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Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

From the aesthetic mind to the symbolic mind

edited by
Lorenzo Bartalesi
Mariagrazia Portera

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Foreword

Lorenzo Bartalesi, Mariagrazia Portera

This issue of Aisthesis grew out of the international and interdisciplinary conference «From the Aesthetic Mind to the Symbolic Mind. Perceptual Dynamics, Mimetic Practices, Human Theatricality» held at the University of Florence on 26-28 October 2017. By bringing together researchers from various academic disciplines (philosophy, archaeology, psychology, performing arts, anthropology) and with different backgrounds and expertise, the conference intended to cast new light on central notions such as «aesthetic mind», "mimetic practices», «theatricality», and to refresh the debate about their relevance and role in human experience and their mutual connections.

What are the main features of an aesthetic mind and how does the human aesthetic capacity relate to the ability for symbolic thinking? What are the cognitive implications of an aesthetic attitude in humans, and how our sense of the self is modified, shaped, moulded by the ability to perceive aesthetically and aesthetically encounter the world? An aesthetic mind is, *per se*, an expressive or theatrical mind, i.e. a mind that expresses itself in gestures, practices, performative acts: what are the implications of the concept of «theatricality» for our understanding of the functioning of the human mind? This is only a small sample of the many questions and issues addressed by the conference participants; the most part of the papers presented at the Florence conference is now included in this issue of Aisthesis.

We would like to follow, in this foreword, at least some of the many relevant threads that the issue weaves together. Christoph Wulf, whose paper opens the issue, provides relevant insights into the anthropological value of mimetic-performative practices, and the role that they play in the constitution of the individual imaginary (Christoph Wulf, *The mimetic creation of the imaginary*). At the crossroads between anthropology and aesthetics, Lorenzo Bartalesi's paper investigates the relevance of the aesthetic dimension to human cultural transmission processes (Lorenzo Bartalesi, *From the*

aesthetic mind to the human cultures: Towards an anthropology of aesthetics). This idea of a common ground betwenn aesthetic practices and cultural processes is also discussed, from an evolutionary perspective, in José Ignacio Ignacio Contreras's contribution (*Playing with pattern. Aesthetic communication as distributed cognition*), whereas the relevance of the aesthetic dimension to symbolic thought is at the heart of Fausto Fraisopi's paper: he asks what the aesthetic experience and scientific theorizing have in common with each other (Fausto Fraisopi, *From Aesthetic Structures to Symbolic and back: Complex Dynamics between Art and Science*). Valeria Maggiore, Federica Buongiorno and Anna Caterina Dalmasso all focus, in their contributions, on different features of the human mind, and on how the aesthetic dimension opens up a unique window through which these features of the mind can be better appreciated and investigated. The human mind in plastic, and the more so the more it is involved in aesthetic experiences (Valeria Maggiore, *Is aesthetic mind a plastic mind? Reflections on Goethe and Catherine Malabou*); the human mind is extended, and phenomenology can provide the missing theoretical framework to develop a more complex and comprehensive theory of the (digitally) extended self (Federica Buongiorno, *From the Extended Mind to the Digitally Extended Self: A Phenomenological Critique*); the human mind is a techno-aesthetic mind, and technicity, as a cultural and symbolic attitude, is constitutively rooted in the aesthetic dimension of human experience (Anna Caterina Dalmasso, *Techno-aesthetic thinking. Technicity and Symbolism in the Body*).

Fascinating insights into the close relationship between the aesthetic and the symbolic dimension of the human mind are also provided by the book symposium «The Geometric Enigma», which features three critical pieces by Dean Falk, Fabio Martini and Ellen Dissanayake dealing with Ellen Dissanayake's and Ekkehart Malotki's latest book, *Early Rock Art of the American West: The Geometric Enigma* (2018). In this book, the earliest human graphic expressions in North America, which consist almost exclusively of non-representational images composed of geometric marks, are interpreted in the light of Ellen Dissanayake's theory of «making special behaviour», i.e. as instantiations of a universally human artifying behaviour which predates the emergence of symbolic thought and makes it possible.

As hinted above, an aesthetic mind is, *per se*, an expressive, theatrical mind. This issue of Aisthesis is further enriched by a special focus on Marina Abramović's performance art and artistic legacy, featuring an interview with Abramović by Marta Rosa and two critical pieces by Andrea Mecacci (*Eating an Onion. Notes on Marina Abramović*) and Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis (*Theatricality and performativity: the relationship between artist and spectator*). Rosa, Mecacci and Mazzocut-Mis all contribute, in an original and thought-provoking way, to the exploration of the concepts of «performance», «theatricality», «performativity», and how they are related to the aesthetic and symbolic functioning of the human mind.

The final part of the issue – *Varia* – collects six relevant essays on various topics and subjects in modern and contemporary aesthetics: on theoretical issues in philosophy of art (Andrew Benjamin, *Doubt and Indifference: Threshold Conditions within the Work of Art* and Elena Tavani, *Theatricality in Installation Artworks. An overview*), on photography (Michele Bertolini, *La trasfigurazione della quotidianità: medium, sguardo e costruzione finzionale nella fotografia di Jeff Wall*), on painting from a cross-cultural perspective (Ju-Yeon Hwang, *Culture and Affect in Aesthetic Experience of Pictorial Realism: An Eighteenth-Century Korean Literatus' Reception of Western Religious Painting in Beijing*), on music and musical experience (Mariangela Calleja, *The Sublime in Music and the Musically Sublime in Lutoslawski's Three Poems of Henri Michaux, 1961-63* and Lucia Angelino, *Les frontières entre réel et imaginaire à l'épreuve des promenades sonores in situ*).

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The mimetic creation of the Imaginary

Christoph Wulf

Abstract. Young children learn to make sense of the world through mimetic processes. These processes are focused to begin with on their parents, brothers and sisters and people they know well. Young children want to become like these persons. They are driven by the desire to become like them, which will mean that they belong and are part of them and their world. Young children, and indeed humans in general are social beings. They, more than all non-human primates, are social beings who cannot survive without the Other. In mimetic processes the outside world becomes the inner world and the inner world becomes the outside world. The imaginary is developed and the imaginary develops ways of relating to the outside world. In a mimetic loop, this in turn affects the inner world of the imaginary. These processes are sensory and governed by desire. All the senses are involved which means that the imaginary has multiple layers. Since there is an intermingling of images, emotions and language, these processes are rooted in the body and at the same time transcend the body as they become part of the imaginary. Human beings create images of themselves in all cultures and historical periods. They need these images to understand themselves and their relationship to other human beings and to develop social relations and communities. Images of the human being are designs and projections of the human being and his or her relationship to other people and to the world. They are formed to visualize representations of individuals or aspects of them. They arise when we communicate about ourselves. They support us to live with diversities and to develop similarities and feelings of belonging with other people. They are the result of complex anthropological processes, in which social and cultural power structures play an important role.

Keywords. Imaginary, Sustenaibility, Mimetic processes, Image.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PREREQUISITES OF MIMETIC PROCESSES

Young children learn to make sense of the world through mimetic processes. These processes are focussed to begin with on their parents, brothers and sisters and people they know well. Young children want to become like these persons. They are driven by the desire to become like them, which will mean that they belong and are part of them and their world. Young children, and indeed humans in general are social beings. They, more than all non-human primates, are social beings who cannot survive without the Other. There are several anthropological conditions behind this.

One of these is neoteny, or the fact that human beings are born at an embryonic stage in their development. In other words human beings are born unfinished or incomplete. Their development has to take place once their life has started, and for this to happen they need people who are close to them, people they desire and who they want to be like. Unlike other non-human primates and animals, children are not governed by their instincts. They are equipped only with residual instincts which are not strong enough for them to be able to survive if they are not kept alive by the people close to them.

We can see this clearly if we compare a young child to a foal. A foal is capable of living just a few hours after its birth, whereas it takes young human beings years to reach that stage. Neoteny and the decrease in the instincts are inextricably linked. As philosophical anthropology has also indicated, this explains why human beings are able to grasp the "suchness (*Sosein*)" of phenomena, in other words the world, whereas animals are only able to perceive an environment determined by their instincts (Wulf [2013a]: chap. 2).

It is through mimetic processes that children make their early discoveries of the world. It is not only that children try to become like other people whom they desire. It is also their discovery of the world that is mimetic. These early processes of perceiving the world that are of such central importance in the development of the imaginary, are frequently mimetic. In other words, at a very early stage young children develop an active relationship to the world. They adopt relationships to objects which are conveyed to them largely by the people whom they desire to emulate. For example children follow adults' movements when adults give them a bottle filled with tea. They perceive the objects "bottle" and "tea" and the movement of the person they love giving them something to drink. As children mimetically appropriate the way the adults they love give them the tea, they feel and appropriate both the act of giving the tea and also the warmth and caring this expresses, over and above the act of tea giving. As children appropriate the action there is an interplay between the object that quenches their thirst (the bottle) and the child's appropriation of the emotional aspect of the action, the caring. Young children perceive these processes at an early age, and at this point it is the receptive aspect that is dominant. It is the adults who perform the actions and the children who perceive them. A few months later this changes and the active side of perception becomes more important. A child's perception of the world is socially transmitted very early on. Since the medium for this is culture, the child becomes "encultured" while very young. This happens via the movements of persons close to the child. These movements convey meanings, even if these are not yet conveyed in words. Children understand the gesture of someone giving them tea (Wulf, Fischer-Lichte [2010]). It contains a meaning, even though this meaning is not articulated verbally. This is because gestures, as non-verbal acts, still convey meaning. What conveys the meaning here is the movement of the body, driven by the senses, which children perceive at a very early age and then repeat, also very early on, in mimetic processes (Gebauer, Wulf [2018]).

It is in mimetic processes that children discover the sense of gestural actions, a sense that is implicit and often does not even need to be conveyed because it has already been conveyed by the body. Such gestural actions form part of our vast silent knowledge, which is very important in human life but to which is often accorded little value in comparison with scientific knowledge which society reveres (Kraus, Budde, Hietzge, Wulf [2017]). Ryle clearly identified the different nature of the knowledge that manifests itself in actions of the body in his distinction between «knowing how» and «knowing that» (Ryle [1990]). Learning to ride a bike is a good illustration of this. I can read a whole treatise about what you have to do when riding a bike, but it will be of very little help to me when learning. Learning to ride a bike does not involve «knowing that» but «knowing how». I need to be able to do it, and have to learn it practically, by using my body. There is no other way I can acquire this knowledge, that is far more an ability. Here too, learning

to ride a bike is the result of mimetic processes, processes that have to relate to other people but above all to the movements of our own bodies. This is a kind of mimesis of ourselves where we develop a mimetic relationship to our own behaviour in order to improve it.

Now let us return to the mimetic processes that take place in young children, by means of which they develop their imaginary. Even before they reach the age of one, they are able to understand the intentions of the people close to them. If someone points at something, for example, they follow the gesture of pointing, not stopping at the finger itself, but grasping that the aim of the pointing is an object and not the finger itself (Tomasello [1999]). It is already apparent in one year olds that they are beginning to use mimetic processes to make sense of the world and gradually transform it into their imaginary. Through mimetic processes the outside world becomes their inner world. As non-verbal actions addressed by subjects towards objects, gestures play an important role in conveying emotional caring and attachment. This is because they are demonstrative and at the same time directed towards the other person. In a mimetic process they convey a positive social relationship and a relationship to the objects of a cultural world. Both of these become absorbed into a child's imaginary in the mimetic process, resulting in a complex interlinking of a cultural object (a bottle), the adult's act of caring and the meaning of this interplay for the child.

In his autobiography, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Walter Benjamin (2006) illustrated how children incorporate their cultural environments in processes of assimilation. In the course of these processes, children assimilate aspects of the parental home, such as the rooms, particular corners, objects and atmospheres. They are incorporated as «imprints» of the images and stored in the child's imaginary world, where they are subsequently transformed into new images and memories that help the child gain access to other cultural worlds. Culture is handed on by means of these processes of incorporating and making sense of cultural products. The mimetic ability to transform the external material world into images, transferring them into our internal worlds of images and making them accessible to others enables individuals to develop their imaginary and to actively shape cultural realities (Gebauer, Wulf [1998], [2018]; Wulf [2002]; Wulf, Zirfas [2014]).

Even at the age of one, children develop a considerable ability, though the fact that they are very active, to absorb the world around them in mimetic processes. The ability of a child's body to move around plays an important role in this. This physical moving enables them to alter their relationship to objects in the outside world. Their perspective on the world changes as they move. This applies to the corners where the objects are perceived and even more to the changing bodily encounters with the world. The world is touched by the child's hands and often by the child's whole body. As they gradually feel their way around the world children experience two things. One is the active child's experience of touching the objects. But it is also the discovery that, through the act of touching, the world itself replies. Children now feel the differences in material objects and at the same time experience the world outside them. This dual experience of touching objects and being touched by them is of central importance in the development of the very first elements of a sense of a child's identity. The child now has the dual experience of being active and passive at the same time, an experience which characterises mimetic processes. Children touch the world and are touched back by it. This becomes a cyclical process of mutual discovery, and I cannot overstate how important this is for the development of the child's imaginary.

In mimetic processes the outside world becomes the inner world and the inner world becomes the outside world. The imaginary is developed and the imaginary develops ways of relating to the outside world. Again in a mimetic loop, this in turn affects the inner world of the imaginary. These processes are sensory and governed by desire. All the senses are involved which means that the imaginary has multiple layers. Since there is an intermingling of images, emo-

tions and language, these processes are rooted in the body and at the same time transcend the body as they become part of the imaginary (Wulf [2014]; Hüppauf, Wulf [2009]; Paragrana [2016]).

As we read works of literature, it is mimetic processes that bring to life an assemblage of non-sensory words into sensory ideas and emotions and give them meaning (Benjamin [1980a], [1980b]). It is the same with other products of culture that also require mimetic processes for them to come alive. Such processes are particularly important in the transfer of the cultural imaginary from one generation to the next, since these processes require a metamorphosis to keep forms of living, knowledge, art or technology alive. As mimetic processes are not simply methods of copying or producing worlds that have already been symbolically interpreted but also consist in our taking and then incorporating "impressions" of these worlds, these mimetic relationships always contain creative aspects which alter the original worlds. This creates a cultural dynamism between generations and cultures which constantly gives rise to new things.

IMAGES OF THE HUMAN BEING: THE VISUALISATION OF THE INVISIBLE

It is in mimetic processes that images of the outside world are transferred to our imaginary. Our imaginary constructs images which shape the outside world (Wulf [2018]). These images also include those we make of ourselves, images in which and by means of which we try to make sense of ourselves. People create images of themselves in all cultures and historical periods. They need these images to communicate about themselves and to understand themselves. Images of the human being are designs and projections of the human being. They are formed in order to visualise representations of the human being or individual aspects of a person. These representations are simplifications of human diversity and complexity in illustrations. A "productive moment" is portrayed here in these representations, as the discussion about the Laocoon statue shows. Historical developments and interpretative variants are not displayed in such iconic "productive moments". The special nature of an image lies in the concentration on one moment and in the suggested evidence, but the limits of the iconic representation are also revealed therein. Human images are always simplifications, which, despite their simplifying character, are extremely effective. The power structures of a society which are often difficult to see are incorporated in the construction of the human images. Human images are the result of differentiated inclusion and exclusion processes. Desires, norms and values are conveyed in human images. Human images are aimed at the normalisation of people. Social and cultural institutions, as well as religions, utopias and world views, use human images to portray their conceptions of humans and to embed their ideas in the imaginary and in the actions of humans.

Such human images are clearly expressed, for example in the sculptures of Ancient Greece, in which the ideal of the good and beautiful, the *Kolokagathia,* the unit of physical beauty and spiritual quality, is expressed. Also in the Christian Middle Ages there are human images in which the devout, godly person is represented. The *biblia pauperum* in the churches of the Middle Ages show this clearly. We find representations of godly people subdivided according to status into monks, nobles and peasants, in which the hierarchical structures of the society are also reflected. Nationalism in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century highlighted numerous idealising images of, for example, the "Germans" and the "French", which became role models for education and an honourable life. Socialism in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe also tried to embed a certain human image in the imagination of the young generation. Today the European Union also endeavours to achieve the human image of a free, independent democratic citizen as a model of human development and education in Europe (Wulf [1995], [1998]).

THE IMAGE OF A SUSTAINABLE HUMAN BEING

After the period for the realisation of the millennium objectives set for the developing countries expires in 2015 and succeeds in reducing poverty and illiteracy in many parts of the world, the community of nations is currently working intensively on developing sustainability goals. In this process there are philosophical and anthropological analyses of the ethical questions associated with sustainability, the development and discussion of the feasibility of the sustainability goals, the clarification of the concepts and the consistency of the argumentation and the methodical and argumentative approach. Development is sustainable when it «secures the quality of life of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to shape their life» (DUK 2014). The sustainability objectives arising from this definition are interrelated with a culture of peace and human rights, cultural diversity and democratic participation and the rule of law. A culture of sustainable development is necessary for the transformation of the economy and society. Future-oriented models, ideas, norms and forms of knowledge are required for its development. These should be supplemented by the development of sustainability values and corresponding attitudes and ways of life. The education for sustainable development also plays an important role here. Without it the initiation of independent action is not possible. The international community of states is looking for a human image, on which representatives from all societies and cultures can agree and which can span the cultural differences as a role model. It is currently not clear whether such a human image is possible and whether such an image would destroy the cultural diversity between the parts of the world. There is also reasonable doubt as to whether and to what extent such images can be used to level cultural differences between the geographical regions of the world without cultivating tension between them.

DEVELOPMENT AND POWER OF IMAGES OF THE HUMAN BEING

Why do we assume that images of the human being and images produced by the human being are so effective? Why do they have such an influence on the development of societies, communities and individuals? I believe three reasons are of particular importance here:

1) Cultural learning takes place using mimetic processes, i.e. processes of creative imitation (Wulf [2013a]; Gebauer, Wulf [2018], [1998]). Images play an important role here. This includes images of other people, images of the living environment and human images occurring gradually in synthetic processes. Human images give orientation and meaning. They are shared with other people and create feelings of belonging and togetherness. Herein lies the sustainability of their effect. Images are not easily adopted, but lived and internalised with other people and their interpretations. They occur in action and language games. In contrast to the instincts of animals, they are historically and culturally determined and can be changed.

2) Human images have profound effects because they occur at least partly in childhood and create a sense of being part of a community. They occupy the imaginary and become part of the imagination. They influence our perception of the world, culture and other people and our own self-perception. Human images become part of the person and his imagination and have an influence on his emotions. They are repeated and consolidated by the rhythms and rites of life. Like plants with extended roots, particular and universal human images are fixed in the imagination and gain effect from the connection with already existing ideas and images (Hüppauf, Wulf [2009]).

3) As images of the imagination and the imaginary, human images become part of the body (Wulf 2018; Pragrana 2016). They are inherent and therefore can be difficult to change. Often they consist not only of individual images, but of

picture sequences, even of picture networks, with which heterogeneous, sometimes even paradoxical images are "captured". As a result, existing human images are repeatedly confirmed and their importance is reinforced (Wulf [2014]).

THE WORLD BECOMES AN IMAGE

A characteristic of modernity is the fact that the world is opposite to man and is perceived as an object and an image. In ancient times, people, animals and the environment were part of living nature, the *Physis*. They were generally perceived as similar to each other. They were stimulated by the power, the dynamis of nature, the *Physis*. This relationship of people to the world was retained in the Middle Ages. Animals, people and world are created by God and have a common creatureliness. In the modern era this relationship of the (Western) human being to the world, to other people and to themselves changes. Nature is no longer experienced as animated. It becomes the object. Human beings are no longer part of nature or the world created by God, but are opposite to it; they measure it and register it as "object". In this process the world becomes an image. With the development of new media this trend increases. Not only the world and other people are perceived as images, we ourselves are also increasingly perceiving ourselves in the mode of images. The widespread use of digital photography in everyday life and especially the selfies are proof of this (Kontopodis, Varvantakis, Wulf [2017]). Using electronic photos or films we create all important events, and ultimately create an image of ourselves (Wulf [2013a], [2013b]).

Human images show the central role images play, and with them the imagination and the imaginary world, for the constitution of the person and his education. They also make it clear how strongly the images are defined by their respective historical and cultural character and how important their research is within the framework of anthropology. Human images are images which the person creates of himself, and whose significance must be understood for his perception of the world, his memories and his future projections. They are generated by social and cultural practices of everyday life and by the arts. Human images become part of the collective and individual social and cultural imaginary world and thus play a part in shaping human activities. The creation of images is a feature, which we share as human beings, whose form, however, is very different in history and in different cultures. As the images and the imaginary world visualise something, which would otherwise remain invisible, their research is an important area of anthropology.

What we describe as an "image" is different, meaning that the spectrum of the term is broad and requires a range of further clarification. Sometimes we mean the result of visual perception processes. Under the influence of neuroscience and its visualisation strategies, the results of the perception with other senses are often even described as "images". We then speak about mental or "inner" images, which bring to mind something which is not actually present. These include, for example, souvenir pictures, which differ to the perceptions due to their vagueness. The same applies to sketches or drafts of future situations, to dreams, hallucinations or visions. Many aesthetic products also take the form of images. They are products of a process aimed at the creation of an image. As metaphors, they are ultimately a constitutive element of language. Creating images, recognising images as images, dealing with images using one's imagination, is a universal capability of humans (Wulf [2014], [2018]). However, it varies depending on the historical period and culture. Because which images we see and how we see images is determined by complex historical and cultural processes. How we perceive images and deal with them is also influenced by the unique nature of our life history and subjectivity.

Like all images, human images are the result of energetic processes. They transform the world of objects, actions and other people into images. Using the imagination they are imagined and become part of the collective and individual imag-

inary world. Many of these processes are mimetic and result in an assimilation to other people, environments, ideas and images. In mimetic processes the outer world becomes the "inner world", which is a world of images (Gebauer, Wulf [2018], [1998]). This world of imaginary images plays a part in shaping the outer world. As these images are performative, they contribute to the emergence of actions and to the production and performance of our relationship to other people and to our surrounding world. The imaginary world is the place of the images as such, the destination of the imagination process generating the images. At the same time, it is the starting point of the mimetic and performative energies of the images.

IMAGE AND IMAGINATION

Not unlike language is imagination a *conditio humana*, a human condition, whose foundations lie in the constitution of the human body (Adorno [1984]; Belting [2001]; Hüppauf, Wulf [2009]; Wulf [2013b], [2018]). The performativity, i.e. the orchestrated character of human action, is a consequence of the principle openness and role which the imagination plays in the form of this openness. With its help the past, present and future are interwoven. Imagination creates the world of the person, the social and cultural, the symbolic and the imaginary. It creates human images. It makes possible history and culture and thus historic and cultural diversity. It creates the world of images and the imaginary and is involved in the creation of the practices with the body. Not only is an awareness of these practices required for their production and performance. In reality, they must be incorporated and be part of a practical, body-based, implicit knowledge, whose dynamic character makes possible social and cultural changes and designs. Here mimetic processes based on the imagination are of central importance. Cultural learning takes place in these processes, which creates a social and cultural identity that is a central prerequisite for well-being and happiness.

Imagination plays a central role for all forms of social and cultural action and its concentration in human and world images. Using images, diagrams, models, etc., it controls the human behaviour and action. Images are defining moments of the action, whose significance is constantly increasing. This leads to the question what makes an image and what types of images can be distinguished. For example, mental images can be distinguished from manually and technically generated images, as well as moving and non-moving images.

Imagination is of fundamental importance not only in global art. It plays an important role in the genesis of the *Homo sapiens sapiens* and its cultures. References to the aesthetic design of bone scrapers can be traced back several hundred thousand years (Wulf [2014]). People's access to the world and the world's access to the "inner" person takes place using the imagination in the form of images.

A distinction can be made between magical images, representative images and simulated images. Magical images have no reference connection; they *are* what they portray. The statue of the "Golden Calf" is the holy thing; with a relic the body part of the holy thing is the holy thing. The situation is different for representative images which are often based on mimetic processes. They refer to something which they portray themselves or are not. Photos are included here which show situations which are the past and not the present. Simulated images are images which have become possible with the new processes of electronic media and are playing an increasing role in the lives of people. The difference between the perceived and the mental images is important. Each presentation is an expression of the fact that an object is missing. This is obvious for souvenir pictures and future projections. The perceived images based on existing objects have an influence on both.

Pathological images, visions and dreams also differ to perceived and souvenir pictures. In all cases the imagination is involved in the creation of the images. With help of the imagination men-

tal or "inner" worlds of images emerge, in which emotions are crystallised. The dynamics of the imagination combines people and creates a sense of community. Its ludic character creates connections between images and new images can emerge.

MIMESIS AND IMAGINARY

With help of mimetic processes individuals, communities and cultures create the imaginary. This can be understood as a materialised world of images, sounds, touch, smell and taste. It is the precondition that people perceive the world in a historically and culturally influenced manner. The imagination remembers and creates, combines and projects images. It creates reality. At the same time, the reality helps the imagination to create images. The images of the imagination have a dynamic character structuring the perception, memory and future. The networking of the images follows the dialectic and rhythmical movements of the imagination. Not only everyday life, but also literature, art and performing arts, obtain an inexhaustible memory of images. Some appear to be stable and hardly changeable. In contrast, others are subject to the historic and cultural change. Imagination has a symbolising dynamic, which continuously creates new meanings and uses images for this purpose. Interpretations of the world are developed using these images created by the imagination (Hüppauf, Wulf [2009]; Wulf [2018]).

In contrast to the general use of the concept of the imaginary, Jacques Lacan primarily emphasises the delusional character of the imaginary. Desires, wishes and passion play a central role here in that people cannot escape from the imaginary. For them there is no direct relationship to the real world. As a speaking entity, people can only develop a fractured relationship with the real world via the symbolic order and the imagination. With its help they can try to hold their own ground against the forces of the imaginary. «The socially effective imaginary is an internal world which has a strong tendency to shut itself off and develop to some extent an infinite immanence; in contrast, the human fantasy, imagination, is the only power capable of forcing open the enclosed spaces and can temporarily exceed it, because it is identical to the discontinuous phenomenon of time» (Kamper [1986]: 32-33). This compulsive character of the imaginary creates the limits of human life and development opportunities. This clarification of the compulsive character of the imaginary is so important, it only makes up one part of the range of meanings, which describes the diversity and ambivalence of cultural visual knowledge according to the opinion expressed here.

Imagination has a strong performative power, which produces and performs social and cultural actions. Imagination helps create the imaginary world, which includes images stored in memory, images of the past and the future. Using mimetic movements the iconic character of the images can be captured. In the reproduction of its image character the images are incorporated in the imaginary. As part of the mental world they are references of the outer world. Which images, structures and models become part of the imaginary depends on many factors. In these images the presence and absence of the outer world is inextricably interwoven. Images emerging from the imaginary are transferred from the imagination to new contexts. Image networks develop, with which we transform the world and which determine our view of the world.

The performative character of the imagination ensures the images of the social field make up a central part of the imaginary (Wulf, Zirfas [2007]). The power structures of the social relationships and social structures are represented therein. Many of these processes have their roots in people's childhoods and take place to a large extent unconsciously. The perception of social constellations and arrangements is already learned during this time. These earlier visual experiences and the resulting images play an important, irreplaceable role in the visual understanding of the world. A comprehending viewing of social actions arises through the fact that biographically influ-

enced historical and cultural diagrams and mental images play a part in every perception. We see social actions and relate to them in their perception. As a result, these actions become more important for us. If the actions of other people are directed at us, the impulse to link a relationship originates from these; a response on our part is expected. In each case a relationship is formed, for whose inception the images of our imagination form an important precondition. We enter an action and do not act according to the expectations in this social arrangement, be it that we respond to them, modify them or act contrary to them. Our action is mimetic to a lesser extent because of similarity, but more because of the generated correspondences. Embedded in an action, we perceive the actions of the other and act mimetically.

OUTLOOK

Our imaginary is created essentially through mimetic processes which also use the images of the imaginary to shape the outside world. Images of the human being are key to our understanding of ourselves. They are irreducible. They arise because we communicate about ourselves and must develop similarities and feelings of belonging with other people. They are the result of complex anthropological processes, in which social and cultural power structures play an important role. Owing to their iconic character, they reduce the complexity of the person and his being-in-the-world to select features and do not create a complete view of the person. There are approximations to the *homo absconditus*, the human being who cannot fully understand himself (Wulf [2013b]). In the *Ten Commandments* there is therefore talk that the human should not create an image of God and by analogy – today we would say – no image should be made from another human being. Images and mimetic processes are important for our relationship with the world, with other people and with ourselves. Image critic is required in order to escape the power of interpretation of images and in particular images of the human being. The same applies to a critical view of the ideas and images created in the discourses on the human being. We must recognise the importance of images, mimesis and imagination for the development of the imaginary and for the understanding of the human being.

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From the aesthetic mind to the human cultures: Towards an anthropology of aesthetics[1]

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Abstract. This paper aims to shed light on the links between aesthetic mind and cultural dynamics. We'll begin by describing the behavioural, cognitive and phenomenological complexity of the aesthetic before examining the role of such multidimensional phenomenon in the processes of cultural transmission. This analysis will lead us to consider aesthetics as a key frame of reference indispensable for investigating the creative and freely productive character of the processes through which individuals reproduce and transform their culture.

Keywords. Aesthetic mind, Anthropology of aesthetics, Cultural transmission, Aesthetic niche.

1. AESTHETICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY: A LONG BUT PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP

The question of aesthetics is intrinsic to the anthropological project. Since the dawn of the cultural anthropology in the 1920s, the notion of aesthetics has underpinned several approaches to culture. In the long chapter dedicated to aesthetics in his *Manuel d'ethnographie*, Marcel Mauss clearly states that «les phénomènes esthétiques forment une des plus grandes parties de l'activité humaine sociale et non simplement individuelle (…), l'esthétique contribue à l'efficacité, aussi bien que les rites» (Mauss [1926]: 85); while, in those same years, Franz Boas claimed that «all human activities may assume forms that give them esthetic values» (Boas [1927]: 9). Some years later, Edmund Leach, by refusing the neutralization of the aesthetic dimension of Malinowski's functionalism, assigned to the «aesthetic frills» nothing less than the defining characteristic of a society, and therefore, the primary source of data

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for anthropological research (Leach [1954]: 12). Similarly, Clifford Geertz elegantly showed how human beings organize through aesthetic forms the unexpressed of a society (i.e. values, beliefs, rules) within an encompassing and expressive structure that makes tangible the essential nature of a cultural system opening to an immediate and meaningful understanding of it (Geertz [1972]). More recently, a minority position in the contemporary anthropological debate describes the aesthetic as the way of seeing of a society, the cultural organization of the sensory qualities of the world. According with Howard Morphy, «aesthetics is concerned with the whole process of socialization of the senses with the evaluation of the properties of things. (…) The human capacity to transform physical properties into aesthetic valuations is integral to understanding human action and choice in both contemporary and evolutionary contexts» (Morphy [1996]: 209). On this basis, the explanatory value of aesthetics as a cross-cultural category is rehabilitated and an anthropology of aesthetics is inaugurated as «the comparative study of valued perceptual experience in different societies» (Coote [1992]: 247).

