrer à la création d'une réalité commune. Buber s'appuie sur deux contre-exemples pour en démontrer le sens: (i) la doctrine de Tao dans le contexte chinois (p. 100-104); (ii) l'enseignement des Upanishad dans le contexte indien (p. 104-109). L'intention bubérienne derrière cette juxtaposition est précisée ainsi:

> *Si j'en appelle à la philosophie d'Héraclite, apparemment empreinte de contradictions, contre les sagesses harmonieusement flottantes de l'Orient, c'est au nom d'une nécessité spécifique de notre époque. Je veux parler ici de la confrontation actuelle de deux points de vue : le premier porte la collectivité au plus haut degré, tandis que le second estime que le sens de la vie se révèle, ou du moins peut se révéler, dans le rapport de chacun à soi-même. Le premier point de vue apparaît comme un travestissement de l'idée antique du commun ; le second, défendu par des philosophes, des psychologues et des écrivains occidentaux, se réclame volontiers des doctrines de l'Inde ancienne et de leurs ramifications (p. 110).*

Collectivisme moderne et variante moderne de l'individualisme sont rejetés par Buber: le premier est négation de l'absolu de la communauté – car

bien que le collectivisme moderne place la collectivité au-dessus de tout, il ne semble toutefois pas lui attribuer un caractère absolu, considérant un tel absolu comme une «fiction inadmissible» (p. 111) – et le deuxième est affirmation d'un faux absolu – le moi individuel y est autoglorifié et l'existence individuelle prime sur tout, rendant un tel individualisme plus dangereux que le collectivisme (*ibid.*). Les trois exemples à partir desquels Buber déplie son argumentation peuvent alors être résumés de la sorte: si la doctrine taoïste invite au détachement de l'être (existence personnelle) du commun vers la solitude au milieu du monde et la doctrine des Upanishad dans la solitude au-dessus du monde, la philosophie héraclitéenne pour sa part «enjoint de suivre le commun» (p. 122). Ainsi le *logos* qui nous est commun touche à sa plénitude «non pas en nous, mais entre nous; car il représente l'éternelle occasion pour le langage de devenir vrai entre les hommes. C'est pour cela qu'il leur est commun», insiste Buber (p. 124). En d'autres mots, la participation au *logos* commun a lieu quand les hommes pensent en commun, parlant et s'écoutant mutuellement, engageant le processus « sans cesse renouvelé d'entrée du sens dans la parole vivante» (*ibid.*). L'idée héraclitéenne de *cosmos* commun s'insère alors dans la réflexion de Buber sur la communauté : de ce *cosmos* nous provenons et il provient de nous. Le *Nous* qui surgit tire sa substance du langage, de ce *parler* qui se déploie entre le *Je* et le *Tu*. Il est principe de responsabilité:

> *Au fond, la fuite hors du cosmos commun vers une sphère particulière considérée comme l'être vrai est, dans toutes ses variantes [...] une fuite devant l'exigence existentielle envers la personne humaine, laquelle doit se montrer à la hauteur du Nous. C'est une fuite devant l'authentique oralité du langage dans le royaume duquel une réponse est toujours exigée, et donner une réponse, c'est prendre une responsabilité (p. 131-132).*

La philosophie buberienne a le mérite d'être claire: pour approcher le *Nous* authentique il faut d'abord passer par le *Tu*. Retrouver l'authenticité du langage dans le dialogue entre le *Je* et le *Tu*

c'est pour Buber retrouver l'existence accomplie dans le *Nous*, véritable «être-nous» (*Wirheit*) (p. 133). Le *commun* héraclitéen et le *commun* bubérien se séparent toutefois sur un point crucial. Ne conduisant pas au-delà de lui-même – *logos* et *cosmos* sont chez Héraclite renfermés sur eux-mêmes sans que rien de transcendant ne puisse subsister –, la conception héraclitéenne est insuffisante selon Buber du moment qu'elle n'ouvre sur aucune transcendance (*ibid.*). Le *Nous* de Buber, fidèle au langage d'Israël, «pilier sud du pont entre l'Orient [Tao et Upanishad] et l'Occident [Héraclite]» est un *Nous* qui se tient ultimement devant *Il*, Dieu. Et c'est dans la parole poétique d'Hölderlin que Buber trouve l'expression d'un tel *Nous* qui se tient en face de Dieu (p. 134): de l'homme qui est lui-même dialogue.