Even though it is a truism that cultural phenomena are displayed, made intelligible and transmitted by a constant aesthetic manipulation and transfiguration, we will be surprised by the relative lack of interest in the aesthetic processes which are responsible for both the variation and the stability of cultural systems. Anthropological scholars have rarely focused on the close relationship between aesthetic conducts and cultural dynamics. This is mainly due to the fact that the aesthetic dimension is clouded by conceptual ambiguities that have limited its adoption and explanatory effectiveness in anthropology[2]. To illustrate this, let's examine philosophical views on the matter.

Philosophers have not arrived yet at a consensual definition of aesthetics. For those who uphold the traditional view, aesthetics should stay on its original philosophical domain, only focusing on the quality of judgments of taste, the nature of aesthetic properties, and the ontological status of artworks. According to this view, inherited from the ever authoritative tradition of romantic and idealistic Western philosophy, extending aesthetics beyond beauty, pleasure, and artwork would diminish its explanatory power. As a result, appeals to aesthetics in the social sciences are still seen as falling within a prescriptive category fully realized in the modernist theory of art. With a very few exceptions, the debate in social anthropology[3] has been dominated by arguments in favour of this speculative tradition that equates the aesthetic attitude with a generic feeling for forms or with artistic production, thereby miscalculating aesthetics' role, overlooking its centrality in sustaining and remodelling human cultures**.** As Alfred Gell has provocatively shown, approaching non-western artefacts or antiquities from this perspective will obviously lead to misunderstandings that irremediably push aesthetics into the margins of the anthropological agenda (Gell [1999]: 159-162).

The four traditional fields of anthropology, however, differ in this regard. In stark contrast with the current state of affairs among social anthropologists depicted by Gell, in recent years naturalistic approaches have been increasingly devoted to exploring the aesthetic dimension. The main reason for this disparity is that the authoritative modernist view on aesthetics is well-suited to a reductionist perspective. Rare exceptions aside, experimental and evolutionary research on aesthetic behaviours is, instead, characterized by a radical tendency toward universalism, and examines the universal psychological, perceptual, somatic, and behavioural features that shape humans' aesthetic experiences. These «aesthetic primitives» are the neural correlates or evolution-

[2] Already in 1958 the anthropologist Warren D'Azevedo identified the major problem of the anthropology of art in the absence of an adequate conception of aesthetics. He emphasized qualitative unity of the aesthetic relationship, at the same time significant and affective (D'Azevedo [1958]).

[3] For a recent revival of this debate see Weiner et al. (1996).

ary antecedents of more complex aesthetic experiences and artistic productions. The standard model of neuroaesthetics of Semir Zeki, as well as the more recent neurobiological approaches (Chatterjee [2014]; Lauring [2015]; Huston, Nadal, Mora, Agnati, Cela-Conde [2015]), focus on the neuronal basis of the perception of beauty; both assume that the neural correlates are causally sufficient to produce an aesthetic experience. Likewise, the dominant model of evolutionary aesthetics (Rusch, Voland [2013]) generally follows the reductionist approach of the narrow version of Evolutionary Psychology (Buss [2005]), an adaptationist and modularist approach that conceives aesthetic preferences (sexual and environmental) as innate, universal and species-specific, a sort of universal basis, hence cultural differences are no more than superficial accidents. Therefore, even if their attitudes towards aesthetics are opposite, their conclusion is the same: these naturalistic research have in fact demonstrated only a passing interest in the interrelationship between cultural processes and aesthetic phenomena.

Here, in contrast, I present the core proposal of an anthropological aesthetic theory. The principal aim of this paper is to mark a first step in the direction of recomposing the unity of the analytical framework beyond the opposition between psycho-biological universality and cultural variability, restoring to aesthetics its full right to membership in anthropological research. In a nutshell, it is intended to be a plea for an interdisciplinary approach towards the aesthetic dimension of human cultures. I will argue that the «aesthetic» – *aesthetic behaviour*, *aesthetic cognition*, *aesthetic experience* – is a multidimensional phenomenon involved in the processes that not only creatively organize the sensorial environment, but which also transmit and transform cultural systems.

2. A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON

If we really want to understand the role of aesthetic behaviours in cultural processes, we first need a preliminary anthropological characterization of aesthetic phenomena. To do this, we have to abandon the notion of aesthetics as a theoretical entity, sprung from the Western philosophical tradition, and instead see it as an *anthropological fact*, rooted in cognitive and behavioural dispositions that contribute to the survival of an individual and a society.

In a first, elementary sense, the aesthetic could be described as cognitive processes that are triggered upon perceiving events or objects with certain features; such processes include attention, emotional investment, energy expenditure, selective judgment and an association with pleasure. These processes produce a meaningful organization of the sensorial qualities of the world in a distinctive experience, and they are at the root of the sensuous ways through which a socio-cultural organization is perceived, understood, and transmitted by individuals. In this definition we can find all the main uses of the term «aesthetic» as found in anthropological research:

i) a distinctive functioning of cognitive, affective and somatic processes;

ii) a form of experience that stands out from the ordinary flow of perception;

iii) a set of expressive elements (i.e. songs, dances, formal patterns, artifacts) triggering this form of experience;

iv) the aesthetic preferences, according to which human beings formulate judgments, make choices and orient themselves in their environment;

v) the objectification of aesthetic preferences in cultural styles that then become objects of transmission;

vi) the integrating of these individual preferences into shared aesthetic values which then make up a hierarchy of qualities resulting in aesthetic judgment (i.e. *art criticism, indigenous aesthetics*).

Such multidimensional complexity of the aesthetic, which necessitates the adoption of different descriptive levels and methodologies, can be profitably described as the articulation of three specific dimensions: *ethological*, *cognitive*, and *phenomenological*.

Aesthetic behaviours

Focusing on the ethological traits of the aesthetic means highlighting the operative components of the aesthetic in the context of the evolution of animal behaviour. A large, heterogeneous collection of studies has gone in this direction, focusing on human mechanisms of choice and preference (environmental and sexual). Going beyond the naïve universalism of the standard model of evolutionary aesthetics, recent studies describe aesthetic mechanisms of preference as the result both of social learning and of exposure to cultural models. By overcoming traditional dichotomies such as organism/environment, innate/acquired, recent epigenetic models point in this direction. For instance, they explain that aesthetic preferences are the fruits of a selective assemblage of neurons and synapses produced by repeated «aesthetic interactions» between the organisms and their biocultural environment. In this way, human aesthetic behaviours are neither universal, innate and genetically encoded, nor are they culturally variable and contingent, but, in contrast, shaped by the experiences of individuals within their own, particular physical, social, and cultural environments (Desideri [2015]; Portera, Mandrioli [2015]).

Based on the Darwinian assumption that many animals share the capacity for aesthetic agency with humans, recent studies have delved more deeply into the behavioural mechanisms underlying aesthetic preferences, focusing on structural homologies between autotelic processes in animals - such behavioural patterns as play, curiosity, and affective multimodal communication - and the human aesthetic attitude. From an ethological point of view, some animal activities, such as the renowned courtship ritual of the bowerbirds[4] are structurally homologous - though functionally different - to human aesthetic behaviours. According to Jean-Marie Schaeffer, in both cases a ritualized metarepresentation of the perceived event breaks with the ordinary attentional routines (Schaeffer [2015]: 256-266). This triggers a homeodynamic process in which attention and hedonic evaluation form an interactive circuit. Therefore, aesthetic behaviour can be described as a mechanism of emotional regulation in which, similarly to the autotelic processes of animal cognition, the primary evaluation - attraction or repulsion - does not result in a behavioural reaction directed at the environment but, instead, in a reflexive delay of attention to itself.

Aesthetic cognition

From a cognitive point of view, we could describe the aesthetic attention as an intensified activity of exploration modulated and directed by attractors present in the ambient perceptual field, where objects or perceived events acquire an emotionally marked yet cognitively undetermined significance. In this broad definition there are essentially three elements to keep in mind:

a) Aesthetic attention is historically and culturally situated. The portion of the world that is the object of aesthetic attention appears to be a meaningful, singular and subjectively modulated unit, generated in connection with the broader context of experiences, gestures, and language;

b) Aesthetic attention works on the basis of a specific relationship between cognitive discrimination and affective reactions. Attention is «captured» in a cognitive, self-inducing dynamic whose sole objective is to maintain itself through continuous feedback between attention and hedonic appreciation;

c) According to Schaeffer, engaging in an aesthetic experience is equivalent to adopting a particular attentional style, namely divergent style (Schaeffer [2015]: 104). The aesthetic attention is very flexible, creative, and capable of a high level of cognitive innovation. It involves both the «vertical» process of conceptual categorization and the «horizontal» exploration of contextual complexity and that is why it is able to grasp relations of affinity among heterogeneous configurations and aspects of reality.

[4] For the complex mechanisms of behavioural ritualization in bowerbirds, see the work by Gerald Borgia's research group: www.life.umd.edu/biology/borgialab/

Aesthetic experience

Finally, we can also define the aesthetic as a specific way of experiencing the world. In the notion of «aesthetic experience» we find all the elements that define experience in a general sense: the character subjectively felt of a situation, the crystallisation of competences acquired during interaction with the world, the role of pre-attentional processing of stimuli and that of mediation of language.

All human cultures describe some form of affectively-marked event that is distinct from their ordinary experiencing of the world. Such qualitatively enhanced experiences emerge in instances where one's concentration is focused on the present moment, with a total psychic engagement[5], resulting in: *i)* a distortion of the perception of time; *ii)* a sense of wholeness that overcomes all partiality; *iii)* a lack of awareness of the distance separating subject and object. The aesthetic is therefore a modality of experience capable of generating an existential frame whereby we become part of an «aesthetic field», that is an experiential situation involving objective, appreciative, creative and performative dimensions. Not unlike religious and mystical experiences, the aesthetic experience is immediate; it partakes of that human capacity to reveal further dimensions of reality that transcend our ordinary perception of time and space. It involves a suspending naïve realism and dissociating experience by means of objects and events as dance, music, images, drama, sculptures and poems. Due to their phenomenological peculiarity, aesthetic experiences are inextricably linked to situations in which our emotional balance and harmony with the world is at stake, as well as our relationship to transcendence, to death, and to the need to attribute meaning to existence. Therefore, from a phenomenological point of view, aesthetic experiences have traits in common with other «making special behaviours» (Dissanayake [2013]) such as ritual ceremonies, immersion in fictional contexts, or the states of intense psychomotor concentration found in some athletic activities.

3. DEEP TIMES

Based on the above description, it can be noticed that the fundamental presence of the aesthetic in human cultures is evident not only in our post-industrial aestheticized societies, but also in smaller-scale, non-Western societies, as well as in the great civilizations of the past or in Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer communities. Archaeological reports provide fully-illustrated accounts of how aesthetic behaviours and expressive activities have played a crucial role in human cultural evolution. The perfect symmetry of the Acheulean amygdales, the systematic pigment use in the middle Pleistocene (Barham [2002]), the shell beads put together to form complex ornaments (Vanhaeren, d'Errico [2011]), such fascinating creations of the European Upper Palaeolithic as the Chauvet Cave and the famous Venus of Willendorf figurine are all expressive testimonies to the existence of an aesthetic world before history. The debate around the function of these artefacts is still ongoing, and I certainly don't claim that these objects were constructed with expressly aesthetic ends in mind. My working hypothesis is much weaker. I simply affirm that an aesthetic inflection of behaviour, cognition and experience are more likely than not to have played a causal role in the production and use of these artefacts.

The Acheulean amygdales are one of the favoured fields of investigation for both contemporary evolutionary aesthetics and studies on human cognitive evolution. The most common hypothesis about these artifacts is that their perfect symmetry goes beyond the merely utilitarian dimension of the instrument, representing instead a visual pattern stimulating to an aesthetic impulse in the minds of humans who selected the material and a form of pre-symbolic signaling (Kohn, Mithen [1999]; Spikens [2012]). The amygdalas' perfect symmetry is generally interpreted as the extended phenotype of the maker, a sort of

[5] This kind of experience has also been referred to as «flow». For an investigation of the aesthetic experience as a flow experience see Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson (1990).

indicator of his fitness and social status. It served as a signal of valuable personal qualities (social and sexual), and in virtue of this it conferred on its maker a reproductive advantage. In a nutshell, handaxes were deeply meaningful first off for an individual, and then for the social group, because they were *expressive* of personal qualities of the maker. According to Gregory Currie, this aesthetic signaling would have been the first stage of the process of symbolization. With the evolution of human cognitive abilities and the transition to larger-scale, hierarchically more complex social structures, this rudimentary fitness indicator became a genuinely symbolic behaviour. By postulating that aesthetic attention was an initial form of evaluation of, and sensitivity to, the visible manifestation of qualities of our conspecifics, Currie gives back to aesthetics its role in interpretating the tangible evidence of social and cognitive evolution (Currie [2016]: 241).

Despite the risks of *just-so stories* and the epistemological difficulties inherent in any evolutionary reconstruction, this hypothesis of a crucial role played by the aesthetic in the process of symbolization appears all the more credible if we consider the notion of «aesthetic» in a very fundamental and multidimensional way. A concept well expressed by the French anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan. According to him, the field of aesthetics involves the implications of nutritional behaviours and bodily affectivity, as well as all of the products of rhythmic creation.

> *Une part importante de l'esthétique se rattache à l'humanisation de comportements communs à l'homme et aux animaux, comme le sentiment de confort ou d'inconfort, le conditionnement visuel, auditif, olfactif, et à l'intellectualisation, à travers les symboles, des faits biologiques de cohésion avec le milieu naturel et social […]. Les références de la sensibilité esthétique, chez l'homme, prennent leurs sources dans la sensibilité viscérale et musculaire profonde, dans la sensibilité dermique, dans les sens olfacto-gustatifs, auditif et visuel, enfin dans l'image intellectuelle, reflet symbolique de l'ensemble des tissus de la sensibilité. (Leroi-Gourhan [1965]: 95)*

Remarkably consonant with John Dewey's naturalistic conception of aesthetic experience, Leroi-Gourhan's description of aesthetic sensibility as a multi-level skill confirms our proposed meaningful organization of the sensorial qualities perception. An organization in which the upper levels are rooted in the elementary, pre-symbolic and antepredicative level of the aesthetic as a «physiological judgement of value» that detects and displays the quality of an affective and dynamic equilibrium between an organism and its environment. This form of physiological judgement could be described as an appraisal of the valence of perceived objects on which a first significant organization of sensory information would be produced. According to the neurobiologist Steven Brown, the neural underpinning of this elementary aesthetic judgement is «a core circuit for aesthetic processing» that involves a «comparison between subjective awareness of current homeostatic state – as mediated by the anterior insula – and exteroceptive perception of objects in the environment, as mediated by the sensory pathways leading up to the orbitofrontal cortex» (Brown, Gao, Tisdelle, Eickhoff, Liotti [2011]: 256). This circuit, whose goal is to determine whether perceived objects will satisfy or oppose our homeostatic needs, is in no way restricted to aesthetic processing, but may be related to all cognitive processes that involve viscerality. It operates across all sensory modalities and may be involved in emotional salience monitoring. Taking this further, the philosopher Fabrizio Desideri hypothesizes that this pre-symbolic aesthetic judgement is associated with «aesthetic schemes», which dispatch sensorial inputs into perceptual clusters according to their affective markings. Such structures would act as flexible schemes, objectively and conceptually indeterminate and, precisely for this reason, capable of capturing relationships of affinity between configurations and aspects of reality that are heterogeneous in themselves (Desideri [2018]: ch. 3). The result is an integrated harmonization between emotional systems and cognitive structures, which would be a new dimension of our senses. Finally, at a hierarchically superior level of treatment of sensory

information, this indeterminacy and freedom of aesthetic processes take on the divergent, «polyphonic» and distributed character of the aesthetic attention described above.

4. FARAWAY PLACES

As a sensorial, affective and meaningful dimension of the human-world interface, the multidimensional phenomenon of the aesthetics is present at both the individual and social level, and may involve other forms of experience. We can observe that in every culture, the aesthetic plays a role in magical, religious and political contexts, where the tacit knowledge of a social group is internalized in the bodies and emotions of the components of the community. The ethnographic literature is rich with examples of aesthetics as a performative dimension of culture - mimetic behaviours and ritualized actions - to be used in renewing an individual's physical, emotional and mental resources, in addition to developing and conserving cultural identity.

A classic example is the body painting practices of the indigenous Australian Yolngu people during circumcision ceremonies. As shown by Morphy, these body ornaments codify the clan structure and demarcate territorial boundaries (Morphy [1991]). Fluctuations in Yolngu cultural meanings are not restricted to material expression; they can also be achieved through a mnemonic archive of tacit knowledge and virtual images of Yolngu culture that are performed through song and dance. In other words, the aesthetic effect doesn't lie in the geometrical forms and brilliant colors of the body painting themselves, but rather, it emerges as a result of their making real the interconnected social meanings in a non-propositional way, beyond any logical-temporal nexus.

Ethnographic descriptions of this kind further confirm for us how aesthetics should be viewed as a complex synthesis between physiological reactions, higher-order categorizations, emotions, social learning, and episodic and cultural memory. Indeed, such complex syntheses shatter the traditional oppositions between semantic and sensorial recognition, the private *versus* the social/public dimensions, and the pragmatic *versus* disinterested orientation toward action. A cross-cultural comparative analysis of multiple ethnographic cases like this one might help us to reintroduce the image of aesthetics as an integrated and integral component of heterogeneous social practices as the interiorisation and transmission of norms and beliefs, as well as the creation and maintenance of institutions through ritual practices. Specifically, the link between ritual efficacy and aesthetic behaviours is found in nearly all cultures and is well attested to in ethnographic literature. A brief description of a few cases should clearly illustrate how the three interwoven dimensions of the human aesthetic ensure the effectiveness of ritual action. I will limit myself to three particularly exemplary cases.

The most famous case is Michel Leiris' analysis of the ritual of Zār Spirit Possession in Ethiopia (Leiris [1958]). The symbolic efficacy of the rite is determined by alternating magical-religious actions, such as healing, with such complex aesthetic-expressive behaviours as songs, dances, rythms, body painting and various ornamentations. In this case, the fundamental aesthetic component consists in being able to captivate the attention, and to amplify the emotional impact with the effect of inducing a suspension of disbelief. By theatricalising the ritual, aesthetic mediation serves as the device which produces a shift of the ordinary relationship with the world in a different relational modality in which shared social meanings are performed in a fictional immersion preliminary to the translation of the universe represented in belief. In other words, it is precisely by disrupting the partaker's sensitivity that the rite is able to establish and transmit a set of beliefs. From this perspective, the ritual is an expressive performance in which his «emotional and aesthetic coloring» (Lewis [1980]: 146) influences participants' grasp of the shared meanings in a very fundamental way.

In a completely different cultural context, that of *dhikr* performed by the Muslim community in

Aleppo, aesthetic elements play a similarly crucial role in participants' internalizing of religious beliefs and moral precepts (Shannon [2004]). *Dhikr* is an invocation of God through prayers, music and movement; it involves a repertoire of aesthetic and kinesthetic practices aimed at inducing an ecstatic trance. Modulated melodies and accelerating rhythms, combined with specific visual, olfatic, and tactile stimuli, promote body memories, imprinting somatic markers of the shared meanings. As in the Ethiopian practices described by Leiris, the *dhikr* breaks down the distinction between semantics and aesthetics. The multimodal experience of the dhikr testifies once again the cognitive and not only ornamental value of the aesthetic components in the acculturation processes.

Further evidence of the role of aesthetic dimensions in ritual efficacy can be found in Monique Jeudy-Ballini's research into the *hemlout* masks of the Sulka in New Britain (Papua New Guinea). These masks are enormous, umbrella-shaped compositions which are built – at great cost – to be displayed during initiation ceremonies or weddings. A vast series of technical and magical conventions governs their making in order to guarantee the object will have the greatest aesthetic efficacy possible during the rite. In fact, in the Sulka culture, notions of effectiveness and beauty are tightly interconnected. As Jeudy-Ballini observed, for the Sulka «Le beau est spécifié d'abord par son efficacité, son caractère agissant, son aptitude à déclencher des émotions.» (Jeudy-Ballini [1999]: 12). If, outside of rituals, aesthetic efectiveness governs farming activity and self-image, in ceremonies, beauty – in the sense of the ability to attract and captivate the gaze of the rite's participants – is the hallmark of the cosmological contract between humans and spirits.

These few ethnographic case studies highlight the transculturalism of the aesthetic and its role in ensuring the very efficacy of ritual actions. In all the instances described above, the success of the ritual practices, and hence of the transmittal and cultural renewal processes on which each social system's survival depends, hinges on the interplay of the several dimensions of the aesthetic[6].

5. THE AESTHETIC DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

After this recognition of the multidimensional complexity of the aesthetic, the last part of the article will be dedicated to opening up an analytical perspective on its role in cultural processes. First of all, it is necessary to see the notion of culture in a dynamic sense and to pay attention to the processes of transmission. In other words, I'm going to stress the processual dimension of cultural systems, namely, the mechanisms of transmission, diffusion and innovation. This theoretical choice is consistent with the traditional social anthropology approach. Despite an apparent lack of explicit interest in the processes of cultural transmission, it is undeniable that from Marcel Mauss, Evans-Pritchard, Alfred Kroeber to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz, social facts are characterized by their transmissibility;[7] according to Maurice Bloch, «the ability of humans to imitate and to borrow information and then to pass it on to another by non-genetic means is (…) what makes culture possible» (Bloch [2005]: 7). Therefore, in the following remarks I will assume that that what makes something «cultural» is the mechanisms of its transmission, while the specificity of each cultural fact resides in its mode of transmission.

Anthropological scholars usually define cultural transmission as a non-genetic process by which cultural elements - in the form of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills, practices, and values as mediated by brains, bodies and environmental features - are transmitted via social mechanisms, such as imitation and teaching, from one genera-

[6] Other ethnographic cases that are particularly eloquent concerning the close connection between aesthetics and ritual efficacy: (Desjarlais [1992]); (Laderman [1991]); (Roscoe [1995]).

[7] The overlapping of culture and transmission is a common theme in social anthropology. See Berliner (2010).

tion to the next, from one group to the next, and from one individual to another. In connection with what has emerged so far on the nature of the aesthetic, if we want to stress the role of this latter in cultural dynamics, we need a model that views cultural transmission as a transformative system wherein the sensorial, affective, cognitive and environmental aspects are part of an integrated developmental process. Therefore, in contrast to what neo-darwinian models of cultural evolution assert,[8] cultural transmission does not merely consist in spreading or copying «bits of culture» (ideas, concepts or propositions). On the contrary, cultural transmission is an historical process, subject to casuality, dispersion, and innovation and it reaches down into the sensorimotor schemas, feelings, and emotions that constitute our meaningful encounter with the world. Every culture is constituted through processes of transmission involved in a field of practice and that go without saying. Therefore, the dynamic of cultural transmission cannot be described as mere transference of shared contents. Similarly, what is commonly defined as a «cultural trait» very often cannot be considered a discreet entity of information to be transmitted; rather, it constitutes a part of a complex developmental process that modifies both the unit being transmitted and the individual.

Moreover, it should be noted that, precisely because of the distributed nature of the cultural facts, the individual mentalization is the place where shared meanings are achieved. The individuals are always the principal vector of transmission and the openness of the processes of cultural transmission depends to a large extent on the fact that each new mentalization opens up possibilities of transformation related to the life-history of a person. Therefore, cultural transmission could be described as a performance by a whole organism-person within a cultural niche[9].

By composing this definition with what has been said above about aesthetics, I see cultural transmission in the aesthetic regime as a form of transmission that continually responds to perturbations within the perceived environment; it is ritualistic, highly creative and mediated through gestures, dance, music, smells, texts, images and artefacts. It is precisely in this form of performative interaction[10] with the cultural environment, wherein a given individual's knowledge is semantically undetermined and inextricably linked with, or bound to, a given location (theatre, ritual place, church, etc.) as well as to the individual's body and affects, that we have proof of the transformative character of aesthetic conducts.

As a result of the opened nature of the transmission processes, the symbolic body of a culture is structurally precarious and subject to dispersion and misunderstanding. Every social system is therefore engaged in an aesthetic-expressive tension that causes great energy expenditure and a huge symbolic surplus. Precisely because of its divergent, polyphonic and prospective cognitive character and the existential frame it manages to create in the flow of experience, aesthetic conducts have the effect of stabilising and renewing the network of meanings and symbols of a cultural system.

Specifically, from historical and evolutionary points of view, I argue that this aesthetic transmission plays a crucial role in the construction of the human cultural niche (Laland, O'Brien [2011]). As remarked by the previous Leroi-Gourhan's quotation, a primary aesthetic interface with the environment shapes social relations and material culture. Individuals are socialized into a world of sensation that resonates with their bodies and influences the way objects are experienced. This is supported by the contemporary research on situated cognition and on the epigenetic cerebral variabil-

[8] The Darwinian paradigm of cultural evolution seeks a population-level explanation and stresses only the macro-level of cultural transmission in order to elaborate statistical models for cultural change and diffusion. For a paradigmatic position see Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981).

[9] Although I prefer to keep the reference to the notion of «transmission», my claim is close to Ingold's notion of «education of attention» (Ingold [2001]).

[10] According to Christoph Wulf, a performative interaction could be defined as «the combination of cultural performance, speech as action and the (aesthetic) staging and performing of the body» (Wulf [2013]: 200).

ity described above, whereby the neuronal configurations are structured by the continuous cultural practices in which human action is immersed. Thus, the aesthetic should be considered as a sensorial, conceptual, and ideational matrix of a given culture's perceptual environment. I shall pursue this reasoning a bit further and propose that the human cultural niche is fundamentally experienced as an «aesthetic environment» (Berlean [2002]) or, stated differently, an aesthetic niche (Menary [2014]). According to this perspective, aesthetics and the cultural environment are tightly and reciprocally bound to one another in an ecological process. Human beings learn and develop inside this aesthetic niche; the exposure to specific sensory environments reorganizes neural circuitry, anchoring knowledge in memory through affective reinforcement. In this way, we simultaneously shape and are shaped by our aesthetic environment; consequently, every aesthetic niche becomes an inheritable trait that affects the practices and behaviours (aesthetic or not) of individuals.

It is within this broader ecological framework that the connection between aesthetic dimensions and the dynamics of cultural systems should be reformulated. This relationship has traditionally been conceived along a one-way causal vector that goes from social organization to artistic objectification: aesthetics is that expressive-sensorial dimension in which the social structure is displayed. I argue that it would instead be more appropriate to conceptualize the relationship between aesthetics and cultural dynamics as a two-way causal, retroactive connection, since aesthetic perception itself also impacts generatively the network of symbols, norms, beliefs, and institutions. While it is true that an aesthetic act is always projected against the backdrop of institutions, norms and habits that determine our judgment and reactions, it is likewise true that the aesthetic perception shape the incessant process of reconstituting the symbolic framework of a given culture. Aesthetic cognition restructures the cultural contents of a social context by moving analogically within the individual network of imaginative associations, memories, and cultural meanings. Such an impact is closely related to the character of indeterminacy and the associative freedom of aesthetic attention that, as we have seen, depends on its specific cognitive and schematic operations. This developmental system of micro-adjustments with retroactive effects turns into a generative force. Particularly eloquent therefore is the claim by Bruce Kapferer and Angel Hobart, wherein «the everyday world in its structuring dynamics, in its emergent symbolic forms, is aesthetic and, most importantly, manifests or objectifies (….) the forces engaged in its composition, which are thus made available to aesthetic contemplation or reflection» (Kapferer, Hobart [2007]: 4).

To summarise, the relationship between aesthetics and human cultures should not be merely described as the objectification of a cultural content into an aesthetic form, but rather as a complex two-way mechanism whose performance depends on the articulation of the three dimensions of functioning of the aesthetic. A developmental system in which aesthetic conducts are influenced by social institutions and belief systems, while a given cultural system is continually renewed and refurbished by the specific behavioural, cognitive, and experiental features of our aesthetic relationships with the word. In this model, the multidimensionality of the aesthetic is a basic component of the symbolic processes of transformation that continuously shape and reshape the human cultural niche. Aesthetics thus becomes a key frame of reference that allows us to rethink the creative and freely productive character of the processes through which individuals reproduce and transform their culture. Revealing a two-way relationship between aesthetics and cultural dynamics changes our perspective on the more general matters of the persistence, transformation and diffusion of human cultures.

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Playing with pattern. Aesthetic communication as distributed cognition

José Ignacio Contreras

Abstract. This article's main thesis is that aesthetic communication has evolved from animal social play to forms of extraordinary complexity such as traditional arts, helping to preserve and transfer survival oriented information in a preverbal, or embodied form. Following this line of argument, aesthetic communication provides the basis for an adaptive modeling of reality wherein the agents engaged simulate potential exchanges and outcomes with factual or fictive entities, further enhancing – by proxy – their ability to predict and adapt to natural and intentional contingencies. By means of aesthetic communication human cognition has become distributed, i.e. off-loaded in the practices, customs and emotional templates readily available in culture. In this light, the decline of traditional societies and the isolation of art practices that results from it, are to be considered subjects of scientific concern in addressing the societal and ecological crisis we confront today.

Keywords. Evolutionary aesthetics, animal play, cybernetics, cultural evolution, epistemology.

The ultimate paradox may be that
play can only be understood through itself.
Burghardt (2005): 405

One of the first things that strike us about art is its costliness. Whether we stand in front of Lascaux; Hagia Sophia; the sand mandalas of Tibetan monks, a Bach chorale, or the elaborate body paintings for the initiation passage of the Selk'nam people, we respond to this elaborateness with a sense of wonder. Where does the magnificence of it all come from? What is the payoff of such sophisticated patterns of behavior? As George Bataille (1949) once said, «art is an occasion of destruction of wealth»[1]. Art is time consum-

[1] Bataille was probably developing an idea advanced by Marcel Mauss (1925) in his essay *The gift,* that examines the practice of potlatch by indigenous tribes of northwest America. The potlatch consists in a gift-giving feast in

ing, effort taking, and seemingly doesn't produce any consumable goods. In evolutionary orthodoxy there's an implicit law of economics at work. Behavior that's replicated over the eons must of necessity increase the survival fitness either of the individual, the group, or the species. Thus, any question regarding the origins of art, seems impossible without considering a proper evolutionary perspective, one that embraces the phylogeny of human behavior and offers a comprehensive account of how the arts may or may not contribute to the overall survival fitness of our species. An anthropological perspective is also a necessary complement for this kind of research. Art is a cultural phenomenon, and although it would be easier to talk about art in general and move forward within the safe premises of western art and theory, from a biological standpoint this narrowness is inadvisable, to say the least. Regardless of what we consider high or low art expressions, if we are to propose a working hypothesis on the origins and adaptive value of art, it needs to be falsifiable within the vast spectrum of cultures and peoples that have been reported by field researchers all over the world. It would also be sensible to listen to what artists, poets, philosophers, and aesthetes have to say about the matter. Although the introspective method has been systematically discredited by contemporary academia, people who have devoted their entire life to the practice and theory of art have developed a sophisticated vocabulary, along with subtle emotional responses to the phenomenon under scrutiny. To deliberately neglect this evidence is to suppress any chance of dialogue between the natural sciences and humanities, thus severing our hypothesis from general validity. The passage between these divergent disciplines is harsh, but it's a passage one needs to traverse back and forth, in order to wind up with a sufficiently robust theory. In the next pages we are about to present an overview of findings in various fields of study, such as animal behavior, cybernetics, cognitive science, ecology and evolutionary aesthetics. Considered as a whole, this article offers an evolutionary account on of the origins and adaptive value of art.

which a chieftain challenges or responds to another chieftain either by giving away or destroying his wealth. The greater the wealth destroyed in the feast, the higher the status attained by the chieftain.

COSTLINESS OF ART AND PLAY

As we have already mentioned, one conspicuous feature of art's manifold expressions is its costliness. Not only from a pedestrian approach to the arts does this costliness perplex us, but also from an evolutionary frame of inquiry, where the biological costs of artistic behavior might seem unjustified in the absence of any solid benefits. Bearing this in mind, one should ask if we happen to know about any other behavior in the animal kingdom whose costs apparently exceed its benefits, which is time consuming and has patterned and recognizable features that distinguish it from the repertoire of the species' typical behavior. Certainly, our best candidate would be animal play[2]. Burghardt (2005) defines five ethological criteria for the recognition of animal play. For the sake of convenience, we present them at length to be consulted further in the development of this article.

1. Limited immediate function: behavior is directed toward stimuli that do not contribute to current survival. 2. Endogenous component: behavior

[2] We will refer to non-human animal behavior or non-human animal play behavior throughout the paper boldly as *animal behavior* and *animal play*. There are at least two good reasons for abridging this convention. The first is, there's no longer controversy in referring to the human species as part of the animal kingdom, so when speaking of *animal behavior* or *animal play behavior* as distinct phenomena from human behavior or human play, it should be stressed that we are acknowledging commonalities as well as differences with the human species-specific repertoire. The second reason is formal. As the paper provides a brief historical account on the subject of animal play, most of the quotations are foreign to the subtleties of contemporary conventions. If adhering to the *non-human animal* convention could probably lead some readers to confusion, we rather risk a little anachronism for the sake of transparency.

is spontaneous, voluntary, intentional, pleasurable (and) rewarding. 3. Structural or temporal difference: behavior involves patterns with modified form, sequencing, or targeting. 4. Repeated performance: behavior is performed repeatedly in a similar, but not rigidly stereotyped form, during at least a portion of the animal's ontogeny. 5. Relaxed field: behavior takes place when the animal is adequately fed, healthy, and free from stress. (Burghardt [2005]: 71-77)

Burghardt's work is a splendid synthesis of almost a century of research dedicated to the subject of animal play, but what's particularly interesting for our study is that it provides a comprehensive approach to behavior allowing for a seamless transition from animal to human play. Taking a glance at the costliest and most patterned exemplars of each tradition and testing them against Burghardt's five criteria, the omnipresence of play in human culture would be hard to contend with. The analogy between play and the costly products of culture such as religion and the arts is not a recent one. It was Huizinga (1938) in his seminal book, *Homo Ludens* who first undertook an attempt to interpret the vast field of human culture in the light of play. «According to Huizinga, play is the ultimate source of virtually all cultural systems: myth and ritual, law, poetry, wisdom, and science» (Bellah [2011]: 76). If that weren't enough, he even speculated that play had something crucial to do with the emergence of mind, and in this respect he was at least two decades ahead of the incipient study of cybernetics.

But in acknowledging play you acknowledge mind, for whatever else play is, it is not matter. Even in the animal world it bursts the bounds of the physically existent. From the point of view of a world wholly determined by the operation of blind forces, play would be altogether superfluous. Play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos. (Huizinga, [1938]: 3)

Huizinga's argument is deeply indebted to the *Letters on the aesthetic education of man*, a pioneer work by the German poet Friedrich Schiller (1795). «(Man) is only completely a man when he plays» says Schiller. For modern thinkers such as Schiller, Baumgartner, or Kant himself, who were highly concerned with ideas regarding human moral dignity and ultimate purpose, aesthetic phenomena were paramount instances of freedom as opposed to natural determinism. Taking pleasure in the arts, whether musical, representational or visual; devoting one's time and genius to the play of pure reason or the quest for a transcendent truth; all of them require a uniquely human disinterestedness. This predilection of modern thinkers with the costly products of human culture as having something to do with moral dignity is reminiscent of the classical notion of *arête* (ἀρετή), an attribute of the Greek aristocracy that consisted in showing one's excellence in various disciplines, particularly those that conspicuously produced no goods and were solely aimed at the refinement of body and spirit (Jaeger, [1947]: 421). Evidently, the *Letters* draw a lot from this source, and the text as a whole could be read as a sort of renewed *paideia* (παιδεία), but Schiller does not stop here, and goes on to propose a play instinct that he discovers in the whole of nature.

It is true that Nature has given even to creatures without reason more than the bare necessities of existence, and shed a glimmer of freedom even into the darkness of animal life. With what enjoyment of life do insects swarm in the sunbeam; and it is certainly not the cry of desire that we hear in the melodious warbling of the songbird. (…) An animal may be said to be at work, when the stimulus to activity is some lack; it may be said to be at play, when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action. (Schiller [1795]:207)

Before we drift away to humanities for good, it would be advisable to draw from here a connection with the natural sciences. In fact, Schiller's ideas, though seldom credited, were very influential in the beginnings of play theory. It was Herbert Spencer (1855) who first observed from a naturalist point of view that «once an animal no longer had to expend all its energy on survival, the surplus could be released in play» and else-

where he likens play with aesthetic activities by affirming that they «neither subserve, in any direct way, the processes conducive to life» (Spencer [1855]: 627). So we find Spencer suspect not only of forgetting the source of his valuable insights, but contrary to evolutionary orthodoxy, advocating a somewhat paradoxical definition of animal play, in which he denies play – and aesthetic activities – any survival benefit, leaving the costliness of the behavior unexplained. The so called *Surplus Energy Theory*, ignited a long lasting debate around whether or not play serves a biological function either immediate or delayed that would account for its costliness (Groos [1898]; Power [2000]), what conditions had to be met before engaging in playful behavior (Craig [1918]; Bally [1945]; Burghardt [2005]), or why it is self-reinforcing – i.e. pleasurable – for participants and onlookers. Truth be told, we haven't yet arrived at a conclusive explanation for any of these problems, but as we carefully gather observations and draw valuable insights from models that have proven predictive across taxa, the analogy between animal and human play becomes an ever more compelling one and so do our chances for presenting a plausible account of the origins and adaptive value of art as a human form of play.

So far we have pinpointed strong analogies between the costliness and elaborateness of both play and the arts. Could we stress the analogy even further? Burghardt's (2005) *Surplus Resource Theory* (SRT) provides a useful and integrative model to understand which factors underlie the emergence of play. Variables in the animal's Ontogeny; Energetics; Psychology/Sociality and Ecology are all to be considered as having a strong influence in the playfulness of the species under study. What should be noted for our current survey is that the ubiquity of play in human culture could hardly be explained as a mere by-product of evolution. Since the beginnings of archaic societies, art, ritual, and costly elaborateness have played a role in modeling our now highly domesticated environment, operating a positive feedback loop in cultural evolution. What Burghardt's SRT model predicts is that not only does play benefit from a surplus of resources, it is also instrumental to the replication of precisely that kind of environment.

> *We now recognize that play can be viewed as both a product and cause of evolutionary change; that is, playful activities may be a source of enhanced behavioral and mental functioning as well as a by-product or remnant of prior evolutionary events. (Burghardt [2005]: 121)*

If Burghardt's claim has some ground, we should direct our efforts at understanding not only where play originates and how we inherited it, but most importantly how play modifies the human mind as our evolutionary tool par excellence. What we are about to attempt in the next pages is to provide a framework that allows us to address this play/mind problem within the larger scope of evolutionary epistemology.

PATTERN: A FIGHT AGAINST ENTROPY

As the early study of cybernetics teaches us, complex systems survive in an environment of high uncertainty by signal redundancy and feedback self-regulation. Complex systems are by definition emergences out of the interaction of simpler units; bodies from cells; self-regulatory artifacts made from physical parts; learning systems made out from carbon or silicon based circuitry. In this light, living systems, societies, minds and viruses, all emerge as order and pattern against chaos and entropy.

> *We are immersed in a life in which the world as a whole obeys the second law of thermodynamics: confusion increases and order decreases. Yet, as we have seen, the second law of thermodynamics, while it may be a valid statement about the whole of a closed system, is definitely not valid concerning a non-isolated part of it. There are local and temporary islands of decreasing entropy in a world in which the entropy as a whole tends to increase, and the existence of these islands enables some of us to assert the existence of progress. […] Remember that we ourselves constitute such an island of decreasing entropy, and that we live amongst other such islands. (Wiener [1950]: 40)*

If it weren't for these "islands of decreasing entropy", life on Earth would not be possible. The process of adaptation presupposes that an information feedback is taking place between the species and its environment. We can portray adaptation as a feedback that allows a species to be *informed* or modified by environmental conditions, so that an instrumental, albeit unconscious knowledge about its surroundings, can be stored and replicated by the reproduction of its genetic pool. By way of example: «A shark is beautifully shaped for locomotion in water, but the genome of the shark surely does not contain direct information about hydrodynamics. Rather, the genome is supposed to contain information or instructions, which are the complement of hydrodynamics» (Bateson [1972]: 134). Far from having discovered principles that underlie physical phenomena, the process of natural selection has attained a precise match between organism and environment by pure statistical means. Anatomical specialization as a result of natural selection takes many generations to be shaped to the environmental demands. Conversely, as anatomical specialization decreases and brains achieve representational power – which can also be expressed as neural specialization – the process of adaptation becomes faster and suppler, taking place within the ontogeny of the individual. We call this adaptation learning proper. To anticipate and predict pattern accurately is what learning systems are all about. Our brains are modeled to recognize and expect pattern and regularity in our surroundings and continuously adjust their policies to actual contingencies. The information feedback we call natural selection has not been replaced by any means; it has been pushed to a new level of emergence that is mental instead of physical. So in a fundamental sense, there's a homology between life and learning; both can be described as information coupling that exerts selective control over variability, replicating what's useful and discarding what's not.

> *Plotkin and his colleagues (1982, 1987, 1988) […] have examined the basic assumptions of evolutionary theory as applied to intelligence. […] Intelligence, in this context, becomes much more than the capacity and skill of one individual mind. Rather, it includes the entire knowledge-structure of the species, as it is stored across the various levels available to the multilevel evolutionary process. Variation is generated at all four levels; the variants are tested, and the successful variants are selected and then regenerated. (Donald [1991]: 158)*

If variation and selection are to be considered as learning either in the biological or behavioral levels, we can draw a continuous axis that goes from the phylogenetic development – as expressed in anatomical features of the fossil record – to the ontogenetic process of adaptation, which involves the expression of innate or acquired behavior – learning in its common usage –. We could even stress the axis further, to include cultural systems with their instances of variation and replication and make them too, subject to the same axioms of evolution. It should be stressed that human minds are never confined to the ontogenetic level, but keep developing by means of cultural transmission. The patterned practices that a culture bears witness to, are not strictly speaking inventions of individual minds but the outcomes of a distributed cognition system that is meant «to decrease entropy and increase the predictability of experience» (Hutchins [2013]: 13). According to the distributed cognition framework, human learning is based on knowledge structures not fully confined to individual brain activity, but distributed across individuals, artifacts, and culturally transmitted practices. For example, when solving an arithmetical problem, one individual may rely on formulas learned from tradition, or when opening a can with a can-opener, the problem solving process is partially off-loaded by means of a tool. In both examples, solutions are implicit and inherent to the problem design and cognition is to be characterized as an interaction or affordance between individuals and their culturally mediated environments. In much the same way, we would like to argue that art expressions should be considered as knowledge structures whose role is to provide a shared cognition system while at the same time

off-loading resources of individual cognition in ready-made artifacts and templates, upon which individuals can reduce uncertainty and re-elaborate creatively according to actual contingencies.

It might be contended that cultural transmission heavily relies on the invention of writing or what Merlin Donald (1991) has aptly called an External Symbolic System. It's probably true that the use of symbols that could be stored outside human brains –e.g. written language– has rapidly enhanced the possibilities of cultural transmission and replication. In point of fact, this is the view advocated by Clark and Chalmers (1998) in what they call *Extended cognition*. However it is also true that literacy is a relatively recent innovation in human evolution – only the last five thousand years out of a roughly one hundred thousand years of history. Long before there were any means of encapsulating knowledge in external symbolic systems, human beings were replicating their cultural environments effectively, sometimes for many hundreds of years. Evidence of prehistoric early hominid stone tools and traditional tool making dated as old as 3.3 million years of age (Harmand et at, [2015]), provide strong evidence that a form of cultural transmission was taking place long before our species made its apparition in the map. From genetics all the way up to cultural heritage, complex systems rely on information transfer strategies of which the human use of symbols is but the tip of the iceberg. So what was going on before written language, or even prior to language acquisition? How did the long lasting informational couplings we call cultures emerge and shape themselves over the centuries?

In Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological account (1964), culture is about transforming or incorporating into the human realm those wild elements of nature that would be otherwise dangerous to manipulate. The act of cooking, tool making, the rites of passage between infancy and adulthood, marriages, funerals, and so forth, are all carefully punctuated by pattern and costly elaboration. In pre-modern societies art is far from being an isolated activity; it's interwoven in all activities conducive to life, conveying important messages about the agents' beliefs and concerns (Dissanayake [2000]). A recipe for preparing an otherwise poisonous root; a chant for propitiating supernatural agents before the construction of a boat; preparation of one's body by means of self-painting or entheogen consumption. Every human act bears the trace of a mind that does not extinguish completely as long as it is repeated according to custom or tradition. So great is the relevance attributed to these patterned elaborations, that if not performed correctly (i.e. according to tradition) they could easily lead to havoc and misfortune. In Huizinga's account:

> *The purpose of music and dance is to keep the world in its right course and to force Nature into benevolence towards man. The year's prosperity will depend on the right performance of sacred contests at the seasonal feasts. If these gatherings do not take place the crops will not ripen. (Huizinga [1938]: 14)*

In this light, when embedded in tradition, arts are anything but superfluous. In a fundamental way they're aimed at giving pattern to exchanges with otherwise dangerous entities, either natural or supernatural, by replicating the age-old formulas of what makes a good living. Wiener's quotation at the beginning of this section reminds us that we as «such islands of decreasing entropy» are not surrounded by physical phenomena only, but our world is crowded with intentional agents, agents that expect and behave according to pattern, agents that depend on connecting with each other in their fight against entropy. By building a network of meaningful practices, that is, by distributing cognition across artifacts and inheritable patterns of behaviors, a culture claims a life of its own, in which no individual is alone to cope with disorder and uncertainty.

AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION

Making sense out of experience and communicating it to others reliably is at the very core of human culture. In the preceding section, we presented the reader with an informational approach

to artistic behavior, wherein patterned practices served to build a distributed cognition system, by means of which individuals could engage in real life problems and contingencies, off-loading some of their resources in templates, formulas, or instructions learnt by tradition. Following this line of argument, art production and the cognitive response to the arts must have been selected early in our species' development as a special form of social communication, rendering informational couplings, which language acquisition could not make totally superfluous. The now famous quote by choreographer Isadora Duncan «if I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it» (Bateson [1972]: 137) boldly declares this fundamental irreducibility of human arts to the symbolic domain, and their right to be considered as an altogether different sort of communication; namely, aesthetic communication.

Aesthetic communication only takes place between intentional agents. Before we can properly declare the objective meaning of an aesthetic message, we can feel the intent the agent has ciphered in it. By glancing at the arrangement of its parts, we are acquainted with a physical or spiritual state of affairs (meaning) and an agent's state of mind when performing the behavior (emotion). If we can read the message properly, our cognitive response will be that of recognition. That is, the message contains recognizable features, which serve as a frame for aesthetic engagement between encoder and decoder. There is no aesthetic experience without a sort of intimacy, an intimacy that mirrors a mind's effort to attain order from chaos and participates in this never-ending task. Even in the contemplation of natural beauty, in its appreciation of order, balance or magnificence, our mind is not capable of withdrawing completely from the recognition of intent. This, among other things, has lead the vast majority of cultures to believe through the ages, in supernatural agencies, either benevolent or merciless, and bears witness of the pervasiveness of what Daniel Dennett (2006) has aptly called the «intentional-stance». Aesthetic experience always betrays a message, that is, the willing expectation to communicate with one another. And that is precisely why aesthetic communication has played such a crucial role in shaping and replicating human culture. Traditional arts not only provide a way to formalize meaning and emotion by means of abstract structures, they actually allow communication to take place across the barriers of space and time. When a material outcome of art finds a support that outlives its agent, such as the case with Upper Paleolithic cave art, the physical attributes of form, color, movement and rhythm we perceive, bear traces of meaning and emotion that regain a life of its own. At an unconscious level, we could say that cave art functions in this example as an encoded message that delivers a specific set of cognitive instructions; a musical sheet nobody has ever taught us how to read, but which however we can play as expert interpreters.

> *Generally speaking, color is a power which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul. (Kandinsky [1914]: 43)*

How are meaning and emotion rendered by the aesthetic experience? First of all, the time and effort invested in the performance should bear witness to the importance of the matter at hand. It has been argued by Alcorta and Sosis (2005) that it is only by wasting resources, or what's known in ethology as *costly signaling,* that others can trust the message as honest and reliable. Secondly, the performance has to achieve order, which is, as we said before, emergence of pattern from simpler parts. Sounds, colors, movements should be arranged in rhythms, cadences and frequencies, so as to produce expectation, prediction, surprise or resolution. And thirdly, the performance must be permeated with deep emotion, in order to produce aesthetic engagement. We could hypothesize that these are three basic attributes of the arts, which are biologically rooted: *Costliness, Pattern*, and *Emotional attunement*. When the three of them coalesce what we get is aesthetic communication.

So far we have seen that aesthetic communication provides culture with a means to preserve and transfer non-symbolic information, encoding it in costly pattern; pattern that functions as a key stimuli that releases meaningful and emotional responses in their recipients, making them, too, agents of novel ways in which the successful pattern can be modified and reproduced. The work of art is never experienced as the sum of qualities of an external object, but as the embodiment of an *I – You* relationship, to use Buber's (1923) terminology. That's why the intimacy we find in the arts is experienced as a sort of resonance, or as Plato would have phrased it, as *remembering* (ἀνάμνησις) of an ideal form. As we will see further, aesthetic communication builds upon mirroring neural systems that have been developed by an array of social species. So the illusion of being identified with the author (Pseudo-Longinus [c. 1st ce. A.D]; Stravinsky [1940]) or the paradox of remembering a pattern when we are exposed to it for the first time, might not turn out to be so metaphysical after all.

AESTHETIC EMOTIONS IN PLAY AND THE ARTS

One of the three biologically rooted components that we mentioned earlier in this work is emotional response. Along with costliness and pattern, emotional response to the arts is one pervasive feature of the aesthetic experience. One cannot imagine a work of communal art that involves the effort of many individuals nor the attainment and recognition of order and beauty out of rough materials, without some kind of emotional involvement. We invest and engage in aesthetic communication because we care. As we emphasized before, intentionality is not just the corollary of a message, but the frame by which an otherwise totally accidental arrangement of sensitive parts becomes informative. When studying the arts, to neglect emotion would be to neglect the motivational context in which the behavior is embedded, which would rob the activity of any meaning. Meaning, as we have shown above, is by necessity an inextricable part of what brains have evolved to construe out of experience. The time is ripe for our evolutionary account of the arts, to look into the phylogeny of emotions, answering what has been their role in shaping aesthetic communication in our social species.

Altriciality is probably one of the most distinctive traits of our species. We are born defenseless and depend completely in our caregivers for many years before we can be completely autonomous. Feeding, clothing, and shelter might be granted in a domesticated environment but, as we know, this hasn't been always the case. Since newborns cannot handle any kind of symbolic communication, there's a strong selective pressure in caregivers for emotional coupling. Is the newborn cold, hungry, bored or sleepy? If it weren't for emotional bonding the survival rate of newborns would drop, and so would the genes of unsympathetic caregivers.

> *During this time, infants and toddlers can develop, use, and rely on nonverbal, gestural, emotional signals to meet basic needs, interact, and communicate. These years provide continuous opportunities to learn and fine-tune the skills of emotional signaling; these skills will continue to be learned and refined during the course of life even after words and other symbols are mastered. (Greenspan, Shanker [2006]: 29)*

Our species comes from a long phylogeny of social mammals in which this selection process has already taken place for over three hundred million years; no wonder we have developed specialized neural mechanisms for emotional tuning between babies and caregivers! It should be stressed, too, that these are the very same mechanisms at play when interacting with conspecifis. Joint attention, empathic response to fear, and learning by imitation, have all been selected for as exapted forms of emotional coupling. Despite the fact that emotions in other species are not always easy to identify, we can confront animal social play against Burghardt's second criterion and infer a high predominance of positive emotions with reinforcing characteristics. The absence of immediate survival benefits – Burghardt's first criterion

– further supports this inference. Social play is a special form of interaction in which the sensitive attributes of behavior – exaggerated movements, surprise, repetition, chance, resolution – become a source of pleasure for the players. The particular sequence – Burghardt's third criterion – we find in playful behavior detaches itself from the species-typical repertoire, many times signaling the opposite of what it means in real life. A stronger individual might actually *self-handicap* to signal a weaker counterpart the interaction is «not as in real life». Dogs can take turns chasing each other, and bonobos will hang many feet over the ground relying completely in a partner's hand as if vital risk weren't an issue (Behncke [2015]). As the Surplus Resources Theory (SRT) predicts, social playfulness will increase according to the availability of resources in the environment. Burghardt's fifth criterion establishes that the animal is adequately fed, healthy, and free from stress. In Craig's (1918) terminology we would say that the animal is neither engaged in an appetitive nor a consummatory behavior, but is in a *relaxed field* (Bally [1945]). What's interesting for the problem at hand is the fundamental difference between the emotional value of play and survival-driven behavior. Whilst a basic survival emotion such as fear, has been selected for a specific action course (fight or flight), playful emotions are intrinsic, freestanding, and respond to stimuli in a *detached* way, more concerned with the sensitive attributes of the performance and the agents at play than with the material outcomes of the sequence (i.e. consummatory behavior). Furthermore, social play presupposes that, up to a certain point, the agents involved share the same playful intent. It is not rare when dealing with signals that some of them should elicit consummatory behavior – as when the play-fights of dogs become too rough. That's why the framing of play has to be periodically reestablished through emotional signaling. This explains why a basic emotion such as fear can be experienced as thrill, and fight or flight not as survival responses, but as punctuation in a sequence of joyful engagement between the players. The logical conclusion would be that during social play, animals are sharing messages about the context of their engagement, a frame, or *meta-messages*, to use Bateson's (1972) terminology.

At a neural level, the discovery of brain mirroring neural systems (Rizzollati et al [2004]) has given some physiological ground to the shared intentionality hypothesis. Some social skills as joint attention, imitation behavior and goal prediction have been found to depend on a specific set of mirror neurons that fires both when performing and observing an action.

> *Our understanding of others as intentional agents does not exclusively depend on language, but also on the relational nature of action. In many situations we can directly grasp the meaning of other people's basic actions thanks to the motor equivalence between what others do and what we can do. (Gallese [2017]: 44)*

If mirror neural systems have played so critical a role in the development of social skills across taxa such as birds, rodents and primates, we surely can infer their activation in social play interactions, wherein context leans heavily on adequately assessing a counterpart's intentionality. In this light, by the amount and variability of social play interactions we could predict a group's ability to act and respond together to urgent environmental pressures. This leads us to what Burghardt calls *tertiary play process*, «play behavior that has gained a major, if not critical, role in modifying and enhancing behavioral abilities and fitness, including the development of innovation and creativity» (Burghardt [2005]: 119). Drawing on this hypothesis, Isabel Behncke (2015) has conducted a compelling fieldwork with a bonobo community living south of the Congo River in the DRC: «Playing with individuals of different sizes, personalities and sex requires learning about contextual-dependent behavior: with whom and when a bite is appropriate, a chase over a push, a gentle tickle rather than a stomping slap, and so on» (Behncke [2015]: 27).

If social play enhances emotional signaling that means it influences group cohesiveness. By sharing intentionality and emotions with others

in the relaxed field of social play, emotional reading would not only have gained accuracy but also led to the emergence of all kinds of new emotional subtleties that simply weren't there as innate responses to external stimuli. These findings begin to shed some light on the hitherto mysterious origin of human emotional expressivity. By learning to mimic non-voluntary emotional responses, and then playing with them by exaggerating or modifying the sequence of motor expression, human beings could for the first time share important information offline, namely, in absence of an environmental key stimuli, inaugurating what Merlin Donald (1991) calls *Mimetic Culture*. This is a momentous leap where social play, as seen across animal and human domains, enables the emergence of aesthetic emotions. We may now characterize aesthetic emotions as encompassing: 1. Empathy: the neural basis for emotional mirroring 2. Motivational autonomy: reframing the meaning of behavior outside a survival driven context and 3. Pleasure: positive emotional response, acting as a reinforcement mechanism for both brain restructuring processes and social bonding. In a deeper analysis, the aesthetic communication we find in play provides the basis for an adaptive modeling of reality wherein the agents simulate possible exchanges and outcomes, further enhancing –by proxy– their ability to predict and adapt to natural and intentional contingencies. If, as we have been arguing, culture depends on making sense of experience and providing a means by which this knowledge can be preserved, transferred, and re-elaborated, then aesthetic emotions must have had a pivotal role in the beginnings of human arts. Fear, anger or zest are emotions that, when aroused in their primary form, can only lead to action, but when deprived of their survival urgency and presented in a punctuated, patterned and meaningful manner, pave the way for the playful detachment so distinctive of aesthetic communication.

> *The visible traces of the creative gestures activate in the observer the specific motor areas controlling the execution of the same gestures. Beholders' eyes catch not only information about the shape, direction and texture of the cuts or strokes; by means of embodied simulation they breach into the actual motor expression of the artist when creating the artwork. (Gallese [2017]: 45)*

Hence we can see how aesthetic communication has evolved from animal social play to forms of extraordinary complexity such as deliberate art production for the purpose of cultural transmission; namely traditional art. Drawing from our inherited capabilities of costly signaling, pattern predilection, and emotional attunement, we can connect and extract valuable information from the readily available artifacts we find in our culture. As human beings, we participate throughout our development in this cultural scaffolding, and we probably never give it up completely. The extraordinary leaps in learning that we observe in a few years of a child's development rely in the acquisition of patterns readily available in the child's cultural environment. As newborns we wake into a patterned and meaningful world, during infancy we play with reality until we are able to deal with it, in adolescence we begin to grasp the moral values of our culture, and as adults we have the chance to exert them and deliver them to others. But across all life stages we depend on our cultural network of meaning to keep us in balance, to support us and to make sense of life's seeming disorder; birth, loss, failure, success, disappointment. We have learned how to express our emotions because we have shaped them into cultural templates; grieving, falling in love, forgiving, are all internalized memories of our cultural heritage. In an interesting hypothesis, John Pfeiffer (1981) refers to Upper Paleolithic cave art as part of larger multimodal experiences endowing the youngsters with the community's library during the rites of passage:

> *The richer the experience, that is, the more associations attached to it, the more widespread its "ripple" effect in the brain and its ultimate representation in the hierarchies and networks of memory. […] Total sensory bombardment was essential when, in the absence of libraries, the brain itself had to serve as*

library. The effort, which today goes into the preparation of books, the research and organization and style illustrations, went into the preparation of ceremonies during the Upper Paleolithic. (Pfeiffer [1982]: 220)

Cultural scaffolding never takes place without aesthetic communication. It needs to be played out, so to speak, making the child believe he has "created an object" that was already there (Winnicott [1971]). If it were possible to translate this kind of communication into a purely symbolic message without losing something essential there would be no point in *playing* it. The more we depend and confidently play within these networks of meaning, the richer our experience of the world becomes and so do our possibilities of living creatively. Once an aesthetic message becomes canonical (traditional), it begins to live in the minds of countless generations of hosts, activating patterns – by means of neural mirroring systems –, which in turn, are creatively modified and replicated as open source programming. An original work is never the achievement of a single or isolated mind, but of a distributed cognition system of themes, templates, recipes and canonical structures, which serve as basis for creative expression:

Every minister in every faith is like a jazz musician, keeping traditions alive by playing the beloved standards the way they are supposed to be played, but also incessantly gauging and deciding, slowing the pace or speeding up, deleting or adding another phrase to a prayer, mixing familiarity and novelty in just the right proportions to grab the minds and hearts of the listeners in attendance. (Dennett [2006]: 154)

This *transitional* template granted by aesthetic communication will probably not take us materially to the far reaches of space and time, as abstract reasoning and applied science sometimes claim, but in keeping its flame alive, at least we will not arrive there so empty-spirited as to be totally deaf to the music of the spheres which inspired our quest in the first place.