Das Experiment des Kibbutz (*Une expérience qui n'a pas rencontré l'échec*, [1945], p. 135-150)[6] est un essai de philosophie politique qui étudie cette forme de communauté qu'est le kibboutz (עוביק –«assemblée» ou «ensemble» – forme de village collectiviste créé pour la première fois en 1909 en Palestine). Ce qui intéresse Buber, plus que tout, ce sont les conditions pratiques d'une vie en communauté: dans cette perspective, le

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[6] «Une expérience qui n'a pas rencontré l'échec (*Das Experiment des Kibbutz*) a paru dans la revue multilingue *Ariel. Revue des Arts et des Lettres d'Israël*, n° 24, Jérusalem, été 1971, sans indication de nom traducteur. Une note de la rédaction précise qu'il s'agit d'un extrait d'une conférence prononcée «au cours d'un symposium organisé en avril 1945 par la Fédération des Travailleurs Agricoles et par l'Université Hébraïque» dont l'intégralité constitue le chapitre X: «Encore une expérience» de *Netivot beutopia* [1947], publié en français sous le titre *Socialisme et utopie* (traduit par Paul Corset et François Girard, préface d'Emmanuel Lévinas, Paris, Aubier, 1977; rééd. Paris, L'échappée, 2016). Toutefois le texte diffère sur quelques points de détail, ce qui nous a incités à le publier ici, ne serait-ce que pour la formule «un Ein Harod céleste», qui ne figure pas dans *Socialisme et utopie* et stimulera sans aucun doute l'esprit du lecteur sensible aux «collusions de noumènes». La traduction a été légèrement modifiée. Le titre est de la revue. L'original allemand a paru dans un volume intitulée *Kollektiverziehung im Kibbutz*, édité par Ludwig Liegle, München, Pieper, 1971, p. 26-35» (p. 156).

kibboutz se présente tel un «non-échec remarquable» dans l'histoire des communautés. Or, pour comprendre cette expérience qui n'a pas rencontré l'échec selon Buber, il convient de la rattacher au contexte capitaliste qui constitue son arrière-plan. Buber est ici fidèle à sa thèse selon laquelle la communauté nouvelle n'a guère besoin d'être animée par l'esprit de destruction de la société capitaliste (c'est-à-dire des *vieux débris*): elle peut au contraire faire naître une vie nouvelle depuis la société même, de son intérieur, via l'enthousiasme créateur des membres de cette nouvelle communauté qui ont pour conviction qu'il y a encore assez de place sur la terre pour bâtir de nouveaux foyers où l'être-présent-au-monde-et-à-autrui puisse non pas se loger mais habiter. Après tout, «loger» n'est pas «habiter»: autrement dit, alors que le logement vise à simplement satisfaire les exigences biologiques de confort physique de l'homme, l'habitation permet à l'homme de réaliser son être du moment que c'est précisément parce que ce dernier «habite», que son «habitat» devient véritable «habitation». Pour Buber les forces capitalistes s'attaquent directement au pluralisme inhérent aux vivre-ensemble. Et c'est précisément ce caractère complexe, divers, hétérogène, profondément pluraliste qui permet aux individus de résister au monisme violemment imposé par l'État centralisateur (p. 135). Qui plus est, insiste le philosophe, l'histoire des idées politiques dévoile la manière dont cette «résistance [pluraliste] fut [déjà] brisée par la Révolution française, dont la politique fut dirigée contre les privilèges de toutes les associations libres. Par la suite, le centralisme, sous la forme nouvelle du capitalisme, réussit là où il avait jadis échoué: il parvint à atomiser la société» (*ibid.*). C'est pourquoi il n'est pas faux d'affirmer que le capitalisme ne veut pas avoir affaire à des communautés fortes, à des associations fondées sur des affinités électives et à des «être-nous» politiquement dynamiques: il ne veut avoir affaire qu'à des individus atomisés et éclatés.