THE ILLUSION OF A CLOSURE

In this article, we have shown how aesthetic communication has had a crucial role in the scaffolding of mind allowing us to build a distributed cognition system we call our human world. We have proposed that art, as a human form of play behavior, is far from superfluous, and we have given several examples of its evolutionary payoffs. A question of great scientific interest is whether the aesthetic communication we find in the human arts still serves a purpose in our contemporary forms of cultural transmission. Huizinga (1935), Guénon (1945), Donald (1991), Dissanayake (2000), and Bellah (2011) have all shown special concern with the cultural drift we're experiencing from the fading out of traditional societies. Having crossed the threshold of mythic culture, rites and ceremonies are no longer a universally legitimate commentary on human experience. Theory and criticism have replaced, maybe without return, the feasts, narratives and séances that used to keep the human world from falling apart. Analytical thought, with its development through technology, has had a pervasive effect in modern society; its supremacy is not only felt in media, education, government and production, but also in ethics, where it questions traditional values and aims to replace them with conventional or utilitarian principles. In this regard, art has become isolated, as some sort of luxury of the civilized world; or an «accursed share», to use Bataille's (1949) image. Confronting this state of affairs, we must remember that, «the stability, resilience, or persistence of a practice depends on the network of relations to other practices within which it is embedded» (Hutchins [2013]: 13). If, as we have portrayed so far, aesthetic communication has had such a pivotal role in the evolution of our species, conveying informational couplings between human beings and the worlds we deal with, scientific effort should be aimed at understanding what kind of knowledge we jeopardize by building our society based on the sole value of profit and utility, and how this bias is acting in or against our benefit in the long run. If aesthetic communication

is to be considered, like Bateson (1972) thought, as a sort of «unconscious ecology», a pattern that connects islands of decreasing entropy, then the waning of art at the verge of ecological disaster begins to be a non-trivial matter. We would like to draw this article to its logical conclusion by quoting once again a man who saw that play was anything but superfluous. Huizinga's *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, a work deeply concerned with the cultural disease of our times, contains a sentence which aptly synthesizes the message of our own essay: «If we are to preserve culture we must continue to create it» (Huizinga [1935]: 35).

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From Aesthetic to Epistemic Structures and back: Complex Dynamics between Art and Science

Fausto Fraisopi

Abstract. We often forget that art and science are not dissociated, nor indeed antagonistic, but rather allow a creative interplay to emerge from which arises the generation of new forms of knowledge (Miller [1995]: 190). According to Parkinson, "the analogy between the new painting and the new physics consists in that elements formerly held as cognitive or conceptual a-prioris enter as constitutive factors in the very structure of the edifices of art and science" (Parkinson [2008]: 161). How exactly does it work? If for us nowadays it's relatively easy to think of the mimetic moment of art as a prelude to geometry, it is not so trivial to claim how higher-order representational symbolic epistemic structures (h.o.r.s.e.s.) arise from the lifeworld, or simply how both interact together. The aim of this paper is to stake out the complexity of processes going from the lifeworld and, before that, from the life of pictorial language, to h.o.r.s.e.s., in order to apply this model to further enquiries. In the first part, we will reactivate the Kantian interdependence between aesthetics and epistemology via the intersubjective dimension, in order to understand how the shaping of forms and the figuring-out patterns remain an essential component of any epistemic structure as such. In the second part, moving from Hacking, Husserl and Foucault, we will look into the way in which the evidence of symbolic structures can be maintained even alongside a genetic conception of science. Art plays an essential role in such a conception, in that it opens new horizons of figurativity in which new shapes can arise and new kinds of objectivities (Gegenständlichkeiten) can be accepted as belonging to our epistemic experience of the world.

Keywords. Symbolic Structures, Aesthetic Dimension, History of Science, Kant.

There is a strong interdependence
between aesthetic and epistemological problems.
E. Garroni

We often forget that art and science are not dissociated, nor indeed antagonistic, but rather allow a creative interplay to emerge from which arises the generation of new forms of knowledge (Miller [1995]: 190). According to Parkinson, «the analogy between the new painting and the new physics consists in that elements formerly held as cognitive or conceptual a-prioris enter as constitutive factors in the

very structure of the edifices of art and science» (Parkinson [2008]: 161). How exactly does it work? If for us nowadays it's relatively easy to think of the mimetic moment of art as a prelude to geometry, it is not so trivial to claim how higher-order representational[1] symbolic epistemic structures (h.o.r.s.e.s.) arise from the lifeworld (that is conceived as necessarily art-laden), or simply how both interact together. The aim of this paper is to stake out of the complexity of processes going from the lifeworld and, before that, from the life of pictorial language, to h.o.r.s.e.s., in order to apply this model to further enquiries. In the first part, we will reactivate the Kantian interdependence between aesthetics and epistemology via the intersubjective dimension, in order to understand how the shaping of forms and the figuring-out patterns remain an essential component of any epistemic structure as such. In the second part, moving from Hacking, Husserl and Foucault, we will look at the way the evidence of symbolic structures can be maintained alongside a genetic conception of science. Art plays an essential role in such a conception, in that it opens new horizons of iconicity in which new shapes can arise and new kinds of objectivities (*Gegenständlichkeiten*) can be accepted as belonging to our *epistemic* experience of the world.

1. AESTHETICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY: MOVING FROM KANT

1.1 Subject, community and shapes

In Epistemology, beyond a purely consensual theory of truth, a cognitive agent must be able to provide the evidence of his statements without external (cultural and anthropological) elements. That is also the idea of a transcendental theory of truth as presented by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this sense, the subject is *alone*, while having access to invariable forms and structures, which are able to shape the evidence for his claims of knowledge.

The experience of beauty on the other hand, according to Kant, confirms the mutual link between the subject and the community (with its cultural and anthropological structures) by a sort of projection of agreement in the claim of validity for every aesthetic judgment (critically considered). The Other, a sort of immanent human transcendence, is present, even if the intersubjective community cannot be deduced by the subject of the claim itself. However, the discovery of intersubjectivity does not seem a roughly idealistic process: the transcendental ideality of the open horizon of all judging subjects is to be found in the dynamical character of the capacity to judge, which acts without reducing the otherness of intersubjectivity to the subject (of knowledge). Such a reduction can be either psychologistically or metaphysically fashioned. According to Kant, on the contrary, intersubjectivity is necessary to the subject in order to be able to conceive itself. According to the claims of taste itself, subjectivity is decentralized, opened to something that is neither roughly psychological (association) nor metaphysical (as a sort of renewed monad). Due to such decentralization, the otherness of a community (historical but also merely synchronic) appears as a coessential (and therefore irreducible) for overcoming the *monadism* of the transcendental subject. Through the mirroring between *selfness* and *intersubjective otherness*, the dimension of historical knowledge emerges, not in the sense of a knowledge of history, but of a historically sedimented knowledge shared with other subjects in a well-defined transcendental perspective.

According to Kant, however, the opening of an intersubjective horizon first of all shows the possibility of grasping the potentially infinite richness of empirical experience (by which knowledge can be knowledge of something determinate rather than of purely physical principles). In other words, before giving access to any kind of history (natural history, human history and historical knowledge) to conceive an *intersubjective otherness* defines the relation between the epistemic agent and the experience of the natural world, as well as its codification in a positive knowledge whatsoever. In this

[1] On the vast topic of «representation» between art and science, see Chakravatty (2010).

sense the experience of beauty is only an exemplary moment. Coherently with the introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, the principle defining the aesthetic subjectivity, or the aesthetic experience of subjectivity, i.e. finality, brings – so to speak – the Kantian philosophy from the idea of a merely mechanical system of nature to a richer idea of nature as a final system. From our perspective, that can be used as a thread for another inquiry: to show how the intersubjective manifold of art forms, in a well-determined age, will bridge the gap between two different ideas of knowledge and, thus, between two different world-images (*Weltbilder*).

In both cases, we need not only to conceive nature as a pure structure of laws, that is, as an *objectum purae matheseos* (Descartes, AT VII: 71), and science as a *mathesis pura atque abstracta*, but to grasp both in their potentially endless empirical diversifications. First we have to shift to another, primordially rooted Nature, instead of holding on to the idea of nature as a sublimation of purely quantitative physical laws. Finality intervenes, according to Kant, precisely at the point where the Newtonian world of pure masses reveals itself only as a high speculative formalization of our way of experiencing it, i.e. as a *natura formaliter spectata* rather than as a *natura materialiter spectata*. Even if the purely relational schema of pure understanding could be sufficient *ex principio*, it determines a phenomenologically *poor* nature, that is, a nature without basis, just as the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* gives a very peculiar idea both of natural science [*Naturwissenschaft*] and of science as such, viewed from the point of view of a systematic approach.

The object, definable in its fundamental epistemic core as *pure mass*, needs to be experienced as *form*, that is, as a figure or as inherent to a figure; it needs to be *figured out* as shape, as *Gestalt*, in a mimetic process that is anything but innocent. In order to be able to *speak* about nature, in order to be able to grasp nature in its potentially endless empirical determinations, our vision must be *taught* to *figure-out* shapes of things. According to Kant, once it is made entirely independent of any form of Psychologism, the process of *figuring-out shapes* becomes a purely transcendental process, even if not in the sense of the transcendental schematism of pure concepts of the understanding.

The implementation of the pure time-schematism with the empirical schematism does not represent an extrinsic need for the aesthetic subjectivity. By showing the strong dependence of the empirical experience on the capacity of our imagination to figure out shapes and patterns, Kant shows that our experience of the world cannot emerge without an intrinsically aesthetic operation. In a somewhat symmetrical way, the intrinsic intersubjective nature of aesthetic experience shows how our experience of the world, a world existing before and independently of the emergence of higher-order formal categorizations, is linked to a practical dimension of life. The world of empirical experiences, as a «world in between», between knowing and agency, is a horizon of contamination, hybridization, a sort of *generative matrix of ways to figure-out shapes and patterns*[2]. The ways of imitation are not only a pure passive ways of mirroring objects but a higher and more complex systemic process of our living, acting and understanding. In this world-in-between, the dimension of fusion and contamination does not unfold as a series of shocks between pure masses, but as encounters between individual entities, cultures, shapes, sounds, gestures and so on.

The experience of beauty is the exemplary phenomenon of contamination, in which we can describe – from a transcendental point of view – the interaction between understanding, sensibility and imagination, the interaction between the subject and his community, the plastically open mirroring between the individual and the universal. The *Deduction of the Judgments of Taste* is the moment of the third Critique in which the universal capacity of figuring out shapes and patterns is linked with intersubjectivity. If the *Analytic of Beauty* alone was sufficient to legitimate the sta-

[2] For the use of «generative matrix» cfr. Schnell (2019: chap. 5).

tus of intersubjectivity, the Deduction not only makes explicit the implicit: the first nine of the twenty-five sections of the Deduction would have been sufficient for that. To make explicit not only the reference to a community *tout court*, but its grounds means precisely to show how that world of forms, the world in between, can be continually reconstituted and reformed.

The Deduction articulates the principle of finality as grounds for universal *formativity*, as a rule of figuring-out shapes and patterns, the moment in which the synergy between common sense (and intersubjectivity) and formal finality converges to the formation of new shapes. As early as the middle of the analytic of beauty, the communicability of pleasure and the free play between the understanding and the imagination were a sort of specular aspect of the same aesthetic dynamics: the ground of pleasure is the communicability of a sensation. The ground of communicability is the harmonic dynamic of the faculties.

1.2 Shaping forms and figuring-out patterns

The free play by which imagination and understanding are aesthetically harmonized, that is oriented to a knowledge in general [für eine Erkenntnis überhaupt], determines – by the same operation of a figuring-out shapes and patterns – the immediate state of our experience. Between appearance of our world of pre-objective experience and objectification through epistemological frames, we can find the dimension in which and by which the manifold pre-predicatively is formed, becoming then a semantically consistent reality. Such a pre-categorial synthesis, defined by Kant as *comprehensio aesthetica* (Kant [1928]: 320), comes up in the *Critique of Judgment* as a «standard idea» (Kant [1790] § 17: 83).

The dynamics described here are not one of associative processes, that is, of personal psychological acts of figuring-out: «This *standard idea* is not derived from proportions that are taken from experience *as determinate rules.* Rather, it is in accordance with this idea that rules for judging become possible in the first place» (Kant [1790]: 84). The emergence of an aesthetic idea as well as of a standard idea is empirically independent, because the faculty of the imagination itself to figure out shapes, i.e. normal ideas, is transcendental, that is: defines a condition of possibility [*Möglichkeitsbedingung*]. It can recall signs for concepts, it can associate a sign to an empirical shape – that the imagination sketched by the description of the visual space – with an archetypal shape: the standard idea. The *eidopoietic* nature of imagination shows also the means by which we think of the empirical world analogically as an interconnected system of forms in mutual relation. According to the standard idea, the world as pre-predicative experience takes on a stable meaning; the neutral state of the subjective dimension also begins to take place in a world constituted by purely relational functions, but moreover begins to appear as its phenomenological basic level. That what the imagination does in an absolutely dynamical natural way, i.e. to figure-out shapes and patterns, is the process by which the imagination «projects a large number of images onto one another. By fixing the middle archetypal form of the object, it is the ground of every empirical conceptual representation» [Ibidem, 83]. The standard idea represents, so to speak, «the image that nature used as the archetype on which it based its productions within any one species» [Ibidem], and it is thus the source of the conceivability of nature. On an intuitive level, it is the archetype by which we can recognize an object, as *this* object. From the standard idea the capacity of judgment projects a sort of frame of regularity into the empirical nature: even the roughest perception of a simple everyday object presupposes the identification, merely analogical but nonetheless essential, of an archetypal causality which is entirely heterogeneous with a deterministic system, the index of regularity that inscribes the bare ontological singularity in a semantically consistent horizon of meanings and forms. Such a demand for stability, before to be formalized in a teleological principle for the Reason as objective finality, is at work basically in every subjective experience.

Even in the process of schematizing, the purely relational structure of transcendental determina-

tions of time (*transzendentale Zeitbestimmungen*) needs, in order to be the *experience of an individual*, another kind of schematizing. The faculty of judgment, either by the standard or the aesthetic idea, preserves that way of shaping forms from Psychologism and reveals it to be something transcendental, but in another way. The faculty of judgment allows us to recognize the identities and the differences between the real object, staked out by shaping its forms, and the concept. How, Kant seems to be asking, do we come to recognize in an empirical manifold a tree, a linden, independently of the fact that this *something* contains general ontological predicates? At the level of immediate perception, the subject receives an empirical manifold that becomes the tree, the linden, only by shaping its form.

What is this «certain something»? Its presence can no longer be purely determined by a transcendental cognitive relation, that is a relation subsisting between subject and pure manifold (the so-called *Gegenstand überhaupt*).

The access to a meaningful, semantically consistent empirical world, is the free yet harmonic interplay between imagination and understanding (Kant, [1790]: 159). Without such a process it would be impossible to have any empirical experience: the ego would be reduced to the experience of an anonymous world. The patterns and the consistency of our empirical world arise from the basic individuation of singularity, not as an ontological singularity, but as an empirical one. The individuation of singularity goes beyond the *praesentia* of a purely ontological complex of relations, and first emerges through naming something recognized as an empirical object. It is precisely at this point that Kant tries to overcome the dichotomy between *mathesis* and *taxinomia* as main presupposition of the science of the modern age.

The relation between name and aesthetic idea serves as an index for the recognition of the experienced *quid*, as *terminus a quo* from which the imagination inscribes the anonymous ontological *quid* in a semantic network: the function of any empirical scheme goes hand in hand with the capacity to link names to standard ideas (Capozzi, [1987]: 121). All of that resides outside a purely formal ontological process. The irreducible parallelism between thought and language, language and nature (word and object), justifies and needs at the same time the intertwining of analogical thinking in order to codify everyday experience in its empirical dimension. If we had a sort of natural relationship between word and concept, as if words, not only names, had an already valid correspondence with things, we would have no need (in Kant's view) of such analogical relations, and the faculty of judgment could play no role in determining our empirical experience. The faculty of judgment plays, on the contrary, an essential role by considering the constitutive semantic fluidity of our experience. How could we, upon a logical ground, infer a conceptual identity from the partial similarity of one thing to another? It is impossible by syllogisms or by concepts. «What I see there and know is a linden!»: in order to utter such a judgment, in order to fix a full correspondence between the shape of this tree, the monogram that my imagination has sketched, and the name – then the concept – must overlap, and therefore I can be able to judge what element pertains to the identification and what does not! The rough singularity of the thing must be *trespassed* towards the identity of the concept, because the concept is always universal (see Kant [1924], *Refl.* 2866: 121), whereas the unnamed thing remains a bare individual. If the concept, as universal, can be applied to a potential infinity of cases, the jump that brings the naked singularity to the universal is neither purely empirical nor purely conceptual, but another kind of process, that is, an analogical one.

In the case of analogical recognition, as with aesthetic representation, it is clear how only certain representational contents are such empirical determinations, inherent to the tree in front of us, but not all of them: only salient representations must be kept. Between the complex representation of the singularity of something and the concept, a sort of shrewd reduction takes place by way of intentionally experienced abstraction, as

in a sketch drawn on paper, or in a mimic gesture or a melody. Could we abstract from Socrates in order to obtain his simple shape? We do that in every moment of our object-oriented experience! In Kant's view, we do that through our productive imagination, educated by aesthetic experience, precisely at the moment when we *name something* with a common noun, such as: «Socrates is a man» or «that is a linden». The process of obtaining that *medium* which serves as a common criterion, as a common measure, is based upon the figuring-out of our imagination (see Kant [1923]: 94; Kant [1966]: 270).

In order to be comparable, then in order to be inscribed within an epistemic or even proto-epistemic framework, bare singularities first need to belong to a genus, to have a common noun. It would be meaningless to compare the linden on our right to the street lamp on our left, if not from a purely formal-ontological point of view. Making clear the analogical processes which puts the subject in its relation to the manifold of empirical experience not only reveals a subjectivity which is constitutively rooted in a semantic framework of meanings and ordered processes, but above all, it reveals how the capacity to figure something out is the necessary condition of knowing, because knowing, before working in purely and normatively formal (formalized) contexts, means being able to bring the singularity into a context, into a semantically concrete framework. This is provided *aesthetically*, according to Kant, by the capacity to judge, that is by finding shapes for a bare singularity. Such an aesthetic way of judging comes from a more disinterested activity of *figuring-out shapes and patterns*, that is, of figuring-out *per se*, without concerning oneself with reality, things or objects, but merely with the shaping of forms.

In this way, Kant presents - at the same time - a new approach to Art, even if the *Critique of Judgment* cannot be considered a treatise about philosophy of art. In other words, he shows a way to bring aesthetics and epistemology together in order to understand how everyday life depends on beauty above all else. In this sense, the basic epistemology of the real world depends on the experience of beauty in a broad sense, for only such experience can activate the essential predisposition for receptivity to ideas, essential predisposition to every relationship with the empirical dimensions of experience. For Kant, however, epistemology and science, in the traditional meaning of *scientia naturalis* and *historia naturalis*, do not include within them a history. Their genesis, already existing and remaining in the background, tells us not about scientific revolutions or paradigmatic crises, but merely about a progressive teleological description of nature itself. If, according to Kant, the *aesthetic* (*das Ästhetische*) plays a central role in epistemology, its *epistemology* is precisely that, what must be questioned and criticized. What the history of science has revealed is that, in fact, science, or the huge network of scientific practices, is more differentiated than it may have seemed at the end of the eighteenth century. It would be very difficult to extend directly the claim of the central role of aesthetic experience on epistemology to that highly differentiated network of epistemic practices which, to this day, we still somewhat naively call science.

However, difficult does not mean impossible. The second part of this paper will evaluate precisely the possibility of such an extension, and the necessary clarification of its basic features, which results therefrom.

2. FROM AESTHETIC TO SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES AND BACK

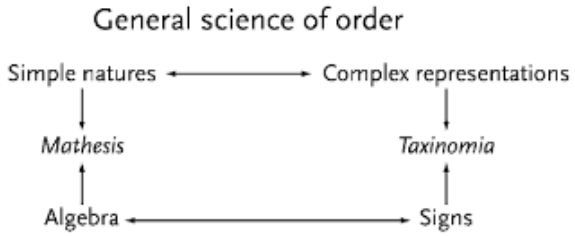
2.1 Passivity, lifeworld, and genetic processes

The question to be asked is no longer whether intersubjectivity (even as a common aesthetic sense) works as the cognitive component for every subject, but whether subjectivity, as empirical and historically situated subjectivity, via intersubjectivity, works on the formation of h.o.r.s.e.s. What we should be asking, in other words, is a) whether there is a trace of the aesthetic working, or of some aesthetical transfiguration of reality, in higher-order symbolic structures of knowing, and b) whether these formations, or some of them,

work backwards to transform our aesthetic imaginary life.

At first sight, it seems obvious that there can be neither fusion nor contact between h.o.r.s.e.s. and the aesthetic element. As in a sort of dogma, we are oriented to consider the genesis of symbolic mathematical, physical, biological epistemic structures, i.e. structures with a high rate of formalization of one or more regional ontologies, as entirely independent of the aesthetic, a dimension wherein beauty can work only from the point of view of the elegance of formalisms (the elegance of certain notations, some proofs and so on).

Such an approach is still essentially Kantian, at least from an epistemological point of view. The aesthetic dimension can, in the best-case scenario, play a role for the so-called soft sciences [Kraus (2011)] and, more generally, for those sciences which – at the time – precisely do not need higher levels of symbolic formalization. In this way, we still remain, so to speak, in that dichotomy sketched out by Foucault, according to which *Taxinomia,* or every complex element of our experience as well as of nature, cannot belong to the horizon of *Mathesis*: the nature of the complex, or nature itself in its complexity, cannot *contaminate* the pure *corpus* of its mathematization (Foucault [1989]: 80).



Our thesis is, to the contrary, that the aesthetic element, the activity of figuring-out shapes and patterns and shaping new forms which seems *prima facie* to be entirely independent of the dimension of formality and formalisms, works in a complex way at an ontogenetic as well as at a phylogenetic level, precisely by allowing new codes of representation to emerge. Such codes, in turn, allow for h.o.r.s.e.s. at the level of a high (if not the highest) rate of formalization. We have then to ask if, and in which way, the aesthetic dimension plays a central role in the formation and construction, but above all in the discovery, of new h.o.r.s.e.s. In this sense, the aesthetic dimension would be considered not only an origin of the receptivity to aesthetic ideas, but also a generative matrix of ideas and epistemic frames.

How could the aesthetic dimension play such a central role? In order to answer this question, we have to take another step into the transcendental dimension, more particularly by considering what the late transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl shows about the genesis and emergence of logically symbolic structures as such. As many scholars since Derrida have pointed out, Husserl is the first to elaborate a genetic non-psychologistic theory of the emergence of logical structures from passivity, in *Experience and Judgement*, and of epistemic structures from the lifeworld, in the *Crisis of the European Sciences* (Husserl [1970]: 27-28).

The importance of such elaboration within ruled genetic analysis cannot be underestimated, first of all for all historical epistemology, as such. In order to sketch out the problem of such a vertical (bottom-up) conception of the emergence of theoretical structures, it will suffice to focus on three points:

1. There is, at the proto-dimension of passivity, a sort of continuum of shapes that shade into one other and are conceivable «at any level of generality». While maintaining his radical anti-psychologism (developed after Frege's criticism of his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* and made stable by the idea of categorical intuition in the sixth *Logical Investigation*), a genetic perspective on the emergence of theoretical structures admits that it is possible (and necessary) to think of a bottom-up process wherein shapes, at any level, have to be considered from the point of view of their logical stability. The process of ideation, or the process of emergence through ideation, does not deny the stability and autonomy of a shape at the level of formalization. The question is, how are we to think of such a verticality of genesis?

2. At the point of the passive proto-dimension, that is, before it has been objectified, a shape cannot receive any kind of intersubjective determinability, i.e. it cannot be «communicable to everyone in its determinations» . The question is: does such an inscription in communicability, in relation to our previous analysis of Kant, still remain purely theoretical, or does it need, at least in some cases, a sort of aesthetic transformation?

3. To take genesis as a bottom-up emergence of shapes for granted, whilst leaving open the possibility of a better understanding of the emergence itself, we have to consider what happens in the transition between the anonymous dimension of shapes, communicability, and the emergence of a formal level as such. Does such a process have something to do with Kant's conception of shaping forms and figuring-out?

The answer to the third question is positive. Indeed, if we consider what Husserl says about the process, we find more than analogies with the process described by the *Critique of Judgement*, but with some important modifications. He says that «measuring is only the end stage » of a longer, more deeply rooted process, meaning that, starting from the proto-passive dimension wherein shapes are embedded in a continuum, the cognizing *ego* begins to describe «bodily shapes of rivers, mountains, buildings» which, as a rule, is independent of names and concepts. It means that, just as for the normal idea, we have to inscribe that form in an intersubjective horizon wherein the shape, in order to be «determinable, and communicable in its determinations, to everyone» must be conferred an elementary linguistic sign.

We find here a sort of symmetry breaking in the pre-categorial experience of a shape and the exit from the continuum of shapes, in order to enter into another continuum, namely the dimension of the lifeworld. It is clear that passivity and the lifeworld are not the same (Staiti [2018]). The lifeworld means intersubjectivity and represents a higher level than pure passivity. In this sense, the emergence from the (undifferentiated) continuum of shapes and the inscription in the lifeworld as an intersubjective (multi-dimensional) horizon signifies an inscription of shapes in a radically new *topology* (Husserl [2008]: 112-118), wherein regions are mapped out and rooted in a sort of *fibration* with each other. Becoming a name, and then a sort of link with an ideality (joined together with other idealities), the pictured similarity would be taken out of its constitutive anonymity and laid open to further determinations: not only the determination of position, but every determination including all further idealization, to the point where the original shape is no longer recognizable as a pictured similarity as such, but is *sublimated*.

According to Husserl's genetic theory of science, the inscription of a shape in the horizon of the lifeworld, even if such horizon is characterized by its multi-dimensionality, need not encounter the aesthetic dimension, as it were. The fact that the aesthetic was never an important topic for Husserl, is proven by the fact that he completely misunderstood, or else ignored (Uzelac [1998]), the importance of the aesthetic dimension in understanding the fixing of shapes at the level of the lifeworld.

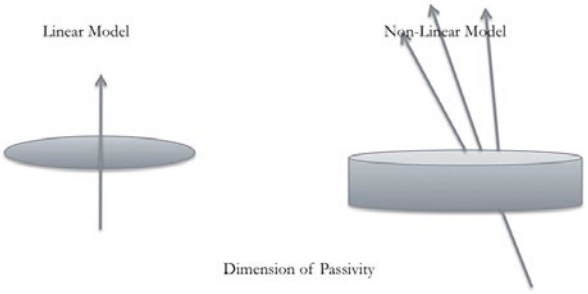
Such a misunderstanding goes hand in hand with a linear bottom-up conception of genesis, as if genesis were a sort of vertical ascent through the power of ideation, that is, with the radical misunderstanding of how the aesthetic dimension is essential to the constitution of an intersubjective community as such. If that is coherent with some of Husserl's basic assumptions about ontology, in particular concerning regional ontologies, it is precisely because such assumptions limit the interpretative power of such a theory of science. For Husserl, although in radical opposition to the ontological monism of Carnap and logical positivism, ontological pluralism is fixed, not dynamically conceived (Pradelle [2010]). The fixed relationship among different regions of experience, as a partition of the lifeworld, make it so that there is no way to think of any hybridization of motives bringing to some higher genesis of concepts and idealities or other. In this sense: from the lifeworld, that which is natural remains natural (as formalized in the natural

sciences), that which is human remains human (as formalized – not too highly! – in the social sciences or anthropology) and so on. The question for us, then, is not merely whether or not, according to Husserl, the aesthetic could become a well-defined regional ontology (in this case it will remain a flat ontology without higher forms of symbolization), but whether such a conception of the lifeworld *per se* is still affordable. To think of the lifeworld, i.e. the multi-dimensional horizon of our experience, as a tiling wherein regional ontologies are tiles, is not only anachronistic but also partially conflicts with the very assumption of a multi-dimensional lifeworld.

From the same perspective, it is anachronistic to think that skipping from the dimension of passivity to the dimension of communicability does not imply a sort of aesthetic transformation. The pictured similarity (a vestige of a sort of Aristotelian psychology, «*imago in phantasia depicta*») is far from being an element of our lifeworld, just as a pictorial work is far from a simply passive copy of something belonging to the same lifeworld.

As Foucault shows, naming and names are no pitches on objects but carriers of the complexity of our living in cultures, with religious, iconographical codes (and systems of power).[3] Naming (according also to Quine [1969]) is not a 1-1 operation but an instantiation of a discursive order. So inscription, through communicability, in the multidimensional horizon of the lifeworld, cannot at first be thought of as a non-active transformation, as if we were dealing with an inventory of things by naming. Such a consideration would take us too far. It is sure that once conceived the difference between the proto-dimension of passivity and the multidimensional horizon of lifeworld, to conceive the bottom-up process as linear and purely vertical is simply and roughly dogmatic. Communicability and aesthetic transformation are almost synonymous, because what we come to see through naming is not only a pictured similarity but a sort of anthropological concretion of meaning which allows us to grasp the named thing or phenomenon as something else, something belonging precisely to our lifeworld. That breaks the linearity of any bottom-up process passing through the lifeworld and going to generate h.o.r.s.e.s. Hence, the passage through the lifeworld breaks the linearity of the genetic process because its anthropological as well iconographic depth works as a prism.

As a prism deviating and refracting a ray of light, the lifeworld, through its anthropological as well iconographic depth, deviates and refracts the genesis from the pre-predicative to a high level of symbolic formalization.



In this sense, Benjamin understood more deeply the strong relationship not only between art and languages, but also between art and the lifeworld. Art is the language of the lifeworld more than any other human factor (Benjamin [1979]: 122).

2.2 Emergence, non-linearity and complexity

If we apply this conception of visual languages[4] as co-essential to the lifeworld as such, we can use it as a method for implementing both Husserl's and Foucault's conceptions, in order to think epistemologically the genesis of h.o.r.s.e.s.. According to Husserl, using the genetic perspective but *aesthetically implemented*, we can claim that the aesthetic element of the lifeworld performs or works actively and genetically bottom-

[3] A satisfactory introduction to this topic can be found in Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn (2009).

[4] On the topic of visual culture and visual language, see Mirzoeff (2001).

up, but not linearly and not bound by any discipline (that is, within a rigid structure of regional ontologies). According to Foucault, the dimension of intersubjectivity is not neutral, but rather a sort of generative matrix of individuation (at first) and the emergence of idealities. To put it differently, the genetic process of h.o.r.s.e.s. is complex, that is «a tissue (*comlplexus* means «what is tossed together») of heterogeneous inseparably associated constituents», «a tissue of events, actions, interactions, retroactions, determinations, fringes, that constitute our phenomenal world» (Morin [2005]: 21). Historic approaches to great civilizational processes, such as the rise of Greek culture (from which, properly speaking, emerges «the idea» of science, *epistêmê*, as we know it), have already touched and analytically considered such implication of motives on the basis of which we can talk about a complex evolution.

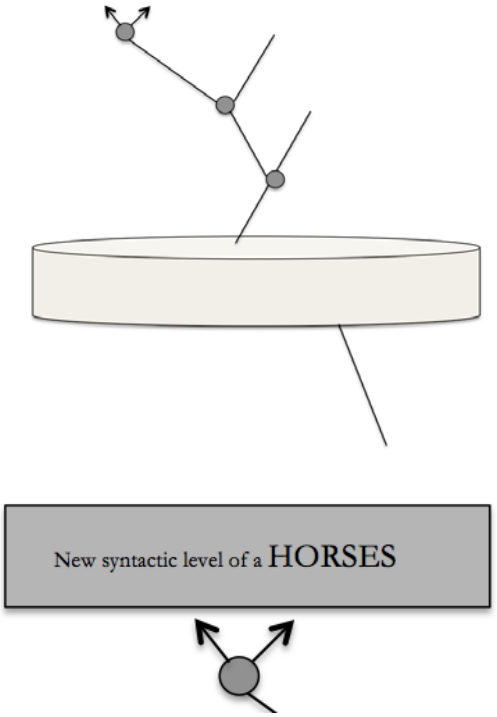
If «art shows an unlimited capacity of spiritual communication» (Jaeger [1986]: 65), it is precisely because – as an essentially formative medium – it lies between the proto-logical dimension of passivity, what Jaeger calls «the sensible evidence of real life», and the conceptual dimension of ideation, that is, «philosophy and reflection». Our thesis is that the invention and construction of h.o.r.s.e.s. must necessarily be not «context-independent» but context-sensitive and articulated according to a constantly operating semantic generative matrix. This must happen from an ontogenetic, as well as a phylogenetic point of view. The thesis is not psychologistic because it is not a question of presenting a sort of psychological analysis of the making of art or the doing of science, but an analytically strong interpretation of changes in science following the perspective of historic epistemology from Kuhn to Hacking. The nodes of the genetic emergence of h.o.r.s.e.s., from proto-passivity to formalization, necessarily pass through real life, and will be refracted, if not oriented, by a sensibility lying at the basis of our real life, an aesthetic sensibility to the world. Art, we might say according to Jaeger, «is more philosophical than real life but it is also more full of life than philosophical knowledge, thanks to its concentrated spiritual reality».

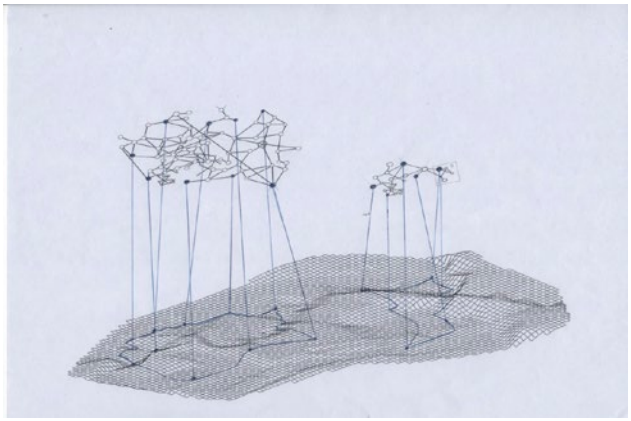
Two possible objections to this thesis are 1) that we cannot apply the method of complex emergence analysis to well-defined structures, and 2) that we fall, if not into a form of Psychologism, then into cultural Relativism *à la* Foucault. That would mean that, with respect to any superficial reading of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, we will lose touch with the evidence of our science, or of our scientific claims because, *in fine*, everything is cultural. But that is not the case, due to the complementarity between the phenomenologic-transcendental approach, which admits, as anti-psychologistic factor, an ever-stable categorical «intuition» of idealities, and Foucault's approach, which brings back, so to speak, the singularity of a conceptual element or node of a scientific complex network to the discursive order of that network as such. The key of a complex interpretation of some formation of h.o.r.s.e.s. must be found beyond all cultural relativism (for every single scientific claim). It arises from, and belongs to, both a certain *discursive field* (Foucault) and to an *order of experience* (Husserl).

There is neither a mere *discursive order* without stabilities, syntactic invariances of highly formalized epistemic experience, nor a mere *order of experience* without paradigmatic, intersubjective and culturally established invariances and saliences of every claim. By complementing Husserl with Foucault and vice versa, we can affirm that a certain claim is statically stable from the point of view of evidence (because evidence, in the form of categorical intuition for h.o.r.s.e.s., arises simply from the directly underlying level) and genetically open, that is, unstable, because it depends on a wider network of concepts, the discursive order, constantly evolving.

If, from a genetic point of view, a h.o.r.s.e.s., even very distant from the empirical experience, still genetically depends on the dimension of the lifeworld and the historical bifurcations of genetic processes from the point of view of the evidence and theoretical stability of a new syntactically higher formalized level, what provides

stability (then possibility) to evidence, is the local categorical pertinence with the directly underlying level[5].





But if, as we (at least) should, we consider a theory or a branch of a theory as a complex network, firstly *per se* (fig. 5a), and secondly in its constant concrete relation to the lifeworld and to the experience (fig. 5b) instead of relativizing evidence, such a general interpretive framework allows us to relativize monistic conceptions of science affected by a dangerous misunderstanding. For example, the very dangerous misunderstanding of a single origin (closer to biblical tales than to science): *the origin* of geometry, *the origin* of physics, *the origin* of biology or *the origin* of science[6].

2.3 Origin, rebirths and feedbacks

The complexity of scientific processes as human processes and their constant relation to the lifeworld, prevents us from speaking about absolute singularities. For example, counter to Husserl, it will be more useful according to Michel Serres to speak of many or multiple origins of geometries: «La mathématique n'a donc pas été une fois, et ceci à tout jamais, en situation d'origine» (Serres [2001]: 25). Such multiple recurrent or resilient *situations of origin* mean simply a reactivation of the relationship with the lifeworld and often with the lifeworld as aesthetic dimension. If we consider phylogenetically, from an historical point of view, many phases of creativity in science, if not revolutions, we notice that they have been filtered by aesthetic dimensions. By affirming the complexity of genetic processes of h.o.r.s.e.s. and their emergence from a lifeworld, it becomes possible not only to avoid

[5] A analysis of the layered structure of categorical intuition was presented by Lohmar (1989: 70-102). For a genetic approach to mathematics in this way, Fraisopi (2012: 33-78).

[6] For a other approach to science, as modular instead of architectonic-axiomatic systems, cfr. Dupré (1983) and Cartwright (1999).

the question «what comes first, the chicken or the egg?», but to analyze some cases from another point of view. Let us consider, for example, the so-called origin of geometry in the Greeks. The myth of a single origin, the search only for a single element in order to explain complex phenomena, should be abandoned once and for all. Where does Geometry or Mathematics come from? Field measurement, bookkeeping, religion (as in the Indian civilization) or whatever else, conceived as unique origin, are all simplistic answers. What came first, agronomy, the religious cult, or art? From an historical point of view, every single element, as part of a complex intersubjective horizon, cannot be, separately taken, a satisfying answer.

The Greek temple, as a symbol of Greek architecture, is not only a building, but like cathedrals in the middle ages, a sort of instantiation of knowledge[7]. But before any cathedrals or what have you, the Greek temple made clear how art and science could melt together. The very meaning of temple, *templum*, *tèmenos*, represents the first original topological partition between sacred and profane life. In this sense, art and religion are what first open up the space of such things as the epistemic as such: why is the Greek temple built according to the golden proportion? Why does geometry find a place in the temple itself? The sacred space, as a normative partition between the inner and the outer, between two dimensions, and as a dimension of normativity itself, allows, in the sense of an epiphany, geometric structures to appear as belonging to the dimension of normativity of the world of appearances. In this sense, art is not only a vehicle for science, but that which allows science to make sense, opening the topological outer space of normativity (but inner space of sacred life) wherein the irregular dimension of phenomenal life must be mirrored in order to become a stabilized meaning.

The same situation of origin can be seen in the late middle ages and at the beginning modernity, when we have no evidence of a single factor determining the rebirth of algebra and mathematics, as well physics and astronomy (Fraisopi, 2016). The method of central perspective, for example, not only works as a model for the *cogito* (Horn, 2000), but above all perspective means a new way to conceive mathematics and physics themselves as formal determinations of nature in science. The same could be said for botany (that is, biology) and illustrating: what comes before? The answer will necessarily be simplistic, because the question is simplistic too (Lüthy, Smets [2009]).

If, on the contrary, we think of a sort of feedback, it is enough to think back to the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. Instead of being considered, as at the beginning, with both ridicule and admiration, we have to look inside, or through, the cubist or the futurist art in order to see what radical counter-effect the deconstruction of the Euclidian idea of space and the relativization of geometry has upon art and common sense. People have not always understood the intentions of cubist artists, and they received this new art with much confusion. While it will undeniably always be remembered as a revolutionary turning point in the history of art for its endeavors to break away from the traditional rules of painting, which had ruled for more than five hundred years, Cubism ultimately represented the artists' preoccupations with new systems of conception and new understandings of spatial structure. As Stephen Kern puts it simply, «then, it was under the impact of the Impressionists, Cézanne and the Cubists that the perspectival world broke up as if an earthquake had struck the precisely reticulated sidewalk of a Renaissance street scene.» [Kern [1983]: 140]. The modernists completely rewrote the rules of painting and opened up the way to every single movement of abstract art that followed cubism. Space was no longer the same in the early twentieth century, and it was up to every student of nature, regardless of their discipline, to uncover the newly discovered mysteries of these higher realms of existence beyond the visible world.

[7] In this sense, Malvezzi (2018), Coldstream (1977), Schweitzer, (1971). For a closer approach to geometric proportions in Greek temples, Leonardis (2016).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Such case studies can ultimately show, starting from the assumption of the complexity of scientific processes, that there is no aseptically defined, decisive division between art and the sciences except contamination (again and again, *immer wieder*), and that epistemology, as a study not focused solely on the object-oriented propositions of science, but on science as a complex system or as a network of complex systems, must consider the fringe of science-making instead of object-oriented propositions, precisely in order to understand what makes it so that the orientation toward objects simply changes. Why does science recognize the need and possibility of admitting new entities into science? If it is impossible to claim that the *aesthetic dimension* determines or orientates the syntactical consistency of h.o.r.s.e.s., without falling into a cultural relativism (à la Foucault), it would be relevant to claim that the aesthetic dimension works precisely in the predisposition to accept new semantic entities, i.e. new kinds of objects, events, states of affairs, as new ontological dimensions. It is the need for science, or for great advances in science, to figure out new situation of origins, to think, to figure out new ontological dimensions even if they are seemingly contradictory with a) sensible experiences, and b) the accepted (already dominant) ideology or worldview (*Weltbild*) resulting from overlapping sensible experiences and previously established h.o.r.s.e.s. Only by working the figuring-out shapes and form, that is the aesthetical dimension of the lifeworld, does art open up new horizons of figurativity. In this sense, we can affirm that through the art-working or through the evolution of the aesthetic dimension, a virtuous circle between our lifeworld and the dimension of knowledge emerges, which is every time instantiated in the opening up of new horizons for seeing and considering the phenomenal world itself.

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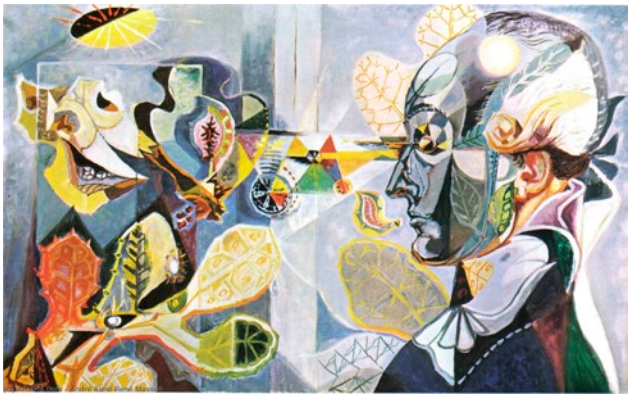
Is aesthetic mind a plastic mind? Reflections on Goethe and Catherine Malabou

Valeria Maggiore

Abstract. What is the relationship between *thinking* and *seeing a form*? In his morphological writings Goethe answers this question by saying that *seeing* is not pure passivity, but a *thoughtful look* because it invokes the *mobility* and *plasticity* of our thinking. For this reason this kind of *aesthetic gaze* is useful to understand the world of life, equally mobile and plastic. In this article, I will try to find out whether Goethe's considerations about aesthetic idea and plasticity can find a new-look in the reflections of Catherine Malabou, one of the most influential thinkers in contemporary French debate, in whose works the concept of plastic form is central.

Keywords. Plasticity, morphology, aesthetic mind, J.W. Goethe, C. Malabou.



The image above, titled *The Metamorphosis of Plants,* was made in 1940 by the French surrealist painter André Masson. As the title suggests, it is a representation that stretches out on the white painting canvas the immediate and intuitive process of aesthetic apprehension and of understanding the original phenomenon.

What immediately prompts our attention, and is therefore the focal point of the whole picture, is the look that connects Goethe's figure on the right to the arboreal representation on the left. A look that is not *pure passivity*, but a *thoughtful look*, which the author of

the painting reproduces graphically, proposing various reworks of the plant. The succession of leaves becomes the true *leitmotiv* of the painting: the plant is decomposed, simplified, chromatically analysed by the subject until it becomes a mental image: what Goethe defines in his scientific writings as *Urphämenom* or *pure phenomenon*. «My perception itself is a thinking, and my thinking a perception» (Goethe [1988]: 39), said the German poet in his morphological writings.

It is precisely on the particular relationship between *thinking* and *seeing a form* I intend to dwell on in this report. It is a topic certainly faced by aestheticians of all times and to which I would give my modest contribution, starting from an article by Catherine Malabou, one of the most influential thinkers in contemporary French debate, a student of Jacques Derrida and now a lecturer at Kingston University of London, in whose reflections the concept of form is definitely central.

At the beginning of the article, titled *An Eye at the Edge of Discourse*, Malabou analyses «this strange state of vision», the «vision of thought», wondering: «what is it to see a thought? To see a thought coming? To be present at its emergence, at the moment when it is still no more than a promise, plan, or sketch, but is already strong enough to live?» (Malabou [2007]: 16). What allows us to talk about the sensibility of an idea? In the platonic tradition, «seeing an idea» indicates the actual act of contemplation. «The idea», Malabou says, «by definition, is that which allows itself to be seen as an image (*eidos*) and the soul is the eye that apprehends it, in other words, receives it without ever inventing, creating, or forming it» (Malabou [2007]: 17). According to this theoretical system, the visibility of the idea is a sort of *imposition*: the idea imposes itself on the mind as something that is necessary to receive and to internalize. I wonder however: is it in this way that we can understand Goethe's gaze, the gaze that has been masterfully reproduced in Masson's painting?

The question is obviously rhetoric. The Swiss literary critic Jean Starobinski, quoted by Malabou, interrogated the etymology of the French term *regard* (look or gaze). He emphasizes that its etymological root does not designate (as one could expect) the act of vision, but the repeated attempt to regain something that, by its nature, is always trying to escape us[1]. «When something has acquired a form», Goethe said, «it metamorphoses immediately to a new one» and «if we wish to arrive at some living perception of nature, we ourselves must remain as soft and plastic as Nature and follow the example she gives» (Goethe [1988]: 64).

The Goethean method invokes the *mobility* and the *plasticity* of our thinking and therefore it would be useful to understand the world of life, equally mobile and plastic. The concept of plasticity, mentioned by Goethe, is relevant to our considerations, because it is a key systemic principle, which can be applied both to our *being in the world* and to our *understanding of the world*, both to our *body morphology* and to *the morphology of our thought*. The plastic principle allows us to consider a living entity in its spiritual and physical unity as a new, dynamic and pre-organized structure, able to integrate necessity and causality, determination and accident. In other words, plasticity allows us to combine «the thought of a sculpture of the self with that of transdifferentiation» (Malabou [2004]: 79).

Malabou moves on the same «accidental» territory of Goethe in the attempt to outline the *ontology of plasticity*. She aims to sketch a new and not naïve way of philosophically rethinking the relationship between human mind, body and accident, beginning with the concept of plasticity, the theoretical support of her whole argument[2]. «In philosophy, art […], genetics, neurobiology, ethnology and psychoanalysis», the French thinker writes, «plasticity appears to be an increasingly more functional operating scheme» (Malabou [2000]: 7).

It is not my intention here to examine the philosophical investigations which led Malabou

[1] Cfr. Malabou (2007): 16.
[2] Cfr. Bhandar, Goldberg-Hiller (2015); Hope (2014).

to elaborate the concept of plasticity on the basis of an original and innovative reading of Hegel. I intend, first of all, to analyze the notional spectrum of the term; secondly, to *weigh* the philosophical scope of this term and *set it in motion* to see if it can lead us to *speculative plasticity*. Finally, I will try to find out whether Goethe's reflections on aesthetic idea, cited by Malabou but never discussed with accuracy in her writings, can find a new-look in her reflections.

With reference to the first point, it is interesting to note that, although the expression πλαστική τέχνη has Greek origins, the derivative term plasticity enters the French language only in 1795. The age is the same for the German term *Plastizität* which, as the Brockhaus dictionary indicates, appears at the time of Goethe and since its entry into the spoken language has been exported far beyond its original area.

The birthplace of plasticity is in fact the domain of art: it is the art of shaping, manipulating a ductile substance (like wax, clay or paper-pulp) in order to create a three-dimensional preparatory model for a work of art or even as an artistic activity to itself. Aesthetics was concerned with this concept mostly referring to that definition, the fulcrum of a key text of eighteenth-century reflection, the *Plastik* of Herder (1778). However, *plastics* are also called, in the physio-chemical field, those materials that at some stages of their manufacture are ductile enough to be molded, thanks to the effect of temperature or pressure (such as PVC, rubber, polycarbonate or polyvinyl). In the medical field, the term has taken still another meaning, indicating the surgical reconstruction of human tissues, performed for therapeutic or aesthetic reasons.

In his *Mythologies,* Roland Barthes, one of the philosophical references of Catherine Malabou, analyzes the word «plastic», saying that it is more than a substance: it «is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible. […] the trace of a movement. […] Plastic is, all told, a spectacle to be deciphered: the very spectacle of its end-products» (Barthes [1975]: 97). This citation is interesting for us because it focuses not on the plastic material in itself, but rather on the *quality of being plastic*, its *versatility*, in French its *souplesse*. According to Malabou, plastic is in fact what «directly contradicts rigidity. It is its exact antonym. [...] According to its etymology [...] the word *plasticity* has two basic senses: it means at once the capacity to *receive form* […] and the capacity to *give form» to reality* (Malabou [2004]: 5). To explain the second of the two indicated senses (the act of giving shape to the real), the French thinker refers to some «professionals of plastic arts»: the sculptor and the plastic surgeon. Malabou merely calls into question these two professional figures without discussing an aspect that, in my opinion, is relevant to our argumentation: their way of shaping is, in fact, very different, because a sculptor, as Michelangelo already suggests in his *Rime*, «sees» and «frees» the form from marble or wood[3]; a plastic surgeon instead «produces» a new form by cosmetically altering the body and «adding» sometimes foreign material to human flesh (this is the case of prosthesis or skin grafts).

In the mentioned cases, in which we can identify two «demiurges of matter», the coincidence of the two previously mentioned characteristics of plasticity is not so easy to perceive. This peculiar coincidence, however, becomes evident if we take into consideration organic bodies, able to be shaped from the outside and, at the same time, to be the engine of this shaping action, in a constant play between creation of new configurations and annihilation of existing forms; this is, in other words, the body's ability to «negotiate with its own destruction»[4], to recreate its formal qualities in relation to the events. «This gradual existential and biological incline, which can only ever transform the subject into itself», states Malabou, «does not, however, obviate the powers of plastic deflagration of this same identity that houses itself beneath an apparently smooth surface like a hidden reserve of dynamite» (Malabou [2009]: 9): a destructive and explosive potential, evident in the

[3] Cfr. Buonarroti (1967): 250.
[4] Malabou (2005): 57.

French word *plastigage*, a term which indicates a «plastic bomber», a substance made of nitroglycerin and nitrocellulose which can cause violent detonation, the disintegration of form and its transformation into the absence of form[5].

Thus, plasticity can be defined as the «synthetic alliance between the giving and receiving form on the hand, and the powerful rupture or annihilation of all forms on the other» (Malabou [2005]: 52).

This consideration might already be the sign of a close relationship between Malabou's concept of plasticity and the Goethean concept of *pure phenomenon*, meaning the original plant painted by Masson or any other perceptible idea. Interested as a young man in natural sciences (especially in Botany and Osteology), the German poet tried to elaborate an empirical theory that would allow him to get beyond the range of individual experimental data, seeking a general law able to explain the malleability, plasticity and variability of life. This is an attempt to understand «the lasting, the permanent, the archetypal form with which nature plays» (Steiner, in Ferrario [1996]: 332) in the multiplicity of natural forms; but this model can be created by our mind only eliminating, in a spontaneous and not predetermined way, all the qualities that statistically tend to vary more. Reinterpreting Malabou's words, one can say that the archetypal idea shares with organic matter the fact that it «is like the sculptor's clay or marble: it produces its refuses and scraps. But these organic evacuations are necessary for the realization of living form, which ultimately appears, in all its density, at the cost of their disappearance» (Malabou [2009]: 12). An *unnatural selection* that does not contradict plasticity, but it is a condition of it: according to Malabou, this kind of selection is functional to «the neatness and power of realized form» (Malabou [2009]: 12).

The conceptual path which led Goethe to the formulation of the «pure phenomenon» is too long and complex to be traced here. I shall just refer to the essay titled *Fortunate Encounter,* in which Goethe tells of his memorable encounter with Schiller after a session of the Jena Naturalists Society. The two thinkers had accidentally left the room at the same time and interlaced a dialogue on the subject of the conference.

> *We reached his house, and our conversation drew me in – wrote Goethe. – There I gave an enthusiastic description of the metamorphosis of plants, and with a few characteristic strokes of the pen I caused a symbolic plant to spring up before his eyes. He heard and saw all this with great interest, with unmistakable power of comprehension. But when I stopped, he shook his head and said, «That is not an observation from experience. That is an idea». Taken aback and somewhat annoyed, I paused […] I collected my wits, however, and replied, «Then I may rejoice that I have ideas without knowing it, and can even see them with my own eyes» (Goethe [1988]: 20).*

Those who are familiar with Goethe's thought can understand that the object of discussion between the two poets concerns the *visibility* and *ideality* of an original plant. When Schiller mentions the «idea» in reference to Goethe's attempt to «graphically» translate the «mental image» of the plant, he does not refer to Platonic idea (as Goethe mistakenly thought), but to the aesthetic idea developed by Kant.

The Kantian definition of *aesthetic idea* can be found in §49 of *Critique of Judgement* which, at the time of this conversation, Goethe did not know yet, but he later read and appreciated, fully agreeing with Schiller. Here the aesthetic idea is defined by Kant as «a representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking, though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it» (Kant [1790]: 192). According to Schiller, the original plant of Goethe is a good example of aesthetic idea, because «it does not belong to any *taxonomic* category, but it is above and beyond it, as an *archetype* of *ideal* nature which contains in itself the creative potential of all *forms*» (Nani [2001]: 34)[6]. It is a *symbolic representation*, in the higher sense of the term *symbol*, because the *thought I see* represents the general «not as a dream

[5] Eadem (2005): 26.

[6] Cfr. Schmitt (2001).

or shade, but as a vivid, instantaneous revelation of the Inscrutable» (Goethe [1833]: n. 200).

According to Goethe (as for Kant) the aesthetic idea is a *regulatory principle,* which, if appropriately used, allows us to not lose orientation in the multiplicity of forms: this kind of idea is not the mental equivalent of any empirically existing form, but something that can only be *seen* by intellect through the creative power of imagination, qualifying itself as intrinsically plastic. It is a *matrix of form* (Allegra [2010]: 80) or a *hypotyposis*, as Malabou emphasizes referring to Kant: it is a *trace* that emerges in incarnate forms never clearly revealing itself or an *image* that can be altered by the discovery of new factual entities (for example, in Botany, by the discovery of unknown plants). Therefore, Nature is plastic, as the idea that can grasp it. This latter is able to give *figure* to the visible without fixing it in a static image, but combining historicity and dynamism. This peculiar figure is for Malabou an «embryo of form, which exists without existing, which starts to live, and which scrutinizes everything even as it hides itself» (Malabou [2007]: 23).

But there is more. This archetypal form, confesses Goethe, is already «a type of ideal [...] For the observer never sees the pure phenomenon with his own eyes; rather, much depends on his mood, the state of his senses, the light, air, weather, the physical object, how it is handled, and a thousand other circumstances» (Goethe [1988]: 24), in other words on what Malabou defines the *ontology of the accident*.

It is interesting to note that the Greek term for accident (συμβεβηχός) derives from the verb συμβαίνω which has a lot of meanings like to *agree with*, to *correspond*, but also to *happen* and to *occur*. If the two first meaning are connected to the Goethean principle of a permanent bond between Nature and its observer, the two other lead us back to an expression that Catherine Malabou defines in her works as synonymous of plasticity: *voir venir*[7]. Also Derrida, who, as we know, was Malabou's academic guide, points out that «plasticity is not a secondary concept or another concept that would add itself to *voir venir* [...] It is the *same* concept [...] Because of its own dialectical self-contradiction and mobility*, voir venir* is in itself a plastic concept, it allows plasticity to come to us» (Derrida [1998]: 8). Thus, the two concepts are *interchangeable*.

I deliberately decided to maintain this expression in French because it could be translated into English only by means of the periphrasis «vision of something that is coming to us». This expression is characterized by an intimate ambiguity, on which I would focus my attention. The *voir venir* indicates the *act of vision* which *sees* what is coming, namely what we can *anticipate* or what we guess on the basis of what we see (for example our capacity to depict future evolutionary changes of species), but it also indicates the capacity of seeing what is unexpected and unpredictable. *Voir venir* is therefore the ability to account for plastic novelties and indicates a mental vision that opens to the contingent and the unthinkable.

At the end of my argumentation, I want to direct my attention once again to the questions posed by Malabou and quoted at the beginning of this article: «what is it to see a thought? To see a thought coming? To be present at its emergence, at the moment when it is still no more than a promise, plan, or sketch, but is already strong enough to live?» (Malabou [2007]: 16). Now I can answer that «seeing a thought» coming, shaping itself and emerging in our mind is possible only if we are aware of the plasticity of our world; it is possible only if we have ourselves a mobile and plastic gaze and, at the same time, if we accept (without hesitation) every natural changes, also the *unexpected* events of life.

[7] Cfr. Martinon (2007): 27-68.

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From the Extended Mind to the Digitally Extended Self: A Phenomenological Critique

Federica Buongiorno

Abstract. In this paper, I will critically consider Clark and Chalmers' hypothesis of the «extended mind» in order to sketch a possible phenomenological account of active externalism, by following three steps: (i) I will consider Clark and Chalmers' hypothesis within the broader context of the so-called «physical symbol system hypothesis» theorized by Herbert A. Simon; (ii) I will connect the problem of the «extended mind» to that of the «extended *self*», with particular regard to the context of digitalization; (iii) I will take into account an explanatory dimension that has been fundamentally underrated by externalist theories: the dimension of the human body and its relationship to mind, which I understand from a phenomenological perspective. My ultimate goal is to show how phenomenology could provide the missing theoretical framework to develop a more complex and comprehensive theory of the (digitally) extended self.

Keywords. Extended Mind, Extended Self, Digital Self, Phenomenology, Theory of Mind.

INTRODUCTION

«Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?» – this was the question posed at the beginning of the very well-known 1998 article *The Extended Mind* by Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 10), which introduced the theory of active externalism in contrast to the classic, passive externalism theorized by Burge and Putnam[1]. While in most of the Putnam/Burge cases the immediate environment is irrelevant and only the historical environment counts in explaining cognition processes, in Clark/Chalmers cases external features play a crucial role in the explanation: for if we retain the internal structure but change the external features, behaviour may change completely. «The external features here are just as causally relevant as typical internal features of the brain» (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 9) – they write.

The authors focused in particular on beliefs and found out that they can be constituted partly by features of the environment: when

[1] See Burge (1979, 1986, 1988) and Putnam (1975, 1982).

those features play the right sort of role in driving cognitive processes, the mind extends into the world. In the case of belief, they write, "there is nothing sacred about skull and skin. What makes some information count as a belief is the role it plays, and there is no reason why the relevant role can be played only from inside the body" (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 14).

In this contribution, I will critically consider Clark and Chalmers' hypothesis of the extended mind by following three steps:

(i) I will consider Clark and Chalmers' hypothesis within the broader context of the so-called "physical symbol system hypothesis" theorized by Herbert A. Simon (especially in his 1993 article *The Human Mind: The Symbolic Level*). I will argue that the hypothesis of twin systems or doubling, which is central to the extended mind theory, can be understood in the same terms as the parallel established by Simon between the human brain and computer processing. In both theories, something crucial seems to be underestimated, which is actually central to the other theory: on the one hand, the functioning of computer processing as a twin to the human cognitive system in Simon's thesis and, on the other hand, the symbolic dimension of the extended mind in the Clark/Chalmers hypothesis.

(ii) Both theories seem to be lacking a fundamental explanatory dimension which, however, Clark and Chalmers briefly draw attention to in their article: "Does the extended mind – they ask – imply an extended self? It seems so. Most of us already accept that the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness" (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 18). Indeed, the hypothesis of the extended mind is essentially linked to the mediation played by some kind of external apparatus (like the notebook, as in the famous example made by Clark and Chalmers in their 1998 article); this mediation implies the agency performed by an "extended self" as the actor of symbolic, extended processes of cognition. This becomes particularly clear, as I will show, in the realm of the *digitally* extended self.

(iii) If we acknowledge the role played by the extended self, especially in the digital environment, we then have to take into account another explanatory dimension that has been fundamentally underrated by externalist theories: the dimension of the human body and its relationship to mind. This is not to say that we have to go back to the "mind-body problem", but it seems that both Simon and Clark/Chalmers have too quickly discarded the problem as simply inconsistent. In this paper, I wish to provide a phenomenological understanding of the bodily dimension implied in extended mind (and self) operations, by referring to Husserl's notions of eidetic variation and embodiment as well as to Merlau-Ponty's concept of *flesh*, in order to show that phenomenology could provide the missing theoretical framework to develop a more complex and comprehensive theory of the extended self.

1. SYMBOLIC MIND – EXTENDED MIND

In his very well known 1993 article *The Human Mind: The Symbolic Level*, Herbert A. Simon considers human mind as a case within his "physical symbol system hypothesis", which he first introduced in his 1976 article (co-written by Allen Newell) *Computer Science as Empirical Inquiry: Symbols and Search.* The hypothesis asserts that «the necessary and sufficient condition for a system to be capable of thinking is that it be able to perform the symbolic processes [of thinking]» (Simon [1993]: 640). By thinking, Simon means activities such as solving problems, reading, playing chess, making an omelette. By symbol, he understands «a pattern, made of any substance whatsoever, that is used to denote, or point to, some other symbol, or some object or relation among objects. The thing it points to is called its *meaning*» (Simon [1993]: 640). A direct consequence of the hypothesis is that a digital computer provides a contemporary example of a physical symbol system, for it seems to be – if appropriately programmed – capable of thinking; conversely, the human brain can be understood – since it is capable of thinking – as a physical symbol system, which implies the existence of a «symbolic soft-

ware level of theory above the hardware of neuronal level» (Simon [1993]: 642).