Les pseudo-communautés – dans le domaine politique, les partis, et dans le domaine économique, les associations commerciales – qui (*in*) existent sont finalement «privées de toute vie auto-nome» (p. 136), elles ne sont pas en mesure de devenir la source de vie de nouvelles communautés: il en est de même pour les organisations coopératives – aussi bien de production (hautement bureaucratiques) que de consommation (hautement spécialisées) (p. 137) – qui n'engagent l'être de l'individu que partiellement, ne réussissant pas à véritablement ouvrir sur la vie pleinement communale. En posant ces insuffisances, Buber fait de la place à ce qui semble être «[l']effort de loin le plus puissant qui ait été fait dans cette direction [réalisation de l'être communautaire]», à savoir le modèle du village collectiviste au sein duquel la vie en communauté « est fondée sur l'union de la production et de la consommation, la production ne désignant pas exclusivement l'agriculture, mais l'union organique de l'agriculture, de l'industrie et de l'artisanat» (p. 138). Si Buber appose le terme «échec» aux tentatives de communautés (entre 1795-1945, approximativement) qui ultimement se sont désintégrées, sont devenues des forces capitalistes ou qui n'ont pas réussit à briser l'isolement et à se rassembler en union de communautés (fédération) (*ibid.*), l'expérience de la commune de village (kibboutz) – telle que les Juifs la réalisent sous diverses formes en Palestine, s'efforçant de mettre en place une structure pleinement coopérative – est présentée comme un «non-échec remarquable» (p. 140-141). Pourquoi ? Si les raisons sont multiples, note Buber, c'est leur esprit *pratique* qui tranche:

Dans l'esprit des membres des premières communes juives en Palestine, les motifs de l'idéal venaient se fondre dans les exigences de l'heure; [...]. L'important est que ces motifs restaient souples presque de tout point de vue. L'avenir était l'objet de rêves divers: on voyait venir une forme nouvelle et plus compréhensive de la famille, on se considérait comme l'avant-garde du mouvement des travailleurs, comme l'instrument direct de la réalisation du socialisme, comme le prototype de la nouvelle [communauté]; le but qu'on se proposait était la création d'un homme nouveau et d'un monde nouveau. Mais rien de tout cela ne s'est jamais figé en un programme tout fait. À la différence de ce qui s'est passée partout ailleurs dans l'histoire des fondations des mouvements coo-

pératifs, ces hommes et ces femmes n'apportaient pas un plan avec eux, un plan que la situation concrète aurait dû réaliser parfaitement, sans pouvoir le modifier; l'idéal donnait une impulsion, mais ne formulait pas de dogmes; il stimulait, mais ne prescrivait pas (p. 142-143).

Le «succès» («non-échec») du kibboutz est ainsi étroitement lié à la forme-de-vie communautaire qui, sans sombrer dans l'isolement et le capitalisme, exerça une véritable influence sur l'idée nationale.

Le dynamisme de cette nouvelle communauté, insiste Buber, se transforma en centre d'attraction, source de vie pour les membres qui la regardaient de l'extérieur comme de l'intérieur (p. 143-144). En d'autres mots, l'ouverture d'esprit qui émerge de cette forme-de-vie en communauté ne peut pas passer inaperçue: «Une communauté réelle n'a pas besoin d'être composée de membres qui vivent toujours ensemble; mais elle doit être composée de membres qui, précisément parce qu'ils sont compagnons, ont «accès» les uns aux autres et sont disponibles les uns pour les autres» (p. 146). Reste que la réflexion politique de Buber sur le kibboutz est soucieuse de mettre en lumière l'apparition d'un problème fondamental. Celui non pas à l'intérieur de la communauté, entre ses membres, mais dans les relations entre les communautés. L'enjeu de l'unification des communautés révèle alors le déclin :