Simon's hypothesis does not consider human brain and digital computer as *twins* or *doublings*: however, the *brain-as-a-computer* metaphor (more than the *computer-as-a-brain* metaphor) is a powerful one, gaining increasingly popularity in scientific debate. In 2011, Stephen Hawking declared «I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail» (Hawking [2011] – online). Still, Simon's (and Newell's) theory is grounded on at least two controversial assumptions: (i) any system capable of intelligent action must necessarily be a physical symbol system; (ii) a physical symbol system equipped with the appropriate software has all that is required for intelligent action.

In a short passage in their 1998 article, Clark and Chalmers refer to Simon's theory (with particular regard to his conception of memory) and state: «Simon's view at least has the virtue of treating internal and external processing with the parity they deserve, but we suspect that on his view the mind will shrink too small for most people's tastes» (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 12). Indeed, Simon's hypothesis can be interpreted as a version of externalism, since it considers human thinking and computer processing as fundamentally similar; conversely, the famous example made by Clark and Chalmers in their article can be compared to Simon's parallelism of computer and brain: in *The Extended Mind*, they describe a thought experiment based on the experience made by two fictional characters, Otto and Inga. They are both travelling to a museum simultaneously. Otto has Alzheimer desease, and has written all of his directions down in a notebook so as to help his memory. Inga does not have any desease and is able to recall the directions within her memory. Both Inga and Otto can be thought to have held a belief of the location of the museum before consulting their memory (in Inga's case) or notebook (Otto's case); the only difference existing in their two cases is that Inga's memory is being internally processed by the brain, while Otto's memory is being served by the notebook. In other words, Otto's mind has been *extended* to include the notebook as the source of his memory. We can clearly replace Otto's notebook with a digital computer or device: in this case, the help provided by the computer would be much more efficient since, according to Simon's hypothesis, appropriately programmed digital computers can perform just the same thinking activities as humans brains.

But what did we achieve by establishing the hypothesis of *twins* (Clark/Chalmers) and that of *physical symbol system* (Simon)? Did we really *explain* something about thinking (its meaning for us), or did we just describe its happening and functioning? In other words, we may ask: *who* is actually thinking here?

2. EXTENDED MIND – EXTENDED SELF

Who is thinking? Is the *mind* that is thinking or is *someone* who is thinking? This is not a trivial question, since Clark and Chalmers themselves seem to admit the lack of a fundamental explanatory dimension in their theory, which they briefly draw attention to in their article: "Does the extended mind – they ask – imply an extended self? It seems so. Most of us already accept that the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness" (Clark, Chalmers [1998]: 18). Indeed, the hypothesis of the extended mind is essentially linked to the mediation played by some kind of external apparatus (like the notebook, as in the famous example made by Clark and Chalmers in their 1998 article); this mediation implies the agency performed by an *extended self* as the actor of symbolic, extended processes of cognition.

Thus, we can broaden the notion of extended mind by linking it to that of extended self. The expression "extended self" was first systematically used by Russell W. Belk in his 1988 article *Possessions and the Extended Self*: as a researcher in economics, Belk was interested in understanding how things – i.e., material possessions – are regarded by consumers as *parts of ourselves* and what consequences derive from this not only in terms of consumption but also in terms of how we under-

stand ourselves as identities, personhoods and subjects. As Belk notes, the idea that «we regard our possessions as part of ourselves» (Belk [1988]: 139) is not new to cultural studies and philosophy: William James already underlined in 1890 that «a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account» (Belk [1988]: 139) – that is to say, the extended self includes external objects as well as other persons and places.

> *Objects in our possessions literally can extend self, as when a tool or weapon allows us to do things of which we would otherwise be incapable. Possession can also symbolically extend self, as when a uniform or trophy allows us to convince ourselves (and perhaps others) that we can be a different person than we would be without them.* (Belk [1988: 145])

It seems that the theory of the extended self can help better understand the agency involved by the hypothesis of the extended mind as well as specify the role played by external factors and environment in the theory of active externalism: if we assume that the objects we posses can symbolically extend our-selves, this also implies an extension of our cognitive power and mind. This is of particular significance in the context of digital environment that is typical of the latest development of high-technological societies: we could update Clark/Chalmers theory of active externalism in order to talk about *digital active externalism*, regarding the extended mind as an essentially *digitally* extended mind. This review is suggested by Russell Belk himself: in 2013 he revised his well-known 1988 article by taking into account the transformations caused by digitilization in our present time and its consequences on the way we perform our identity digitally (Belk [2013]). He underlines some problems that are characteristic of the digital extended self and that we can interpret – my suggestion – in a phenomenological perspective.

3. PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE (DIGITALLY) EXTENDED SELF

The most important features of digital extended mind are two: the first feature is called by Belk *dematerialization*. «Things are disappearing right before our eyes» (Belk [2013]: 478). Today, most of our possessions are digital, i.e. composed by electronic streams that are stored locally somewhere in a cloud within the Internet. Our Emails, music, photos, videos, texts are now digital data, i.e. dematerialized digital artefacts. Of course, as stated by Lehdonvirta [2012], phenomenologically digital goods are very real to their owners and users and it is rather material goods that are not real in the Internet realm: we can develop a strong attachment to digital possessions (we may think of the common obsession with the constant back-up of our data on different memory-tools). At the same time, since virtual goods are endlessly replicable, it is "difficult to regard them as perfectly unique, nonfungible, and singular, even if we have custom-crafted them or employed suitable possessions rituals", (Belk [2013]: 481)

Connected to dematerialization, a second change occurs, which has a special phenomenological meaning: we may call it reembodiment. Dematerialization also means a disembodiment of subjects in the digital context – let us just think of the possibilities of telecopresence in digital communication, where the condition is the absence of the corporeal body and face-to-face communication. However, the disembodiment we experience through digital activities is far from being a simple detachment of the self from the body: it is a more complex phenomenon, since it is followed by «a reembodiement as avatars, photos and videos» (Belk [2013]: 481). The relative freedom of configuring our avatar bodies has led some to suggest that our avatars represent our *ideal* selves, our *possible* selves, *aspirational* selves, or *alternative* selves: of course, this doubling of our-selves by means of digital avatars changes our perception of ourselves after spending even small amounts of time wearing an avatar (Belk [2013]: 482) – this phenomenon is called the Proteus effect after the

ancient Greek god who could take on whatever form he wished.

The self deriving from corporeal disembodiment and digital reembodiement is characterized by four features (as noted by Shanyang Zhao [2005]): (i) it is inwardly oriented, i.e. it focuses on one's inner world and experiences, even though this inner world is meant to be shared with others through «self-disclosure» practices that are made easier by the anonymity of the Internet; (ii) it is inherently narrative, i.e. a «symbolic project» (Thompson [1995]: 210) that an individual actively constructs in working out a coherent «narrative of self-identity». Indeed, in the world of corporeal copresence we tend to take our self for granted in face-to-face interaction: in the online world, we are often obliged to provide some type of self-description (just think about biographies or brief descriptions required on social networks or the necessary use of a nick-name etc.); (iii) it is retractable, since a given version of one's self can be erased relatively easily; (iv) consequently, it is multiplied. Self is fundamentally «decentered, dispersed, and multiplied in continuous instability» (Poster [1990]: 6).

If we acknowledge the role played by the extended self and try to update it in the context of digital environment, we then have to take into account another explanatory dimension that has been fundamentally underrated by externalist theories: the dimension of the human body and its relationship to mind. This is not to say that we have to go back to the *mind-body problem*, but it seems that both Simon and Clark/Chalmers have too quickly discarded the problem as simply inconsistent. From my brief account of the two main features of digital extended self/mind, however, it is clear that this dimension (and its transformations in the context of digitalization) plays a crucial role in understanding the interaction between self/mind and external environment. We may interpret this dimension phenomenologically: phenomenology, as first developed by Edmund Husserl, is that approach which focuses on the operations performed by *living bodies* (*Leiber*) in the most concrete and precise way. It is, indeed, an «embodied approach to the construction of meaning» (as described by Kozel [2007]: 2): far from being just a theory resorting to reflection and analysis, or a mere operational method, phenomenology constantly integrates the intellect with sensory experience and starts its philosophical work from the analysis of perception.

In the limits of this contribution, I can only briefly describe – as open topics for future research – the key concepts of a phenomenological interpretation of the digital extended self. As a first key-concept, I suggest we resort to Husserl's concept of eidetic variation: in *Ideas I* (1913, english translation 1982), Husserl describes eidetic variation as that method by which the phenomenologist can grasp the invariant structures of phenomenal reality. Variation is based on the fictional character of the imagination, «the vital element of phenomenology as of all eidetic sciences» (Husserl [1982]: 160). The potentially unlimited power of variation is *de facto* bound to the world, which is already given: as Bernard Waldenfels has noted, «eidetic variation must set out from the real world; as a starting point, this is unsurpassable and hence more than a mere example […]. As Husserl himself ultimately realized, variation is not a game suspended in mid-air, but *gebundene Variation*» (Waldenfels [1971]: 277-278 – my translation). In this sense, we may conceive eidetic variation as a *simulation* that creates a *virtual* world which is not opposed to reality – for the latter actually stands as its foundation – but which has an ideal content: the virtuality of eidetic variation would therefore be opposed to the actuality of the world (as Deleuze suggested[2]) and not to

[2] Deleuze's thesis in *Difference and Repetition* (originally published in 1968), according to which the virtual and the real are not opposed but rather complementary, has proven all the more true today, as not only the concept of "*virtual reality*" has become well-established but also – with a further distinction – that of "*augmented reality*", i.e. the concept of a (digital) integration of the real that allows interaction with it. See Deleuze ([1994]: 208-209): «We opposed the virtual and the real: although it could not have been more precise before now, this terminology must be corrected. The virtual is opposed not to the real

its reality. According to this perspective, we may understand digital experiences as a virtual transposition of the contents of real experience, and hence as the creation of an eidetically varied ideal world. If understood in terms of eidetic variation, augmented reality and the digitally extended self are still understandable as reembodied experiences (in Belk's words) within the digital context, i.e. as a transposition on a higher, eidetic level of our first embodied, intuitive experiences. This would be a way to maintain our focus on our lived experience, even within the digital mediation.

Following Thomas Fuchs' theory [2013], we can develop a phenomenological notion of the "extended empathy" as the second key-concept of a phenomenological interpretation of the digital extended self: we can differentiate between a primary, implicit, or bodily empathy and an expanded, explicit, or imaginative empathy. The latter already involves a certain degree of virtuality. Empathy can also be extended towards fictive persons or non-personal agents, a phenomenon which Fuchs calls "fictional empathy" and seems to involve the role played by imagination and variation (in the sense I refer to above) as well as an *externalist* completion of empathy. Fuchs also focuses his anlysis on the problem of "disembodied communication" (which Belk's called *dematerialization* and Lehdonvirta emphasizes as «telecopresent communication»): «in the meantime, however, virtual encounters are becoming increasingly a characteristic of every-day life *in toto*. Instead of interacting with embodied persons, we interact more and more with pictures and symbols» (Fuchs [2013]: 167). This leads, again, to a deep change in the structure of imagination, i.e. in the function of our (eidetic) power to modify and vary our relation to the world (to refer to Husserl's terminology): the style of imagination deployed must be understood «in the context of a technology that dis-embodies and textualizes encounters, linguistic exchange being the means to produce psychological intimate knowledge» (Illuz [2012]: 228). As a result, «virtual media produce extended networks of weak connections that can be maintained and accessed without requiring significant investment of time and effort […]. The quality of emphatic relationships in varying degrees of intimacy is increasingly making way for the amassing quantity of contacts from homogeneous virtual space» (Fuchs [2013]: 169).

As a final phenomenological key-concept, Merlau-Ponty's notion of *Flesh* is also a useful one in the context of our discussion. According to him, the human body is both immanent and transcendent: «Immanence refers to the material, corporeal flesh and bone aspect of the human body. It is through the immanent body that we experience sensation and are physically present in the world. "Transcendence" refers to those aspects of us that are not material: our intellectual, imaginative and cognitive processes» (Ladkin [2012] – online). The constant osmosis between immanence and transcendence means that "it is impossible for humans to assume the *God perspective* in which they objectively observe the world in such a way that they are not affected by the world observing them back. Human beings cannot perceive without simultaneously being perceived" (Ladkin [2012] – online). This statement can be understood in terms of phenomenological externalism: the chiasmus or reversibility of the process of perception – what Merlau-Ponty (1968, english translation 2013) calls *Flesh*, the connective structure that conveys the possibility of every aesthetic experience (and which is invisible in itself) – also occurs within digitally extended self/mind activities: the organic level of bodies constantly transcends itself towards the external, yet embedded level of environment or digital media.

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but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract"; and symbolic without being fictional […]. The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements along with singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure […] far from being undetermined, the virtual is completely determined».

CONCLUSION

Whether it is possible or not to develop – on the basis that I sketched in this contribution – a phenomenological account of active externalism, with regard to the digital extended self and mind, remains an open question for future philosophical research. To sum up my argument, such a phenomenological account would be based on the following foundamental assumptions:

1) Deleuze's distinction between possible and virtual, and hence the criticism of the conception of the virtual as that which is merely *opposed* to what is real;

2) the application of the notion of eidetic variation and of the virtuality of the process of perception according to their phenomenological (and especially Husserlian) meaning;

3) the extension of the phenomenological notion of *empathy* to the field of digital self and digitally mediated interactions;

3) the application of the notion of *Flesh* developed by Merleau-Ponty, which transcends the notion of body (with its limits and material quality) in a connective and virtual sense.

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Techno-aesthetic Thinking. Technicity and Symbolism in the Body[1]

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Abstract. This paper investigates the reciprocal implications between aesthetics and technics, to show how technicity, as a cultural and symbolic attitude, is constitutively rooted in the aesthetic dimension of human experience. The analysis conducted aims to bring into focus the originarity of technicity in the development of the living body, understood in its inseparable connection with the mind, as junction between the sensible and the symbolic, the organic and the cultural, the perceptive and the expressive. I address this question through a parallel analysis of Simondon's groundbreaking reflection on technics and the less explored account of technics in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. If the latter inscribes our attitude towards technics in the motricity and symbolism inherent to the living body, the former ascribes to aesthetics a form of thinking, thus playing a fundamental role in our relationship to the technical dimension. Despite the differences in their approach to technics, I combine their theoretical perspectives to encompass their internal limits and to outline possible convergences.

Keywords. Technics, techno-aesthetics, aesthetic thinking, Merleau-Ponty, Simondon.

Technology is our culture.
Jarod Lanier

Seulement à travers l'initiation au savoir technique
et la parallèle reconnaissance de la valeur culturelle et symbolique des objets techniques,
la culture pourra parvenir à une compréhension de leur mode d'existence
et apaiser le malaise social qui hante le rapport entre l'homme et la machine.
Gilbert Simondon

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1. INTRODUCTION

Because of the increasingly pervasive presence of technology in our lives, the question of technics, and especially that of its relationship to sensibility, has become crucial under many respects. Technological devices, as well as the cultural and epistemological dispositives they produce, work as prosthesis for human sensibility and expand the capacities of the intersubjective sphere, entailing political and biopolitical issues and affecting our embodied existence.

The coupling of body and technologies has never been as evident as in the last decades, by virtue of the diffusion of portable and wearable devices as well as virtual and augmented reality technologies. As has been pointed out, such a massive exteriorisation of human capacities[2] into technologies could also entail the risk of a dematerialization of embodied experience and even engender a progressive «insensibilisation» of our perceptive, cognitive and relational functions[3]. In other words, the risk intrinsic to our contemporary technoculture would be that of disembodiment, i.e. an elision of the living body's presence, as the enhancement of bodily functions which technology provides is likely to threaten the very existence and integrity of the living body as we know it.

Yet, can we assume such a premise from a philosophical point of view? Isn't the body what ultimately enables our aesthetic and cognitive experiences, even virtual ones? And isn't the human body structured in such a way as to extend itself into organic artefacts and prosthesis, being exposed, «altered» and dispossessed of any supposed natural authenticity?[4] Indeed, although the digital revolution has brought forth unprecedented configurations, we still tend to describe the present technological condition by means of categories of the past, such as subject/object, activity/passivity, nature/culture, etc. To encompass this dualism, we need a theoretical paradigm that enables us to understand our embodied experience in its essential connection – rather than in its supposed opposition – to our technoculture.

Technologies should never be considered in isolation, since they exist only in relation to the interminglings of bodies and society that they make possible or that make them possible. In his account of human technicity, Leroi-Gourhan, makes no essential distinction between the tool as technical organ and the organ as bodily element: a technical object, such as a *biface*, emerges from the sensible matter in the same way as the hand does, insofar as both are a «secretion of the body and the brain» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 132; Leroi-Gourhan [1993]). Thus, technicity shall be thought of not as something that is merely added onto a «natural» core of embodied life, but rather in its mutual implication with sensibility, i.e. in its relationship with the development and historical evolution of the living body, understood, in its inseparable connection with the mind, as junction between the sensible and the symbolic, the organic and the cultural, the perceptive and the expressive. This is why a cross-examination of technology and especially of embodied technics is essential to account for the anthropological transformations that are afoot in contemporary technoculture.

In order to address such questions in a comprehensive manner, contemporary philosophical and non-philosophical studies have frequently turned to the groundbreaking observations of Gilbert Simondon, providing a wide account of technicity and of its long neglected cultural relevance (Simondon [1958]; [2014]). In this paper, I would like to challenge Simondon's fascinating perspective through a parallel analysis of both his account of technicity and the reflections Maurice Merleau-Ponty devoted to the expressivity and symbolism of the phenomenal body (Merleau-Ponty [1942]; [1945]; [1961]; [1994]; [2011]).

Certainly, Merleau-Ponty is not a «philosopher of technology» and is not known for having developed a systematic account of technics; nev-

[2] On the notion of technics as «exteriorisation» see Leroi-Gourhan (1964); McLuhan (1964).

[3] About these questions see for example Hayles (1999); Milon (2005); Small (2008); Meirieu, Kambouchner, Stiegler (2012); Tisseron (2013), (2017).

[4] See Montani (2014).

ertheless, as some commentators have begun to show (Ihde [1990]; Guchet [2001], [2010]; Hansen [2006]; Hoel and Carusi [2015]; Slock [2016]), his philosophy allows us to sketch out, if not an organic reflection on technics, at least a set of very productive and operational concepts to think of it. And, perhaps, the apparently arbitrary operation – namely addressing a phenomenology of the body in search for the elements of a philosophy of technicity – can also be read as a cultural symptom that reveals the necessity to account for the connection between sensibility and technics in the present historical situation – whereas a different time might have possibly explored the body from the perspective of a doctrine of the passions, of a theory of beauty, or of the sacred.

In this paper I aim not only to emphasize possible connections between Merleau-Ponty's and Simondon's thoughts, but rather to shed light on the specific conception of our relationship to technology developed by the two philosophers whilst also attempting to encompass their internal limits by combining their works. This parallel analysis will allow us to investigate how technicity, as a cultural and symbolic attitude, is rooted in the aesthetic dimension of human experience, being even a constitutive part of it.

2. TECHNICIZATION OF THOUGHT AND THE THINKING OF TECHNICS

If we examine Merleau-Ponty's approach of technics, it may appear ambivalent: on the one hand, the philosopher strongly opposes a *technicization* of thought (Guchet [2001]) that proceeds from mechanistic science, but, on the other hand, he considers technology as a non-philosophical field whose symbolic and cultural significance calls for a philosophical investigation, opening up new paths for philosophy.

In *The Structure of Behaviour*, the philosopher firmly opposes scientific approaches that understand nature and the human being based on the model of the machine, resulting in a science that, as he would later argue in *Eye and Mind*, «manipulates things and gives up dwelling in them» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 9; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 368). Thus, Merleau-Ponty's goal is to criticize a theory of behaviour that leans on a causalist relationship between stimuli and reactions, as it reduces the human being to a mechanism and misses the excess of meaning that the living body and the environment always involve. On the contrary, he addresses the notion of life and behaviour as linked to the historical and embodied *situation* of living beings, that is, the reciprocal and complex relationship between the organism and the environment.

Merleau-Ponty examines multifarious examples drawn from the technical domain to support his arguments against a mechanistic conception of thought, a perspective that ultimately complies with Heideggerian critique of the instrumental conception of technology (Heidegger [1954]). At the same time, we notice that more often, Merleau-Ponty's argument relies on phenomenological descriptions of technical devices, which are understood as correlatives of the configuration of the human body and its excessive structure. The analysis of technical artefacts, especially optical devices such as the mirror – I will come back to this point later in the text – , is set forth in order to bring into focus the living body's perceptive structures. Hence, in these cases, far from being put in contrast to human perception, technology is precisely that which can reveal the functioning of sensibility, which is normally dissimulated and dwells unnoticed in our ordinary perception.

The essay *Cinema and the New Psychology* is an emblematic example of this process. In this famous conference from 1945, Merleau-Ponty takes into account the technical invention of cinema to clarify the functioning of our perception; indeed, he outlines a parallel between the structure of our ordinary perception and the technical–cinematic perception, in which the intrinsic operation of the cinematic apparatus is employed to support the thesis of *Gestalt* Psychology, against the empiricist theories of perception. Moreover, in the conference, Merleau-Ponty suggests that, once invented, any technical instrument – in this case

the machine of the cinematographer, which allows to register and project moving images – needs to be taken on and almost invented a second time by culture – so that the moving images become what we commonly refer to as «cinema» (Merleau-Ponty [1948]: 61-75; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 48-59).

Therefore, despite arguing against a technicization of thought, in developing his main philosophical goals, Merleau-Ponty seems to pursue another direction of research, in which technology comes into play as an ally of philosophy. Let us further examine this (only apparently) contradictory aspect of his approach.

Merleau-Ponty's account of technics must be inscribed in the framework of two main concerns that occupy his philosophical research, namely the relationship between nature and culture on the one hand, and, on the other, the account and formulation of the notion of *body schema* or *body image*[5], which serves as a theoretical basis for Merleau-Ponty's understanding of technicity and its relationship to sensibility.

From his initial works, Merleau-Ponty refuses the nature/culture opposition and the idea of nature as a separate entity. He aims to show that «what we call nature is already consciousness of nature» (Merleau-Ponty [1942]: 199; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 212). The whole research developed in *Phenomenology of Perception* can be read as the effort to inscribe the problem of nature in the historicity and symbolism that is inherent to the living body. Nature is not behind us as an unreachable dimension that we might eventually access if we managed to get «beyond» culture. Rather, nature is the background on which human beings live and it is the source of an excess of sense. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, what characterizes human beings is «not the capacity to create a second nature – economic, social, cultural – beyond their biological nature, but rather the possibility to overcome their given structures for creating new ones» (Merleau-Ponty [1942]: 199; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 184). Such possibility relies on the capacity of the human body that becomes particularly remarkable if we observe the movement of *dilatation of perception* (Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 262; Merleau-Ponty [1968]: 212), which is afoot in our embodied relationship to instruments and technologies.

Merleau-Ponty describes the operational organisation of the phenomenal body through the notion of body image, to be understood as a mental design, supporting the living body's memory, spatiality and motility, which is experienced proprioceptively and dynamically and through which my body is geared onto the world. This is to say that, even before being involved in action and movement, the body is already engaged in their virtual projection. Like, for instance, in the experience of vision, in which we do not only perceive the objects and the landscape in their respective features, but we also seize the potentialities and relationships which are woven into the parts of the landscape, or between the landscape and me as embodied subject.

Hence, in their intentional relationship with human sensibility, things cease to be mere objects and become instead «quasi-organs» (Saint Aubert [2015]: 107), contributing to our being open to the world and realizing an «extension of existence» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 178; Merleau-Ponty [2005]: 135). This process can otherwise be described as «habit», expressing the power of our body of «dilating our being-in-the-world» and «changing our existence by appropriating instruments» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 168; Merleau-Ponty [2005]: 127).

Thus, as Don Ihde has pointed out, in Merleau-Ponty's account of body image there is an implicit «latent phenomenology of instrumentation» (Ihde [1990]: 40), that is, a theory of the process by which the body operates both a techni-

[5] For a discussion of the notion of «body image» in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and its sources, see Saint Aubert (2015); Saint Aubert (2006); Weiss (1999); Mazzù (2001). In Merleau-Ponty's writings no theoretical distinction can be tracked between «body image» and «body schema». As Saint Aubert discusses in detail, the philosopher takes on this notion from *Gestalt* psychology and especially the work of psychiatrist Paul Schilder (Schilder [1923]; [1935]) and creatively reinterprets it in the perspective of his own philosophical reflection.

cal exteriorisation of its functions and an incorporation of the technical tools. The way we get used to technical objects and artefacts is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body.

Furthermore, for Merleau-Ponty, the relationship to instruments can better clarify the very nature of body image, for it shows that the image that we have of our body does not just delimit its edges and position into space, defining a static position of our body as *res extensa*. On the contrary, the body image operates as a virtual system, open to possibility and always ready to be transformed, as it creatively integrates in and realigns itself to it. The philosopher provides different examples to explain how the body image behaves and adapts plastically, incorporating technical objects in its actions. Thanks to its virtual power, the body can both *integrate* objects in its own spatiality and *extend* itself through artefacts[6], as we observe the way in which «a woman may, without any calculation, keep a safe distance between the feather in her hat and things which might break it off» for «she feels where the feather is just as we feel where our hand is» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 167; Merleau-Ponty [2005]: 126). The same can be said if one notices that, when I am driving a car, I am able to «enter a narrow opening and see that I can "get through" without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings, just as I go through a doorway without checking the width of the doorway against that of my body» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 167; Merleau-Ponty [2005]: 128).

An even more evident example is the way a blind person no longer perceives their white cane for itself, as it has progressively become for them an area of sensitivity in their exploration of the world, as it extends through its range of action «the scope and active radius of touch and providing a parallel to sight» – or rather what can be transposed by sighted persons as a parallel to sight[7].

Human beings are characterized by a virtual relationship with their environment, by their capacity of «orienting oneself in relation to the possible, to the mediate» (Merleau-Ponty [1942]: 190; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 176), of projecting themselves into the future and the past, constantly transcending their goals. This capacity of the body to systematically overcome its merely «biological» possibilities and its tendency to virtually project itself, which we might also call *imagination*[8], is for Merleau-Ponty what distinguishes human behaviour from that of other animals in the relation towards technical objects.

Thus, technics is understood as a symbolic and cultural projection or as the excess of sense within our «natural» embodied and adaptive actions, precisely in this perspective, technical objects are for Merleau-Ponty an *expression* – just as, according to him, perception is in itself expressive (Merleau-Ponty [2011]: 48 ss.) – insofar as they express the human being by expressing things[9]. In other

[6] Merleau-Ponty makes no essential distinction between the process of incorporation and extension that characterise our use of technology, and rather considers them as two complementary movements. For a discussion of the distinction between body-extension and body-incorporation see De Preester & Tsakiris (2009); Parisi (2019).

[7] «The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch and providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term: the blind man is rather aware of it through the position of objects than of the position of objects through it. The position of things is immediately given through the extent of the reach which carries him to it, which comprises, besides the arm's reach, the stick's range of action» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 167; Merleau-Ponty [2005]: 127).
The example of the so-called «blind man's stick» has been discussed in literature: see Polanyi (1966) and Bateson (1973). For more recent contributions see: Malafouris (2008) and (2013); De Preester & Tsakiris (2009). In particular, Malafouris has discussed the implications of the philosophical problem of the blind man's stick for archaeology of mind, in the attempt of redrawing the boundaries between brains, bodies and things, which has become particularly timely due to recent advances in the study of brain plasticity.

[8] See Montani (2014): 33 ss.

[9] About the notion of expression see Slatman (2003), Kristensen (2010), Fóti (2013).

words, human artefacts involve a certain experience of the world, and thereby they incorporate an anthropological and historical significance. What the philosopher seeks to describe through the notion of *expression* is the reciprocal, two-way movement between culture and the sensible-aesthetic dimension, as they constitutively overlap each other, the aesthetic conducts being informed – even if not determined – by the social and cultural sphere, and the cultural systems being inflected and constantly reconfigured by the symbolic, which is not simply potentially present, but already *expressed* within the aesthetic contact with the world.

The meaning of actions, objects of use, and more generally all human products, never coincides for Merleau-Ponty with the simple results and functions connected to them, but it is always entangled with a cultural significance that goes beyond them. Thus, for human beings the act of dressing, originated to defend oneself from the cold or atmospheric agents, entails «the act of adornment or also of modesty and thus reveals a new attitude toward oneself» (Merleau-Ponty [1942]: 188; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 174). The same can be observed with regard to houses, in which human beings project and realize their tastes and values. And language itself can be understood as being but a further articulation of this movement of symbolic projection of adaptive actions.

3. AESTHETIC THINKING AND THE CULTURE OF TECHNOLOGY

As we have seen, although technicization of thought appears to be an obstacle, for Merleau-Ponty technics in itself is not «extraphilosophical», on the contrary, it appears to be «full of philosophy» (Guchet [2001]). Techniques and instruments are anthropological phenomena revealing a whole universe of significations that must be investigated by philosophy. As Merleau-Ponty repeatedly claims in his writings and especially in his late *Collège de France* course notes, the advancement of technology and the development of modern physics are just as in art, literature or cinema, a permanent call to philosophy and to its renewal (Guchet [2001]; Merleau-Ponty [1996]).

Merleau-Ponty believes that «modes of thought correspond to technical methods» (Merleau-Ponty [1948]: 75; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 59). This is why philosophy needs to investigate technologies and more in general technical objects as anthropological facts able to revive and question philosophical reflection. Thus, for example, modern technologies and science urge philosophical thinking to reckon with the cultural meaning that is *expressed* by them, although in an indirect and non-conceptual way. This is why *a philosophical investigation of the cultural meaning of technology is complementary to the project of formulating a new ontology*, whereas most of the science and culture of the time, at the dawn of the Sixties, tended to rely upon the ontological premises of Cartesian representationalism (see Merleau-Ponty [1948]; Merleau-Ponty [1964], Merleau-Ponty [1968]).

Merleau-Ponty elicits a sort of «unthought» in the manifestations of modern technology, and he prompts philosophy to reckon with it (Merleau-Ponty [1996]: 391 ss). This line of research has since been pursued by Gilbert Simondon, in particular by his account of the mode of existence of technical objects, to which he devoted his *thèse complémentaire* (Simondon [1958]). Indeed, Simondon seems to have taken on Merleau-Ponty's suggestion to investigate the *spiritual* – i.e. the invisible – characters of technologies. The goal of Simondon's extensive analysis is precisely to shed light on the cultural significance of technics and to raise awareness of the cultural meaning of technical objects, which Modern Western thought seems to have denied by refusing or neglecting technical realities as essentially human (Simondon [1958]: 9).