Sous une forme d'abord indifférenciée, une tendance fédérative était connaturelle aux communes, qui les poussait à se fondre dans une plus large unité sociale; et c'était une tendance très importante, puisqu'elle montrait que le kibboutz comprenait implicitement qu'il était la cellule d'une société dotée de nouvelles structures [communauté des communautés]. À la suite de l'éclatement et de la prolifération des diverses formes, depuis la forme semi-individualiste qui préservait jalousement son indépendance dans l'économie, dans la manière de vivre, dans l'éducation des enfants, etc., jusqu'à la pure forme communiste, l'unité singulière fut remplacée par une série d'unités, du type de l'association, chaque association ayant sa forme propre de village coopératif et une

conception de la vie humaine plus ou moins définie. Mais quelque chose d'autre survint, qui mena à une prodigieuse intensification de cette attitude de la part des associations: la politisation. Il y a vingt ans [en 1925], le leader de l'une des plus grandes associations pouvait affirmer, non sans emphase: «Nous sommes une communauté, non un parti». La situation a radicalement changé entre-temps, et il s'est ensuivi une détérioration des conditions requises pour l'unification (p. 149).

Cette grande lutte politisée qui a éclaté autour de la question de l'unification porte une double signification pour Buber. D'une part, est grand et remarquable l'effort dynamique déployé par les membres de ces nouvelles communautés pour dépasser «l'un avec l'autre» vers «l'un à côté de l'autre» en vue de «l'un envers l'autre», et ainsi tenter d'ouvrir l'être vers une communauté des communautés (*communitas communitatum*), une organisation humaine structurellement nouvelle. D'autre part, est petite et déplorable la querelle autour de l'unification qui a éloigné les individus de *l'union de vie* vers *l'union d'intérêts*: expérience couronnée non pas de succès, mais d'un non-échec.

Prises ensemble, les différentes facettes de la philosophie politique buberienne exposées dans *Communauté* convergent dans la grande thèse: « notre communauté ne *veut* pas la révolution ; elle *est* la révolution» (p. 32). Orientée vers une nouvelle communauté, cette «pensée nouvelle» déployée par Buber prend une forme dialogique: elle est dans son essence même en rupture avec la «pensée traditionnelle» et moderne en ce sens que ce ne sont plus les doctrines fixes – enseignements et règles transmis par la tradition – qui fondent la vie mais l'expérience d'une présence, présence immédiatement éprouvée du *Tu* par le *Je*. Le *Tu* (autrui ou *Tu* éternel) vivant qui entre en dialogue avec le *Je* révèle le fait que c'est fondamentalement l'image de la rencontre qui traduit le mieux l'essence de l'expérience politique, mais aussi religieuse: la présence agissante et non chosifiante du *Tu* vient à ma rencontre et attend une réponse dans la parole vivante, que ce soit dans la communauté horizontale ou verticale (les deux

se juxtaposant dans la nouvelle communauté chez Buber). La pensée nouvelle bubérienne, dans ces conditions, se propose comme une alternative respectable à la philosophie théorique traditionnelle en remettant sérieusement en question le rationalisme (primauté du moi rationnel qui chercher à déduire à partir de son propre fond les contenus de la conscience). Au contraire, la pensée nouvelle en appelle à une transformation du *Je* pour l'ouvrir au *Tu*: ainsi, une telle transformation «spirituelle» a comme conséquence pour le jeune Juif pris dans sa perplexité (tension entre la sagesse grecque qui selon la formule de Juda Halévi *donne des fleurs mais pas de fruits* et la sagesse biblique qui selon Maïmonide a besoin d'Aristote pour être interprétée en profondeur) de l'orienter vers le «retour» à la communauté juive. Ce faisant, assimilation et sionisme politique (dans sa version dominante) sont écartés: les deux «solutions» signalent d'une certaine manière l'abandon de la religion – niant un des faits fondamentaux de la vie selon Buber: le fait que Dieu est et que l'homme se tient devant Lui), en reléguant la religion au rang des affaires privées pour le premier, en sécularisant les catégories religieuses sous la forme de catégories politiques pour le deuxième. Néanmoins, l'interrogation persiste dans l'esprit du lecteur : est-ce que la pensée nouvelle – qui est le socle de la nouvelle communauté telle qu'esquissée par Buber – a réellement été en mesure de rompre avec les catégories et idées dominantes de la pensée traditionnelle et moderne qu'elle cherche à dépasser? La question se pose d'autant plus que le vocabulaire même et le cadre des interprétations de la pensée nouvelle semble se déployer à partir de certaines prémisses propres à la modernité. Par exemple, la philosophie politique bubérienne hérite des cadres conceptuels du socialisme – via l'héritage intellectuel de Landauer, entre autres choses – que Buber investit afin de mettre en mouvement sa réflexion sur une communauté nouvelle socialiste et religieuse. C'est peut-être dans cette dialectique *continuité-rupture* que la pensée nouvelle bubérienne se déploie: le plus important étant le trait d'union qui unit dans la mesure même où il sépare. La question demeure donc ouverte et en tension : Buber,

ni véritablement théologien, ni philosophe théorique, *penseur d'esprit pratique.*

(par Mario Ionuț Maroșan)

Agnès Gayraud, *Dialectic of pop*, 2019; Falmouth, Urbanomic Media; 456 pages; 26euro; ISBN 1913029557

Agnès Gayraud rebels against the Adornian stigmatisation of popular music and insists that pop music (*la pop* or *musiques populaires enregistrées*) has been one fundamental *récit* and force of musical, cultural and political history. This is why in *Dialectic of Pop*, the French philosopher insists on thinking dialectically about pop music in such a way that it is considered, once and for all, a musical art. Gayraud thus calls for justice to be done to the musical material of pop music, i.e. to its complexity, history and unfair stigmatisation, of which Theodor W. Adorno was the forerunner. In other words, she thinks seriously, as she says, about pop music in the field of philosophy, to the point of giving it an aesthetic of its own. To begin with, she redefines and broadens the notion of popular music, which she calls "pop music" (*la pop*) or "popular recorded music" (*musiques populares enregistrées*). In this sense, pop music is «the globalised phenomenon that fuses black American influences, remnants of European folk music, African drums, and Indian sitars, all captured by the technological means -electrification, amplification, studio production- of recorded music» (p.19).

In the first part of *Dialectic of pop*, Gayraud claims that the category of aesthetics of pop music distinguishes the pop form as a musical art whose *raison d'être* is recording (*l'enregistrement*). Rather than disparaging properties or technical qualities such as recording or the popular character of pop music, Gayraud builds on them to prove that pop music is *omnivorous*, that it shares aspects with the musical modernism so revered by the German philosopher, and that these works also possess an aesthetic truth (*verité esthétique*). In other

words, the formal and possible condition of pop is recording, and this determines the fragmented and plural form of pop music. With regard to the popular character of recorded pop music, the author states that «the popular does not at all designate a point of origin, it is a destination» (p.420). Gayraud is optimistic about the democratisation of mass culture and the diversity of pop as a tool that gives voice to different communities and collectives, what she calls "the utopia of popularity". Contrary to Adorno, the French philosopher rejoices in the accessibility, communicability and plurality of pop music instead of defining and condemning "the residual language of pop". The author of *Dialectic of Pop* considers accessibility as a virtue because it allows all listeners, regardless of class, origins or musical knowledge, to recognise the work of art without obstacles or hostility. This is conductive to creating sort of reconciliation or *promesse de bonheur* and a shared aesthetic experience between listeners.