Simondon constantly points out the existence of a gap, of a dramatic divergence between the advances in techno-sciences and the actual state of culture: by neglecting the meaning and human genesis of technical objects, established theory has ended up drawing an opposition between human

beings and machines. This has prevented considering technical objects as «mediators between man and nature», or, according to Merleau-Ponty's view mentioned above, as «expressions»; that is, embodied phenomena, able to reveal anthropological significance (Merleau-Ponty [2011]: 48). For Simondon, the rushing search for supremacy, that leads technical progress, stems from an idealisation of technics, resulting in a mythical and purely imaginary conception of the machine as a threat that needs to be questioned and undone by philosophy.

Moreover, besides the fact that technical objects always include an anthropological significance – insofar as they are the product of human creativity – they also maintain «a certain margin of indetermination» (Simondon [1958]), a notion which represents one of the most original and decisive aspects of Simondon's reflection on technical objects. Indeed, in the process of their production, technical objects incorporate part of the natural world, which works as a condition of its functioning and, at the same time, provides them with a certain degree of independence, so that they are always open to contingency and to the unexpected[10].

A technical invention or creation is never concluded in itself. Indeed, once the technical object has reached a certain configuration, in the process that Simondon defines as *concretisation*, it still maintains an open structure likely to assume new assemblages and organisations. Similarly, we have seen that, with regard to the cinematic apparatus, Merleau-Ponty argued that «after the technical instrument has been invented, it must be taken up by an artistic will, as it were, re-invented» (Merleau-Ponty [1948]: 75; Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 59).

Now, what is particularly noteworthy is that for Simondon the virtual possibilities of technics hinge precisely on the aesthetic dimension, which has to be understood as the common ground of both artistic expressions and the developments of technology and modern science. As I will argue, under Simondon's pen, the notion of aesthetics ranges different definitions: from an understanding of aesthetics as theory or philosophy of art, to a more comprehensive perspective that – following Baumgarten (1750) – entails the whole spectrum of sensibility and extends the definition of aesthetics to the exchanges between nature and human beings, that are also enabled by technical objects.

In the third part of his book *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, entitled «The Essence of Technicity»[11], Simondon develops a symbolic history of the three different modes of being-in-the-world proper of humans – *magical phase*, *religious phase*, *technical phase* –, to be thought of as successive individuations of a metastable system that describes the relationship of human beings to the environment (Simondon [2005]). In the first mode of existence, the relation of human beings to the world comes about in an elementary structuration, corresponding to the emergence of the «distinction between figure and ground in the universe» (Simondon [1958]: 156), which precedes the separation between subject and object. The human being experiences a primitive unity with the world; yet, this environment or *milieu* is not continuous nor undifferentiated, since a «reticulation» of points emerges which institutes salient moments and places as «key-points» (Simondon [1958]: 229) and polarities, having a sort of magical pregnancy, in which the capacity of the world to influence human beings is concentrated (Simondon [1958]: 164). This is the

[10] For Simondon, the level of development of technical objects depends entirely on this margin of indetermination: «En fait, l'automatisme est un assez bas degré de perfection […]. Le véritable perfectionnement des machines, celui dont on peut dire qu'il élève le degré de technicité, correspond non pas à un accroissement de l'automatisme, mais au contraire, au fait que le fonctionnement d'une machine recèle une certaine marge d'indétermination. C'est celle-ci qui permet à la machine d'être sensible à une information extérieure» (Simondon [1958]: 12).

[11] About Simondon's account of technics see Barthélémy (2005); Guchet (2010); Carozzini (2011); "Critique" (2015); "Cahiers Simondon" (2015). About Simondon's conception of aesthetics see Michaud (2012).

case with geographical sites – such as mountains, summits, promontories, gorges, the heart of the forest – and points in time – such as beginnings, inaugurations, strong transitions and passages –, which are able to give rhythm to becoming and regulate exchanges between the human being and the world.

The constitution of the *technical phase* and of the *religious phase* proceeds from the rupture of this initial structure (Simondon [1958]: 233), in which the key-points distinguish themselves from the structure. The primitive unity of the living being and the *milieu* are split apart, resulting in a phase-shift [*déphasage*] of the primitive magical mode of existence. Structure and ground are undone and a certain distance is introduced between human beings and the world. Such emerging distance is *mediatised* by technics, on the one hand, and by religion on the other, which are to be understood as two interdependent poles.

As the primitive unity of the living and its environment is divided, it becomes *objectivated* by technics and *subjectivated* by religion. While technics (objective pole), with an analytic attitude, extracts fragments and isolates objects from the world to act upon it, allowing human beings to relate efficaciously to it, conversely, religion (subjective) represents the quest for totality and transcendence, trying to restore an absolute unity.

Simondon tries to avoid too dialectical a structure, which risks reducing and theoretically weakening the heuristic power of his description of the phase-shift. In a way, the anti-dialectical and metastable structure of the three modes of existence is provided by the aesthetic dimension. With respect to the results of this phase-shift, the *aesthetic thought* or *aesthetic thinking* [*pensée esthétique*][12] acts as «a permanent reminder of the rupture of the unity of the magical mode of existence and the striving for future unity» (Simondon [1958]: 160), and presents itself as the possibility to reconstitute the totality of the reticular universe, where humans experience the world directly without separation between subject and object. By building analogical relations, aesthetic thinking aims to recompose unity, since it creates continuity and universality, preventing the isolation of thought from itself (Simondon [1958]: 248).

Thus, aesthetic thinking allows us to establish continuities between the human being and the *milieu*, since every aesthetic action ultimately consists in constituting noteworthy and salient points. Those are no longer inserted in a primitive magical unity, but in the universe that has resulted from the differentiation of the magical world, into technical world and religious world. In Simondon's perspective, then, aesthetic thinking is not simply related to works of art and artistic practice, given that every act, thing, or moment «can become a noteworthy point of this sort, all can therefore be "aestheticized"» (Michaud [2012]: 124). Inversely, we should rather understand the very existence of artistic products as resting upon the ability of human beings «to feel the aesthetic impression with regard to real and vital situations» (Simondon [1958]: 248). The ultimate function of art is to preserve and develop this decisive human capacity.

Before bringing into focus Simondon's account of aesthetic thinking, we need to point out that, in the first place, the aesthetic dimension does not pertain to the properties of aesthetic objects or aspects of reality, nor does it define a subjective judgment or point of view, but rather stays somewhere at the intersection between them, as that which lays the basis for the sensible and symbolic encounter between human beings and the world. Secondly, as long as the notion of «aesthetic thinking» situates aesthetics in the domain of thought and Simondon connects it to the «aesthetic impression», this does not subordinate aesthetics to linguistic practices nor to the formulation of an aesthetic judgment. In fact, as Simondon argues, an aesthetic impression is independent from the real presence of an aesthetic – or artistic – object and *can embrace every human experience* (Simondon [1958]: 249). Hence, for instance, technical

[12] I prefer this second translation to express the dynamic and inchoative nature of what Simondon calls «pensée esthétique», that should not be confused with the aesthetic reflection, but embraces a dimension which precedes any aesthetic jugment or aesthetic discourse.

objects can have aesthetic value and can be said to be beautiful (Simondon [1958]: 254), not because of their ornament and decoration, such as when the external case or the shape of the object aims at concealing its technical features (*cryptotechnic tendency*)[13], but precisely by virtue of their technicality (*phanerotechnic tendency*), and of their *insertion* in the *milieu*:

> *the technical object is not beautiful in just any circumstances; it is beautiful when it encounters a singular and notable place of the world. The high-tension lines when they are crossing valleys, the car when is steering, the train when it leaves or comes out of the tunnel […]. The technical object is beautiful when it encounters a ground that agrees with it, of which it can be the proper figure, that is, when it completes and expresses the world (Simondon [1958]: 185).*

By virtue of the aesthetic impression that it can evoke, technics comes to creatively reintegrate into nature the objects that it had separated from it and therefore objectified. Through the aesthetic dimension, technics surpasses itself by creating new noteworthy points, able to re-signify and amplify the feeling of the coupling between the human being and the environment, or between nature and human artefacts. Simondon's reflection on technics provides a theoretical framework to undo too narrow a separation between the technical environment and the natural world, the process of insertion providing and implying the possibility of a permanent reactivation of the critical and symbolic functions in what he calls the «associated milieu». Still, in his first account of technicity the relationship between sensibility and technology is not developed further by the philosopher.

4. *TECHNO-AESTHETICS* IS SAID IN MANY WAYS

As we have seen, according to Simondon, the «aesthetic impression», or the sentiment of beauty that is connected to it, depends on the gesture of inserting an object in a *milieu*, such as to disclose unexpressed potentialities and to produce new individuations. The aesthetic impression is the result of an operation of cutting and editing or of assemblage that, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, proceeds from the generative gap [*écart*] that is at work in the sensible[14]. In this perspective, aesthetic thinking and technical thinking cannot be separated; on the contrary, they combine in the process that allows the emergence of the different articulations of the relationship between the human being and the world. Aesthetic thinking is precisely what makes the activation of a *margin of virtual action* possible, specific to every technical artefact; such margin ensures that the technical object can be put into circulation within the cultural dimension, thus mediatising the production of sense – in Merleau-Ponty's terms the operation of «expression» – which is always afoot in technology.

Simondon's theoretical gesture seeks to define what we might call an *aesthetic performativity* inherent to technics, in order to describe the creative effects of aesthetic thinking, to be understood, as I suggested above, as an intrinsic property of the objects as much as a capacity of the embodied subject. Thereby, as a further step, let us now focus more in detail on the *connection between technics and sensibility*, to bring into focus the convergence between Merleau-Ponty's and Simondon's reflections.

This question is explicitly addressed by Simondon in his later thought, in a short text of 1982, where he lays the basis for the foundation or «axiomatisation» of what he proposes to define as «aesthetico-technics or techno-aesthetics» (Simondon [1982]: 379-396; [2012]). In this unfinished manuscript, Simondon takes on some of the ques-

[13] «S'opposant au mouvement phanérotechnique de manifestation de la technicité, relève d'une tentative de déguisement finalisée à faire pénétrer l'objet technique, à le faire accepter, au sein de la «citadelle de la culture», en l'obligeant pour ainsi dire à porter un "voile"», (Simondon [2014] "Psychosociologie de la technicité [1960-1961]": 37).

[14] On the notion of gap in Merleau-Ponty see Saint Aubert (2015).

tions already outlined in his previous research, to articulate further the theoretical core of the mutual relationship between technics and aesthetics. In Simondon's notes, the notion of techno-aesthetics is addressed under different angles, as if the philosopher's argument were following – to use a mechanical image – the oscillations of a pendulum, every movement revealing a different way to understand the co-implication of technics and aesthetics in our relationship to the world.

The term «techno-aesthetics» is first employed to describe the way in which works of art or aesthetic objects incorporate technology, as in the creations of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Fernand Léger, Alexander Calder, but also Gustave Eiffel and Le Corbusier, among others. These works combine technical efficiency and beauty, functionality and «aesthetic power» (Simondon [1982]: 382; Simondon [2012]). Here, the term techno-aesthetics expresses the specific fashion in which these creations tie together art and technological avant-garde, so that the «technicized landscape also takes on the meaning of a work of art» (Simondon [1982]: 390; Simondon [2012]).

Yet, this bond between aesthetics and technics does not just concern artistic creations: even a water tower or a viaduct, the engine of an automobile or the specific arrangement of a clamp, a shear, a stepped key, can raise an aesthetic or techno-aesthetic impression. The first ones, being engineering works, do so by virtue of their insertion in the geographic environment, with which they re-establish a unity, while machines or instruments elicit an aesthetic feeling which derives *from the action* that is connected to their manipulations and functioning. Their use triggers a «sensorimotoric pleasure» or «pleasure of action» (Simondon [2014): 383; Simondon [2012]), «something orgasmic», which becomes the «tactile means and motor of stimulation» when «a certain instrumentalized joy» is «mediated by the tool» (Simondon [1982]: 383; Simondon [2012]).

In developing such an insight, Simondon introduces another angle of analysis, since he outlines a consideration, in quasi-phenomenological terms, of our sensible contact with the technical object and of the ease produced by its functioning and even of the pleasure that is elicited by its form, while we enjoy the contemplation of the structure and shape of an instrument, revealing through its simple visual form the balance between its proportions and the forces it is supposed to encounter.

Thanks to this texture of virtual potentialities, the tool *mediatizes* the relationship with the object on which it operates, and, conversely, the body of the user finds itself in the middle of a dynamic exchange, as it is called to perform a perceptive and motor response by meeting the sensory structure offered by the object. The «pleasure of action» produced derives from the user's aesthetic capacity, and the word «aesthetic» here is to be understood in a wider sense as referring to the human sensorium.

Later in the text, Simondon points out another aspect which is complementary to this function of *mediation* assured by the technical object, one that consists in eliciting the presence of physical forces that cannot possibly be noticed by human perception. There is an «aesthetics of nature» which can only be perceived through technical tools or devices, just as electricity can only be detected by means of a galvanometer or by an oscilloscope. This shows how our relationship to the world is inseparable from its techno-aesthetic manifestations in the perspective of what Gaston Bachelard would define a *phenomeno-technics* (Bachelard [1931]).

After developing this argument, Simondon considers once more the productions of art, to address not only the aesthetic feeling, but also the technical aspects that concern the practice of artistic creation and the contact with the «matter that is being transformed through work» (Simondon [1982]: 384; Simondon [2012]). These elements are even more essentially aesthetic than the experience of the beholder or spectator in contemplation of a work of art. Indeed, artists in their practice experience deeply the «pleasure of action» that Simondon describes in the notes as part and parcel of the process of creation. A wide range of

sensorial articulations – with endless variations depending on the subjective response of the artist – arises from the encounter with artistic instruments: a musician enjoys the vibration of the strings or the tactile feedback of fingering the keys of a piano, as a painter is stimulated by the viscosity and stickiness of the paint they mix or spread on canvas, and so on.

Art cannot really be separated from its status of *techné*: «art», explains Simondon, «is not only the object of contemplation; for those who practice it, it's a form of action that is a little like practicing sports» (Simondon [1982]: 384; [2012]). The production of artistic objects is then associated with a techno-aesthetic pleasure and with an «aesthetic affection» (Simondon [1982]: 384; [2012]). Such a technical tenor of art also concerns and can serve to describe the structure of certain artworks, likely to be analysed in a technical perspective. Thus, for instance, a techno-aesthetic analysis can shed new light on the interest of Leonardo da Vinci's *Monalisa*. The aesthetic pleasure raised by this famous work depends on the fact that the painting is «essentially plural», since it exists as a «superimposition of itself», insofar as it merges on the same canvas the beginning and the end of a smile, without representing its complete unfolding. Since the smile is not manifest, but only evoked by its two extreme terms, the beholder experiences the inchoative process linking the two moments. The painting conveys the superimposition of two techniques, explains Simondon, such as when in palimpsests one needs two messages in order to infer the source-message, which remains absent in itself.

More generally, for the philosopher, «no object is indifferent to our aesthetic *need*» (Simondon [1982]: 384-385, [2012]). Rather, aesthetics, understood as *aisthesis*, affects and determines the whole spectrum of our behaviour. At this point, the philosopher introduces a «more primitive, more fully physical sense» of techno-aesthetics (Simondon [1982]: 386, [2012]). Simondon argues that between aesthetics and technics there is «intercategorial fusion»: «[t]he techno-aesthetic feeling seems to be a category that is more primitive than the aesthetic feeling alone, or than the technical aspect considered from the angle of functionality alone (which is an impoverishing perspective)» (Simondon [1982]: 391-392, [2012]).

Thus, if in the first part of his notes «On techno-aesthetics», Simondon seems to fluctuate between a Baumgartian sense of aesthetics and one that understands aesthetics as theory of art or beauty, in this passage, he articulates a much more radical conception, overcoming the previous definitions of aesthetics, to embrace the cultural and historically rooted nature of *aisthesis* as the dimension of our sensible contact with the world.

In order to explain how techno-aesthetics deeply affects our practices and existence, Simondon evokes a striking example, by referring to the research carried out in India by the *Food Research Institute*, an organisation aiming to develop a «basic food», which could be produced easily and in high quantities to be distributed to the population in case of famine. Despite the food's formula having been finalised, researchers still needed to find the most suitable shape for the food, so as to engender the adapted conditioning and allow the different ethnic and cultural groups in India to accept the product without obstacles. Indeed, in a region where common food is based on wheat, the population will not easily welcome rice-shaped food, even if it is distributed freely during a famine, for it will not meet the aesthetic habits of a certain culture rooted in their sensible relationship to the world.

This example demonstrates the importance of the affective tenor and the «value of presentation» of objects, all of which is highly conditioning in guiding our behaviour, being notoriously exploited by commercial strategies, packaging, product design and so on. Thus, techno-aesthetics is also what inflects our practices and our choices, operating at a very deep level: «The *aisthesis*, the fundamental perceptive intuition, is part of a culture. It acts like a pre-selector, separating the acceptable from the unacceptable, and determining whether one will accept or refuse» (Simondon [1982]: 387, Simondon [2012]). Through this analysis, Simondon comes to shed light on the «milieu of tools,

instruments, institutions that mould my way of thinking», whose importance had already been emphasized by Merleau-Ponty in his 1949-1952 Courses at the Sorbonne to point out their philosophical value (Merleau-Ponty [1988]).

5. EMBODIED TECHNICS AND THE «TECHNIQUES OF THE BODY»

As we have seen, techno-aesthetics *is said in many ways*, which should be interpreted in connection to the different meanings that the notion of aesthetics can assume[15]. In the articulation of this concept defining the co-implication of technicity and sensibility, Simondon seems to converge with some of Merleau-Ponty's reflections about human perception and its historicity, since they both urge us to think of the human body as already inserted in an environment filled by virtual actions and potentialities. As I argued above, for Merleau-Ponty technicity expresses the virtuality of the human body, its capacity to extend and project itself into embodied significations; something which concerns both human techniques and works of art, Merleau-Ponty having mainly devoted his research to the latter, so as to show the reciprocal relationship between sense and sensibility.

In a way, we could argue that, if the author of *Phenomenology of Perception* did not devote a specific study to the nature of technics, it is because, for him, technicity as such is always latently inscribed in the *flesh* as an amplification and emanation of the structure of human *aisthesis*, and specifically of the constitutive gap in the sensible of the flesh as a texture of differentiations[16].

This is particularly striking if we consider the mirror example that Merleau-Ponty evokes in a passage from *Eye and Mind*, where we find one of his most significant arguments about technics. The philosopher addresses the dispositive of the mirror[17] and its reflective surface, which, in Simondon's terms, we may define as the ultimate techno-aesthetic object, since it emerges at the intersection of the natural and the human. Indeed, on the one hand, the mirror incorporates a «natural» technicity, as performed by the water's surface, and on the other it enacts the perceptive and imaginative capacity of human beings by virtue of a repetition of the natural world.

It is only in connection with the reflexivity of the sensible that we understand the reflexivity of the mirror (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 33; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 359). The mirror can be read as the emblem of technics in its radical exteriorisation, as a projection of the human into the inorganic–prosthesis, instruments, dispositives, etc.–but, equally characterizing the organic, from the pseudopodium developed by the amoeba to the most complex biological structures: «More completely than lights, shadows, and reflections, the specular image sketches, within things, the work of vision. Like all other technical objects, such as tools and signs, the mirror has sprung up along the open circuit running from the seeing body to the visible body» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 33; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 359).

It is this techno-aesthetic mystery of the body that the gestures of the artist explores:

> *The painter is there, strong or frail in life, but sovereign incontestably in his rumination on the world, sovereign without any other «technique» than the one that his eyes and hands are given by means of seeing, by means of painting; he is there relentless to pull from this world, in which the scandals and achievements of history resound, canvases which will hardly add to the angers or the hopes of humanity; and no one matters (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 15; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 353).*

At the same time, the mirror can be said to perform a techno-aesthetic function, insofar as it

[15] For an account of aesthetics as anthropological constant and for a discussion of the theoretical definition of aesthetics in the contemporary philosophical debate see Desideri (2011), Desideri (2015) and Bartalesi (2017).

[16] About this interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh see Carbone [2011]: 42 ss.

[17] About the mirror in Merleau-Ponty see Dufourcq (2011): 63 ss.; Saint Aubert (2015): 165-200.

institutes a salient and noteworthy point, which allows the unification between nature and human beings as well as between my proprioceptive sensibility and the visual surface of my own body. Let us examine the way Merleau-Ponty outlines what can be described as a «techno-aesthetic» analysis of the mirror, as *mediator* (Simondon [1982], Simondon [2012]) of our relationship with the environment:

> *Through it, my outside becomes complete. Everything that is most secret about me passes into that face, that flat, closed being of which I was already dimly aware, from having seen my reflection mirrored in water. Schilder observes that, smoking a pipe before a mirror, I feel the sleek, burning surface of the wood not only where my fingers are but also in those glorious fingers, those merely visible ones inside the mirror. The mirror's phantom draws my flesh outside, and at the same time the invisible of my body can invest the other bodies that I see. Hence my body can include segments drawn from the body of others, just as my substance passes into them; man is a mirror for man. Mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that changes things into spectacles and spectacles into things, me into another and another into me. (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 33; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 359)*[18].

The experience of seeing our own image in the mirror and, in particular, the gesture of seeing our body manipulating objects, described by Schilder, condenses the tactile and «sensorimotoric» pleasure described by Simondon, a pleasure that in the mirror arises from the redoubling of the world operated by the reflective surface, working as a technical and prosthetic element, able to extend and multiply human sensibility, and, in so doing, to realize an exchange between the inside and the outside, between the human being and others. «Every technique», writes Merleau-Ponty, «is a "technique of the body". It figures and amplifies the metaphysical structure of our flesh» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 33; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 359).

The specific technicity of the mirror is inscribed in the flesh as much as it «draws my flesh outside», so that even the human body–the body of the other–can itself become a mirror. This is why the mirror is a timeless pole of attraction for painters of different ages. In this ancient tool, just as in the dispositive of perspective, takes place the metamorphosis of the viewer and the viewed, «that defines both our flesh and the painter's vocation» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 33; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 359).

Therefore, on the basis of the analysis conducted, if we read Simondon in the prism of Merleau-Ponty's account of technics, we may even push his conception of techno-aesthetics further by extending it to the very structure of the human body, of technics *in the flesh*. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as the fundamental medium of our being open to the world, as a «machine for living the world», of our eyes and our hands as a «technique» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 15; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 353), not in the sense of an objectified instrument, but as the virtual power that is inscribed in human sensibility, of which the eye is one of the most significant examples: «The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand» (Merleau-Ponty [1961]: 25; Merleau-Ponty [2007]: 356).

Thus, in this perspective, the question of technics is always implicated by Merleau-Ponty's constant interrogation of the body as both sensible and symbolic matter, as shown by his clear reference, even if implicit,[19] to Marcel Mauss's work. For the French anthropologist, to whom Merleau-Ponty devoted a famous essay (Merleau-Ponty [1960]: 143-157; Merleau-Ponty [1964]:144-125), technicity is primarily concerned with the «techniques of the body» or «bodily technique», that is,

[18] The reference is to Schilder (1935). On the subject of mirror and mirror stage see also Lacan (1949); Lacan (1973); Merleau-Ponty (1988).

[19] Although no reference is indicated in footnotes, the expression «techniques of the body», probably extremely familiar at the time to the philosopher's audience and circles, is indicated in quotation marks by Merleau-Ponty.

with all those actions which are *effective* and *traditional*, i.e. culturally transmissed (Mauss [1936]: 374; [2006]: 75), independently of the technological instruments with which human beings have endowed themselves. Hence, an account of technical behaviour shall not be limited to the relationship with technical objects, but rather take into account that human beings' «first and most natural technical object» is the body itself (Mauss [1936]: 375; [2006]: 75).

Indeed, there is nothing *natural* in the way we live and use our body. It would be completely inaccurate to describe the acts of walking, running, swimming, eating and even going to sleep as something natural, since all these gestures and movements require and rest upon specific techniques that need to be learnt in the development of the organism and in life, and whose set of parameters vary – actually rather quickly – over the generations, being deeply influenced by the slightest cultural changes. The technical gesture is but an extension of a *bodily* gesture, an emanation of the body – or «bodily technique» in Mauss' words – and, conversely, a bodily gesture is, in itself, the product of a certain technicity of the body, being brought about by biological functions, postural and motor possibilities and specific organs.

As we have seen, Simondon articulates the question of technicity not as an isolated anthropological or transcendental characteristic, but as inseparable from the structure of human sensibility, posing the question of an «originarity» of the techno-aesthetic feeling. Merleau-Ponty's reflection converges with Simondon's in an effort of thinking the aesthetic and the symbolic dimension of technics together, and not as opposite paradigms; however, in a more radical way he situates technicity in the fundamental structure of the flesh, embedding technics as a constitutive part of our carnal being.

Hence, in this perspective what is «original» is not human enhancement by technology or the act of delegating functions to technical objects or machines, but rather the ontological gap and internal alteration inscribed within human sensibility or flesh, with regard to which technicity is but an amplification, a further articulation, both natural and cultural. In other words, what is «original» is the power of the body to project itself in the world, to exceed itself as symbolic expression – not *despite of* but *through* the thickness of sensibility.

Merleau-Ponty's and Simondon's reflections set out the basis on which to think of technics not as the product of culture over nature, but rather as the expression of an aesthetic structure of the human mind-body system, that is, of a permanent interference or *mediation* between the sensible and the symbolic operated in carnal existence, insofar as aesthetics, to be considered as a synonym of techno-aesthetics, names the form itself of our embodied thinking.

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Ellen Dissanayake, Dean Falk, Fabio Martini, *The Geometric Enigma. A Book Symposium*

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ELLEN DISSANAYAKE, *WHY I AGREED TO GIVE SEVEN YEARS OF MY LIFE TO ANCIENT ABSTRACT-GEOMETRIC ROCK ART*

Readers of my earlier books and articles may well wonder why my latest publication is about the rock art of any region, least of all the American West. Certainly its title, *Early Rock Art of the American West: The Geometric Enigma*, gives no indication of the subjects and ideas I have developed over the last forty years and for which I am known. The Library of Congress catalogues the book as "Indians of North America – West (U.S.) – Antiquities; Petroglyphs – West (U.S.); Picture-writing – West (U.S.); Rock paintings – West (U.S.)". In the University of Washington Bookstore, it is shelved with other books about "Native Americans". It is then hardly surprising that reviewers and readers of my earlier work have not heard about it. I am therefore extremely grateful to Professor Desideri for publishing a special section on the book in *Aisthesis*, with two reviews and this brief contribution from me.

My previous work has addressed the arts generally – as universal, evolved, normal, and necessary attributes of the human species. The titles of my previous books illustrate the topics that have engaged me: *What Is Art For?* (1988), *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (1992), *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began* (2000), and *L'infanzia dell'Estetica: L'origine evolutiva delle pratiche artistiche* (2015). In these books, "art" was not confined to a particular kind of art (like geometric rock art) or a specific time and location (like early paleoart of the American West). On the contrary, my purview included all the arts of all times and places: music, dance, literary language, and "visual" arts of all kinds - paint-

ing, carving, sculpture, decoration, environmental enhancements, and so forth. I questioned what made something "art" and what art is. I became particularly interested in considering art as something that people "do" (a "behavior") rather than as an object or entity. In the narrowest (or perhaps broadest) sense I was seeking the universal underpinnings of the origin and nature of the practice of the arts - one might even say the metaphysics of art.

This quest came to include knowledge of the psychology of art – its cognitive and emotional sources and concomitants. What do the arts contribute to people's lives that it should be found in every human society? To this end I found it necessary to incorporate findings from evolutionary theory, ethology, and eventually neuroscience. As I continued along my scholarly path, this cross-disciplinary work found a cross-disciplinary audience among art practitioners, theorists, educators, and therapists; music (and movement) practitioners, theorists, educators, and therapists; craft practitioners and theorists, and that creature beloved by authors, the "intelligent layperson" who could recognize that my fundamental ideas were relevant to all these fields and more.

Ekkehart Malotki, a scholar of Hopi linguistics and culture, who had become passionately interested in finding and photographing rock art – petroglyphs and pictographs – in the deserts and canyons of the Greater Southwest, read *Homo Aestheticus* and telephoned me. At that time, he had published three highly-praised books of his photographs, but had an idea for a more ambitious publication that would showcase the many kinds of early geometric (or "abstract") motifs that had received little scholarly attention. Would I collaborate? I was at first perplexed. What did I know about open-air paintings and engravings on rock? I had never seen one in the flesh, as it were. Although I had written about visual art, my primary personal "arts" had been music and poetry, which took place in ephemeral time rather than existing motionless for millennia in space.

As we talked, however, and as I thought about it, I realized that rock art as a phenomenon presented the opportunity for further fascinating aesthetic problems and insights. To begin with, even though they were immobile, the engravings and paintings could be usefully approached and understood as the result of a universal human behavior, mark-making, a subject I had not previously treated. Furthermore, simple geometric shapes, not pictures of animals, are the earliest markings everywhere and appear to show roughly the same developmental trajectory as in children. Cupules (small hemispherical depressions), the very earliest kind of marks on stone, can be found on every continent (except Antarctica) and have been produced until at least the last century. Why on earth (literally) did people everywhere make them, in profusion? Although cupules may seem boring and can hardly be called "beautiful", they were obviously important to their makers as they are difficult and time-consuming to create, requiring hundreds and even thousands of blows with a hammerstone or hours of grinding. One would not make them for fun or to pass the time.

It seemed clear that makers of cupules and other rock markings must have had reasons for creating them. Although their cultural meaning is now lost, they were obviously about something that their makers cared about. I had been aware that art was never about unimportant things, but the existence of rock markings from the earliest times emphasized and confirmed that art and caring-about (emotional commitment) were inextricably entwined.

Ekkehart told me that he had been taken with the "common denominator" I had proposed for the activity of making art, which I originally called "making special". Whether with their hands, voices, body movements, or words, humans make ordinary things extra-ordinary ("special"), different from the everyday. Certainly cupules and other human-made marks made ordinary rock surfaces extraordinary so that people noticed and responded to them. This is the case with abstract geometrics as well as figural representations, which came later. Pictures were considered by most people to be more appealing because stories could be made up about their meaning. But to my

mind, geometric marks, then, were more elemental, their meanings (if any) hidden.