The most remarkable and courageous aspect of Gayraud's first work is that she thinks with, against and from Adorno. Thus, notions of Critical Theory such as negativity, historicity and progress articulate her original discourse on pop musician order to revalue it. At the end of the first part of this book, the philosopher, musician and music critic explains that pop is constituted negatively. This means that the form of pop has «a broken form, dislocated by these tensions that inscribe it into a very particular historicity» (p. 122) Pop is constituted from what it is not. Pop music has to be thought dialectically with "anti-pop", with what it should not be. Pop music is therefore the result of an act of irreconciliation in the musical material. This is why the pop work is built on contradiction. In this way, pop wants to be universal and singular at the same time or attached to its roots and deterritorialized (p.123). In the author's words, «pop is immediate and challenging, entertaining and spoilsport, romantic and modernist» (p.122).

Since recording popular music is constituted thanks to its negativity and by its negativity, since it is permanently in conflict with itself, it does not behave affirmatively, as Adorno constantly repeated. This means that it does not systematically reproduce either the 'administered world' or the logic of instrumental reason. In other words, in *Dialectic of Pop*, the philosopher restores the negative character of pop music from the Adornian criticisms that accused this music of reification, standardisation, affirmation and ahistoricity. The Adornian aesthetic tribune, as Gayraud says, is now called into question thanks to the Gayraud's arduous research into the form of pop music. She examines the plurality and diversity of *Leichte Musik* in order to definitively disassociate the industrial logic of the musical language of pop. This allows her to give pop material a moment and a historical character that Adorno had taken away from it.

How could the pop musical material that merely reproduces industrial standardization *ad nauseam* reveal a hint of historicity?, Adorno would ask. Gayraud's aesthetics of pop goes deeper into the expression of singularity and subjectivities that pop expresses. But, the French philosopher should insist on the necessity of pop to respond to the historical demands of Postmodernity, i.e. representing the manifestation of the *petits récits* of the postmodern era. In other words, pop has been concerned with expressing particular, individual situations related to the emancipation of race, sex, gender or class, participating in the progress of the consciousness of a community of individuals. It could be said that pop has a kind of *Zeitgeist* consciousness.

In the last chapter of the book, Gayraud surprises us once again. The author of *Dialectic of Pop* suggests that Adorno underestimated the notion of differentiation and singularity within popular music. According to the Frankfurt School philosopher, it makes no sense to speak of progress in the *Kulturindustrie*, since the sedimented and reified musical language does not show truly substantial changes. In other words, the eternal return to the same musical recipes makes negativity, historicity and progress of the material impossible. However, the French philosopher observes that the musical material of pop music progresses and also ages.

Contrary to Adorno, she asserts that there is no *mode intemporelle* that corresponds to the pop form, as the author of *Minima moralia* wrote in his analyses of jazz. However, the progress of pop material is neither perceived nor analysed from the intellectual vantage point of objectivity and immanence proposed by Adorno. Gayraud dives into the depths of pop to see the musical material progress in relation to the technical conditions of its "degraded transmission" (*transmission degradée)* and pop instrumentation. The progress and development of pop music is revealed in its «sonic material as a material altered by the distortions, modulations, and emulations of electrical transmission» (p.410). To analyse the progress of the material, the philosopher divides this cognitive process into three moments or *listens*, another provocative gesture to the Adornian theory of types of music listeners and listening behaviours. Among some other features, the *first listen* examines the *forme-chanson*; the *second listen* analyses the distortion and modulation of sound; and the *third listen* reveals the plurality and eclecticism that makes up the musical material of pop music. The author demonstrates that pop is on progress and that it also calls « into question the idea of progress, its rational linear authority, and its fundamental historical consequence: the designation of certain artefacts as the mere scraps of history, as outmoded and obsolete possibilities of experience» (p. 384).

In conclusion, Gayraud values the technical reproducibility of pop, its contradictions, its ambivalence and the imbalance of the pop form that generates new styles and works, authentic works of art, not mere substitutes for works of art. Her penetrating mind and the richness of her musical examples not only prove that the musical practices of pop artists overcome the barriers between popular music and classical music or between responsible music and *Leichte Musik*, but also that «pop music by definition has not outside» (p.419). Popular recorded music does not respond to legalities outside the musical material, but rather relates dialectically and negatively to its sonic material. Pop wants everything. This is why the art of *musiques populaires enregistrées* is condemned not to be reconciled with itself.

Agnès Gayraud is a French musician and philosopher born in 1979. She teaches theory at the Villa Arson (National Art School) in Nice. She has gained critical acclaim for her musical practice (as La Féline) and is a regular writer for the daily paper *Libération*.

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(by Cristina Parapar, Sorbonne University)

P. Antich, *Motivation and the Primacy of Perception: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Knowledge* (Vol. 54), 2021, Athens, Ohio University Press, 248 pages, ISBN 9780821424322 (hardcover)

In first instance, the merit of this work, in addition to the clarity and systematicity with which it has been conducted, lies in the choice of the proposed theme. Motivation is a theme often misunderstood and underestimated in theoretical and epistemological debates, both

because of the prejudice that would link the notion exclusively to a horizon oriented to the sphere of the will and therefore to practical philosophy (if not even to psychology), and because of its apparent incompatibility with the experimental paradigm (particularly relevant in current times in relation to the many attempts at naturalization in the field of phenomenology). The choice, therefore, to defend a thesis that elects motivation as the epistemic grounding of perception, is particularly courageous. In fact, it aims to overcome the dichotomies between reason and causality and between justification and explanation, on which the traditional epistemological debates have focused. By virtue of such grounding, it offers, compared to the classical epistemological framework (empiricist or rationalist) but also compared to the contemporary debates of analytical epistemology, a radically new account of knowledge and its relationship with perception. In this regard, the second fundamental thesis supported in the book, directly drawn from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, is precisely that of the "primacy of perception", according to which our whole knowledge is ultimately based on perceptual experience. In essence, the work could be summarized as an attempt to read the "primacy of perception" thesis in terms of motivation.

From this we can deduce the ambitious, though more than agreeable, goal pursued by the author, i.e., to solve some fundamental questions related to the epistemological debate, reformulating the terms in a phenomenologically adequate way. However, although the phenomenological framework used is clearly that of Merleau-Ponty, it is hard not to notice that much of the conceptual apparatus supporting the argumentation comes directly from Husserl (for example, the notion of *Fundierung* and of *Erfüllung*, the concept of motivation itself, the notion of "horizontal intentionality" that resolves the third Kantian paralogism). This is not meant to claim that, in general, Merleau-Ponty's theoretical contribution does not constitute an autonomous and innovative phenome-

nological perspective, but simply that perhaps not enough space has been given to the recognition of Husserlian inheritance regarding the issues dealt with therein (for example, the distinction between *Vernunftmotivation* and the passive/associative account of *Motivation*).

Nevertheless, this is definitely a remarkable contribution to phenomenological studies, whose effectiveness is supported and enriched by examples drawn from interesting empirical and literary studies. Completeness and expositive lucidity are undeniable, as well as the theoretical insight, detectable especially in those sections of the work where the relationship between experience and a priori judgments is analysed. Interesting is also the chapter taking into account Merleau-Ponty's response to skepticism, in terms of his notion of perceptual faith as motivated.

Finally, there is the fruitful engagement with Kant: two final chapters in which a serious and profound confrontation with Kant's transcendentalism is undertaken, in order to bring out, by contrast, the specificities of the motivational paradigm and the consequences, even metaphysical, that derive from it. From this comparison does not result, unexpectedly, an overriding of one perspective on the other, but the assessment that both operate on their own level, because of different premises. In spite of this, the comparison brings to light an interesting implication, namely that the Kantian perspective, with regard to metaphysics, as with regard to synthetic a priori knowledge, tacitly relies on the phenomenological account of experience. This conclusion, deduced from the discussion of a particular Kantian metaphysical question, that of the Third Paralogism (namely, the identity of the self), calls into question Merleau-Ponty's concept of "reversibility," entailing a sort of dialectical approach to metaphysics. A worthy conclusion that does not shy away from complexity but rather allows the author to recognize and enhance an unusual paradigm for a theoretical framework of this type: the model of ambiguity, as a useful reading key in order to avoid any form of dogmatism or skepticism.

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(by Andrea Lanza, University of Florence)