Western art history books often begin with the Ice Age paintings of animals in deep caves, such as Lascaux and Chauvet, not with cupules or other geometric marks. These iconic masterpieces deserve the label of "art", but bestowing it on other rock markings has been problematic, since the concept of art is a modern one and did not exist in indigenous cultures of the past. In any case, many of the marks (like cupules) defy being called art because they are not beautiful or even skilled. The term "making special" addresses this conundrum and seems more accurate, if less lofty, than "art". That is, no one can disagree that a rock surface is made special by mark-making, even though many would withhold calling the mark "art". Although it might be difficult to recognize a motif as art, everyone can concur that artifiying or "artification" (the labels we eventually gave to the activity) had taken place. In our finished book, the first chapter is called "The Concept of Artification", which became an essential underlying theme.

As my knowledge of this new field broadened, I discovered further subjects that were stimulating to think about. Almost every investigator (and especially the journalists and science writers who report on ever earlier discoveries) assumed that they were not only examples of "art" but were symbolic, evidence that the people who made them possessed "symbolic cognition" and were capable of abstract thought. The smallest marks scratched on material other than stone – a shell or piece of ocher – kept pushing back the assumption of symbolicity further and further into the past, even though for decades it had been strictly confined to sophisticated depictions of animals like those inside the Franco-Cantabrian Ice Age caves. I gradually found the whole slew of assumptions about symbolic thinking and meaning to be confused and confusing. Thus Chapter 4, "Ancestral Minds and the Spectrum of Symbol", makes the case that symbolicity is not an all-or-nothing cognitive acquisition, but like any evolved behavioral or mental capacity has a long history and a variety of manifestations. The chapter is a significant contribution to the field of cognitive archaeology and even the philosophy of mind in general, although that also is not evident in the book's title.

The final chapter of the book, "Why Did Our Ancestors Artify?" is the most recent and detailed formulation of the hypothesis about the nature and origin of the arts that I have developed over forty years. It would have been much longer if our editors had not required that I cut many of the most fascinating details that presented even more support for the various components of "the artification hypothesis". Anyone who has followed the development of my ideas over the years will find this chapter important. Although it is about all the arts in all parts of the world, not only ancient rock markings in the American West, it is they that provided a new platform on which to display my latest thoughts about the origins and concomitants of the species Homo aestheticus.

In summary, my decision to join Ekkehart in his lengthy endeavor resulted in unexpected insights into the human behavior of artification, extending some of its ramifications and solidifying others. It has confirmed a principle that has colored my now long life as a scholar: knowledge and careful thought are necessary, but another part of the brain – call it "instinct" or intuition – has its own mysterious but vital role to play.

DEAN FALK, *EARLY ROCK ART OF THE AMERICAN WEST: MOVE OVER BANKSY!*

Because of its lush photographs, I knew even before reading a word of *Early Rock Art of the American West* that it would be a gorgeous addition to my coffee table. But thanks to its authors, Ekkehart Malotki and Ellen Dissanayake, it also turned out to be an elegant scholarly read. Clearly written, with (as far as I could tell) nary a typo, the book introduces the reader to the beauty and mystery of geometric images that were etched, chiseled, grooved, painted, or pounded on the surfaces of large stationary or smaller portable rock surfaces in the United States (Chapter 1). Some of

these images may be as old as 13,000-14,000 years, perhaps not too long after people first arrived in the New World (although experts disagree on when, exactly, that was). As Malotki details in Chapter 2, dating rock art is tricky, so the dates for most images are not secure. Many of the images appear to be not only ancient, but also weathered, faded from sunlight, or covered with geologic residue or lichen.

Curiously, the early record of graphic expression in North America consists almost exclusively of nonrepresentational images composed of geometric marks such as straight lines in various orientations and arrangements (including zig-zags), arcs, circles, ovals, dots, meandering squiggles, and hollowed-out cupules (which the authors speculate may be the forerunner of the other kinds of marks, Chapter 3). Markings like these have been found in many parts of the globe. However, well before people got to America and started to produce geometric images, artists in parts of the Old World were creating not only geometric images, but also representational art, such as the well-known painting of animals in Lascaux Cave of southwestern France. For some reason, Native Americans declined (and I think that is the right word) to make realistic images of people and animals for thousands of years after their arrival on this continent. Why this was so is a fascinating mystery, which the authors call the *geometric enigma*. Significantly, and despite some distinctive regional imagery in the American West, Malotki notes that, «overall […] the design reservoir […] is strikingly homogeneous and marked by broad pan-Western if not pan-continental similarities. These similarities clearly point to widespread social interaction among human groups that probably included the sharing of both symbolic systems and ideological beliefs in their struggle for survival» (Chapter 5, p. 148).

Dissanayake is not so sure that all of these images incorporated symbolism, however (Chapter 4). What was important, she suggests in Chapter 1 and elsewhere, was the *process* of making the images - i.e. the *artifying* itself, rather than the end product (the art): «Although it is sometimes difficult to recognize symbolically mediated behavior, it is not difficult to recognize artification. And artifying something that one cares about is a unique human activity in its own right, concomitant with the psychobiology of hunter-gatherer societies» (Chapter 4, p. 125).

Indeed, Malotki thinks that the long duration of abstract-geometric rock art in North America was associated with separate small bands of hunter-gatherers who were not in competition with each other. However, he also notes that trends toward naturalistic art that depicted people and animals eventually appeared in various regions of America (perhaps by mid-Holocene), which may have been associated with, among other factors, increased populations sizes, less mobility, changes in climate, an increase in the number of permanent settlements, and competition for resources between different groups. For the latter part of the Holocene, naturalistic and geometric images were frequently combined, as illustrated in stunning examples reproduced on pages 153 and 154. Significantly, Malotki notes that certain elements such as animal and bird tracks and human handprints and footprints began to appear in these combined images, which he views as «protoiconic precursors to full-fledged iconicity» (Chapter 5, p. 154).

It is important to keep in mind that the first known graphic marks in other parts of the globe were also abstract rather than representational images. In Chapter 6, the authors discuss eleven hypotheses that address whether such images were intended to communicate symbolic ideas or, alternatively, to express emotional states, a few of which are noted in this review. One of the best-known ideas is that image-making may have been associated with magical rituals intended to promote successful hunting, although this explanation was associated mostly with depictions of animals rather than geometric markings. Another, to me less convincing, generalization (although it may be true to some extent) is that the geometric marks were intended to represent male and female symbols. An alternative idea that the earliest geometric markings may have represented sys-

tems for keeping track of objects, events in time, or lunar phases (Marshack, 1976) is also reviewed. Although Malotki and Dissanayake suggest this explanation might be a bit too analytical (*left-brained*), it is interesting and may be worth considering, at least in some instances.

Another explanation discussed more favorably by the authors is the possibility that early art may have been produced by shamans in altered states of consciousness induced by various methods such as ingestion of psychoactive substances or activities like chanting, drumming, etc. What is particularly interesting about this hypothesis is that altered states and hallucinations are known to be accompanied by visual experiences similar to the geometric images that appear on rock art (Bressloff et al., 2002). In fact, scratches on petroglyphs have been interpreted by at least one investigator as depictions of hallucinatory images (Patterson, 1992). Nonetheless, one may experience similar images from bumps on the head (i.e., seeing stars), pressing on the eyelids, standing up too quickly, intense physical exercise, or optical migraine headaches. In other words, as Malotki and Dissanayake note, the fact that human visual systems are wired to generate geometric flashes of light known as phosphene images may be related to their propensity for creating geometric images (Bednarik, 2006). The authors present a related *neurovisual resonance theory* as a preferred alternative to the *phosphine theory*, although both are premised on the fact that human visual cortices are wired to perceive and/or process simple and repetitive geometric figures.

More specifically, as initial responses to visual stimuli, geometric visual experiences are generated within the brain by neurons in the primary visual cortex that are specialized to process *form constants*, which correspond to tunnels and funnels, spirals, lattices (including triangles and honeycombs), and cobwebs "all of which contain repeated geometric structures" (Bressloff et al., 2002: 473). These initial perceptions are projected laterally in the visual cortex and forward to other parts of the brain that process them to interpret (see) broader, more realistic images of what's actually out there in the world. Geometric images are not only the first art in the archaeological record of people everywhere, they comprise the first visual information to be extracted and processed in the brain, and the first kind of art that children produce (unless one considers scribbles to be art). The stunning photographs in this book, thus, show something extremely fundamental in early rock art.

In Chapter 7, Dissanayake takes a geographically broader perspective and explores possible reasons why early human ancestors around the world evolved the ability to artify. She describes two predecessors from our animal past that paved the way – play and ritualized behaviors. In previous work, Dissanayake reasoned that strong mother-infant bonds were critically important for prehistoric infant survival, and that this led to the evolution of ritualized mechanisms that enabled mothers and infants «to enter the temporal world and feeling state of the other» (Dissanayake [2000]: 391). She expands on these observations in the present book to explain how basic evolutionary substrates first emerged and eventually gave rise to the predisposition to artify:

> *Drawing upon their innate sensitivity to proto-aesthetic operations in vocal, visual, and gestural modalities present from infancy, early humans "invented" ritual ceremonies, packages of salient multimodal artifications that we as scholars (unlike they as participants) can classify or separate into various genres: chant, song, literary language, mime, dramatic performance, dance, visual enhancement – that is, the arts. (Chapter 7, pp. 206-207)*

Dissanayake's research inspired my own *putting-the-baby-down hypothesis*, which addresses the origins of baby talk (*motherese*) and how it seeded the emergence of protolanguage (Falk [2009]: 97-98). Whereas Malotki and Dissanayake define *language* narrowly as «something that is spoken» (p. 176), I define *language* more broadly as incorporating posterior-brain sensory aspects (listening, reading, seeing [sign language]) and anterior-brain motor functions (speaking, writing, and signing). Neither definition is right or wrong,

of course, and I agree with the authors that spoken language emerged before written forms during prehistory. I also accept their hypothesis that artifying, which draws heavily on the right side of the brain, was facilitated by evolutionary changes in hominin mother-infant interactions. For reasons detailed elsewhere, however, I think that prolonged natural selection for left-hemisphere dominated language was probably the prime mover for the evolution of advanced human cognition more generally (Falk [2009]; Falk, Schofield [2018]). In any event, the two hemispheres of the brain evolved together and, despite their main hemispheric underpinnings and activations of specific neurological regions, the visual arts, music, and language share, to some extent, overlapping use of the same widely distributed highly evolved neurological networks. These behaviors and their neurological substrates are, in fact, what make us human.

Although Malotki and Dissanyake reject a *protowriting hypothesis* as an explanation for the markings on early rock art, the idea that these markings might bear some relationship to the later emergence of the world's first full-fledged writing system (currently thought to have occurred around 5,000-6,000 years ago) is worth considering (Falk, Schofield [2018]). Brain scans show that written words in any language are first perceived as individually meaningless visual fragments of letters or characters (such as lines with certain orientations) in the primary visual cortex. After processing there, the information is sent forward to a universally specific region in the left hemisphere, which has been dubbed the *brain's letter box* (Dehaene [2013]), where the elements are assembled into words. According to Dehaene's *recycling hypothesis*, the emergence of reading was facilitated by preexisting brain circuits that were initially adapted for language and vision and later repurposed. Malotki and Dissanyake's research suggests that the most basic elements that form the smallest components of the geometric images seen in rock art may well be the same fundamental components that are initially stimulated in the primary visual cortex when one observes print or writing. If so, the universal appearance of geometric abstract artifying prior to representational artifying may indicate that human brains were not only fully lateralized for spoken and gestural language by the time recorded art emerged, but were also preadapted for reading long before reading and writing came on the scene.

As discussed elsewhere (Falk, Schofield [2018]), this raises the fascinating question of what the letterbox and related networks were doing before the evolution of reading and writing. Reasonable hypotheses are that these parts of the brain were activated during recognition of faces (areas of the brain that recognize faces shifted to some extent after reading emerged) and, more interestingly, during "reading" animal tracks and other natural phenomena. This is significant because our ancestors everywhere (not just in the relatively recently inhabited American West) made their livings as hunters and gatherers during the vast majority of hominin prehistory.

As Malotki and Dissanayake point out, the origins and functions of abstract-geometric rock markings may have been multi-faceted and complex. In other words, the proximal motivations for creating rock art likely varied. Certainly, the activity may have been emotionally satisfying in and of itself, as Dissanayake suggests, at least to some producers. Perhaps some images were meant to convey information (if only as simple as *Kilroy was here*), or were produced during ritualized performances intended to influence future events. Maybe some early ancestors simply wanted to *make their mark*, as some people wish today. Or perhaps some of the images were simply graffiti that foreshadowed the anonymous stealth markings of contemporary graffiti artists, such as the famous England-based street artist, Banksy.

One thing that should not be concluded, however, is that the first rock artists in America were incapable of producing representational art. The neurological findings discussed above suggest that they would have had the same potential for creating images of people and animals as humans had in other parts of the world, but deliberately chose to confine their representations to abstractions,

possibly for religious reasons. It, thus, seems reasonable to speculate that producing realistic images may have been culturally prohibited during the first part of human habitation in the New World.

The authors end their book by noting that, to date, no prehistoric American rock art location has been recognized as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site, and with a recommendation of several sites that they think would qualify for such an honor. Hopefully, their suggestion will bear fruit. Meanwhile, I suggest you read this fascinating and thought-provoking book before you (proudly) show it off on your coffee table.

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FABIO MARTINI, *"ARTE" PALEOLITICA ED ESERCIZI DI STILE OVVERO DALLA VENERE DI HOHLE FELS AI* "TEXTICULES" *DI RAYMOND QUENEAU*

Nell'ambito degli studi sulle prime manifestazioni figurative in epoca preistorica e sull'evoluzione del "fare segno" paleolitico un paradigma concettuale ed espressivo che non ha risparmiato nessuna generazione di studiosi riguarda la definizione del linguaggio col quale il "segno" viene comunicato, vale a dire il sistema non verbale codificato che trasmette il simbolo iconografico. Mutuato dal campo storico-artistico, il termine "stile" in archeologia tende ad individuare l'insieme dei tratti formali che nelle produzioni figurative restano costanti all'interno di una espressione culturale ricostruibile in un determinato ambito geografico e cronologico. Individuati all'interno dell'ampia gamma della variabilità dei segni, gli stili delle figurazioni paleolitiche si connotano per specifici canoni grafici espressivi che diventano, ognuno, linguaggio codificato e quindi condiviso, una norma coerente che identifica i vari procedimenti concettuali con i quali la civiltà dei cacciatori-raccoglitori ha raccontato l'interpretazione di sé, degli stati dell'anima e del mondo. Lo stile, o meglio gli stili, presenti nell'iconografia pleistocenica sono documenti archeologici che attestano l'adozione di specifici canoni espressivi, il cui scopo è la comunicazione consapevole, attraverso il segno, di simbologie e di ideologie funzionali a cementare l'identità del consorzio sociale. In assenza di fonti scritte e prescindendo dai confronti etnografici (un parametro discutibile per quanto di successo in talune scuole antropo-archeologiche) all'archeologo preistorico è precluso l'accesso ai significati del complesso patrimonio immateriale che insieme ai saperi materiali definisce le culture paleolitiche e di conseguenza deve limitarsi ad individuare l'esistenza di processi di interiorizzazione di sistemi ideologici, sociali, religiosi e la persistenza di pratiche comunicative non verbali (arte, musica, danza…). Lo stile nelle iconografie, inteso come strumento di trasmissione linguistica non verbale

del mondo simbolico, e l'evidenziare il suo ruolo tra tradizione e innovazione sono lo strumento per valutare l'effetto delle esperienze estetiche nella trasmissione dei saperi.

Tutto ciò nella consapevolezza che l'estetico, presso quelle comunità paleolitiche, non si esauriva nel linguaggio visuale, ma partecipava delle esperienze multisensoriali che caratterizzavano la pratica eidetica all'interno delle grotte, godendo di stati di forte concentrazione fisica e psichica. Qui il *vedere* si accompagnava alla dinamicità delle figure dipinte, divenute mobili al fluttuare dei bagliori delle torce, si accompagnava al senso dell'*udire*, sensibile al silenzio assordante delle caverne, allo stillicidio, ai rumori del proprio corpo, del respiro, del battito del cuore. Questo accadeva nelle esperienze emotive individuali, che potevano tuttavia essere integrate da performances implicanti suoni, canti, danze di gruppo, amplificando quindi la valenza estetica dell'esperienza visuale che diviene collettiva. Fare segno, quindi (verosimilmente non "arte" nell'accezione moderna) come esperienza compartecipativa alla saturazione emotiva dell'accadimento estetico. Accadimento che comporta l'assenza di casualità dell'esperienza stessa: il rapporto multisensoriale nell'incontro con le immagini che dalla parete delle grotte si offrono allo spettatore non nasce, se non come momento transeunte, dalla volontà di osservare ma dalla capacità delle immagini medesime di attrarre. Lo spettatore non sceglie di guardare ma subisce il peso attrattivo (dimensioni, colori, luci e ombre…) delle immagini e, di concerto, l'espansione del fatto estetico che abbassa *in itinere* il livello cognitivo dell'esperienza.

Esperienza, quella eidetica paleolitica, che probabilmente diceva a chi si poneva di fronte alle immagini simboliche, dipinte o incise, non *chi erano* quei personaggi zoomorfi o antropomorfi (l'arte è finzione, non verità) ma rassicurava lo spettatore assicurando da un lato cosa *non era* e dall'altro garantendo che ciò *che è* (*to on*), per quanto irreale in quanto simbolo (quindi finzione), *esiste* e poiché ciò che esiste è, quello che è visibile attraverso l'invisibile (l'essenza del simbolo) rassicura in merito alla propria esistenza. Essere, quindi, significa coscienza identitaria di sé e del mondo circostante.

Ne deriva che il mondo zoomorfo e antropomorfo creato con le figurazioni, le statuette, i bassorilievi e i modellati in argilla non sono attori di un racconto immaginifico ma si trasformano in personaggi del mondo reale. Non troviamo mai nelle figurazioni paleolitiche separazioni nette (o percezioni di separazioni) tra mondo reale e irreale, tra natura sensoriale e natura metastorica. La realtà è simbolica e il fare segno paleolitico non concerne figure reali, non descrive il mondo perché il mondo è composto da immagini, non comporta una divisione di mondi ma una fusione tra piani ontologici diversi, l'ingresso nell'infinito. Cos'è l'infinito? È ciò che è al di là del definito, è ciò che si intravede quando si supera consapevolmente il confine della distanza, è uno stato emotivo che riusciamo a cogliere in modo confuso e approssimativo procurandoci reazioni non unanimi all'interno di esperienze che sono connesse, dentro un viaggio interiore, al rito o per lo meno ad una forte religiosità. L'attrazione dell'estetico è fortemente legata in tutte le forme di creatività, attiva o passiva, al piacere, sentimento che ci fa mettere in secondo piano la consapevolezza che i nostri occhi sono complici di un inganno, che il nostro *logos* deve tacere perché la valenza metastorica della metafora segnica attiene alla mente che, sola, sceglie cosa vedere. "L'anima ha due occhi - scrive il poeta e mistico Angelus Silesius - uno guarda nel tempo, l'altro è rivolto all'eternità". Ma torniamo al discorso principale eliminando il rischio di prendere altri sentieri.

In una visione antropo-poietica dell'evolversi delle culture, il fare segno, una delle varie espressioni dell'estetica, per conseguire il suo obiettivo primario di cementare un consorzio sociale attraverso il consolidamento di un sistema culturale specifico, deve creare stimoli e sistemi di percezione condivisibili e trasmissibili attraverso linguaggi immediati, sintetici, funzionali all'intersoggettività. Lo stile quindi diviene, al pari di altri comportamenti gestuali, un canone ritualizzato che trova nella sua ripetitività priva di devianze la chiave per raggiungere e stimolare le funzioni comunitarie del gruppo umano e quindi la sua

legittimazione.

Veniamo all'ambito archeologico. Diversi sono i linguaggi attestati dalle evidenze paleolitiche europee, che cerchiamo qui di sintetizzare in questo preambolo.

In quello più naturalistico i soggetti zoomorfi e antropomorfi sono immediatamente riconoscibili, decisa e netta è l'attenzione alle proporzioni e ai dettagli anatomici e il risultato è una resa verista della raffigurazione. Alla Grotta Chauvet in Francia [Fig. 1], per esempio, le pitture datate tra 35-30.000 anni fa (Aurignaziano, la prima cultura *sapiens* europea) seguono questo canone che, immutato, si ripete in altre iconografie più recenti, ad esempio nella Grotta Lascaux (18.000 anni fa circa) e in altri contesti più tardi (in Francia Grotte di Niaux, Rouffignac, Pech Merle, Cussac e molte altre, in Italia Grotta del Romito), sino a circa 10.000 anni orsono [Fig. 2].

Ma contemporaneo al naturalismo di Chauvet è il procedimento concettuale di scomposizione dei volumi anatomici e la loro ricomposizione mediante linee che ha prodotto in Italia il cosiddetto "sciamano" di Grotta Fumane, presso Verona [Fig. 3]. Una sincronicità che documenta l'istantanea comparsa di più stili nel momento cruciale dell'invenzione della linea ad opera dei *sapiens* recenti europei, entrati in Europa dal confine orientale intorno a 40.000 anni fa, pionieri che colonizzano in soli 3.000 anni l'intero continente

Figura 1. Grotta Chauvet (Francia). Pittura aurignaziana in stile naturalistico verista.

Figura 2. Grotta del Romito (Italia). Figurazione naturalistica di *Bos primigenius*.

Figura 3. Grotta Fumane (Italia). Il teriomorfo ("sciamano") dipinto in stile schematico; la morfologia antropomorfa e il copricapo (o maschera) con corna sono ben riconoscibili.

sostituendo i Neanderthaliani e rinnovando dal profondo il *sense of beauty* di questa specie, il primo nella storia dell'uomo se ci atteniamo rigorosamente alla documentazione archeologica.

La Venere dell'Aurignaziano (la prima cultura *sapiens* in Europa nel Paleolitico superiore) rinvenuta nella Grotta di Hohle Fels in Germania, risalente a 40-36.000 anni orsono [Fig. 4], documenta la contemporaneità con Chauvet e Fumane di un altro procedimento concettuale, nel quale la scomposizione delle masse corporee del soggetto è seguita da una ricomposizione mediante volumi. Si tratta di un canone che porterà, per tutta la durata del Paleolitico superiore sino al primo Mesolitico, al cospicuo repertorio europeo della piccola statuaria femminile, in particole delle cosiddette "Veneri" nelle quali i volumi principali legati alla identità riproduttiva femminile sono volutamente enfatizzati a scapito di altre parti anatomiche secondarie (testa, braccia, arti inferiori).

Non mancano all'interno della variabilità stilistica i segni geometrici e lineari, sia semplici sia complessi, elaborati in forme organizzate (ad esempio i cosiddetti "segni araldici" di Grotta Lascaux) oppure presenti singolarmente in varie tipologie. Ad essi si associano segni puntiformi, singoli o a gruppi [Fig. 5]. Sono espressioni simboliche estreme nella loro iconografia astratta, senza richiami al reale, inquietanti nella loro chiusura ad ogni tentativo di strappare un'interpretazione o un barlume di significato. Presenti sin dalle fasi più antiche del Paleolitico superiore europeo, vedono un'adozione e una diffusione più ampia in tutta Europa negli ultimi 3-4 mila anni dal Paleolitico e talora si presentano come il linguaggio dominante e a volte esclusivo di alcune province culturali (l'area balcanica sino alla Crimea, il Salento nella Puglia meridionale in Italia)

Figura 5. Grotta del Castillo (Spagna). Insieme di segni geometrici e lineari dipinti.

Figura 4. Grotta di Hohle Fels. Questa Venere aurignaziana è al momento la più antica figurazione femminile a tutto tondo.

Figura 6. Grotta del Cavallo (Salento, Italia). Spirale labirintica geometrica incisa su blocchetto calcareo.

[Fig. 6]. La loro complessità concettuale non va intesa, vista la maggiore diffusione di tali segni astratti negli ultimi millenni del Paleolitico europeo, come una elaborazione matura del linguaggio figurativo dei *sapiens*; infatti i segni attestati nella purtroppo scarsa iconografia neandertaliana sono sempre lineari, legati ad una semplicità che esclude una capacità di raffigurazione, preclusa a questa specie, ma che indica un "sintomo" di espressione mediante il segno improntato ad una complessità concettuale che si esprime, per esempio nell'osso inciso di Grotta Costantini, mediante una chiara sequenza di spazi pieni e spazi vuoti [Fig. 7]. Complessità attestata per i Neanderthal anche da altre pratiche, sia utilitaristiche (alcune tecnologie innovative di scheggiatura della pietra) sia simboliche (la prima pratica inumatoria con la creazione di uno spazio della memoria dove custodire, all'interno della grotta, il corpo del defunto ma anche il mantenimento nel mondo dei vivi di piccole parti dello scheletro degli scomparsi come reliquie).

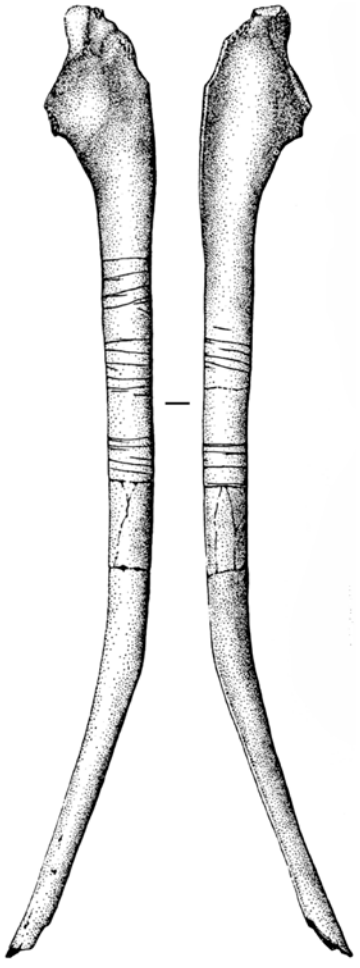

Figura 7. Grotta Costantini (Italia). Osso con incisioni lineari a scansione ritmica, uno dei motivi complessi delle produzioni neandertaliane.

Il discorso sugli stili non può esaurirsi in questa sintetica descrizione di procedimenti linguistici non verbali, infatti all'interno di queste "grammatiche" del segno sono attestati alcuni procedimenti che arricchiscono la complessità mentale dei *sapiens* paleolitici nelle pratiche figurative. Espedienti tecnici o concettuali come l'anamorfosi, la sineddoche, le figurazioni cinetiche nelle quali la raffigurazione ravvicinata della stessa parte anatomica (corno, zampa) è replicata più volte creando l'effetto di movimento (si pensi alla tecnica del cartone animato) e, non ultima, la stilizzazione geometrica dei corpi rendono il repertorio iconografico paleolitico paragonabile all'arte contemporanea e dimostrano che nel campo "artistico" da 40.000 anni il *sapiens*, sia recente sia attuale, sta ripercorrendo le medesime vie, con esperienze di comunicazione non verbale, duttili nei millenni, ma costanti nei procedimenti di resa bidimensionale o tridimensionale della realtà che viene colta dal nostro sistema percettivo per masse e volumi [Fig. 8; 9].

I diversi stili, intesi quindi come codici espressivi condivisi, possiedono ciascuno un proprio specifico procedimento concettuale di resa bidimensionale o tridimensionale della realtà e generano, attraverso la reiterazione dei caratteri tipologici dei segni, una *costanza fisionomica* (*sensu* Gombrich) che produce la percezione di una *costanza ontologica*. La ripetitività del canone grafico, che l'archeologo preistorico può solo attestare e che, in mancanza di fonti letterarie, non può decifrare nel suo significato, comporta di conseguenza la creazione di una *sostanza simbolica* che, diluita nei millenni senza variazioni formali sostanziali, diviene una *costanza simbolica*. In altre parole, gli stili presenti nelle esperienze incisorie, pittoriche e della piccola statuaria a tutto tondo del Paleolitico non sono mera forma ispirata a convenzioni grafiche, ma sintetizzano sistemi espressivi focalizzati sui medesimi contenuti che

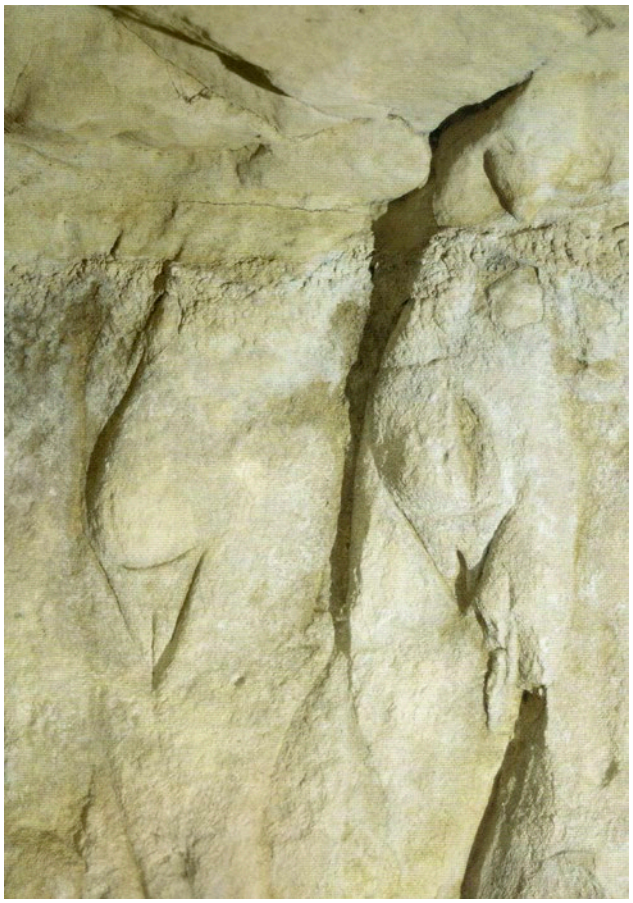

Figura 8. Roc-aux-Sorcier (Francia). Figurazione femminile in forma di sineddoche con ventre gravido e segno vulvare.

Figura 9. Abri du Colombier (Francia). Profilo di stambecco inciso su roccia, con moltiplicazione delle zampe per creare l'effetto di movimento tramite la sovrapposizione di immagini successive.

Figura 10. Hohelenstein Stadel (Germania). Statuetta in avorio raffigurante un teriomorfo con testa di felino.

concernono essenzialmente tre grandi temi:

- la fertilità femminile che garantisce la sopravvivenza della specie,
- il mondo animale e la caccia,
- gli ibridi antropo-zoomorfi, ovvero le figure umane con maschera animale, i teriomorfi che, in una vasta letteratura sono molto impropriamente detti "sciamani" [Fig. 10].

Tre temi che sembrano compenetrarsi se pensiamo che tra specie umana e specie animali non vi è alcuna differenza essenziale, ipotizzando quindi che l'animalità potesse essere percepita come un aspetto dell'umanità, percezione attestata in particolare dalle figure teriomorfe dove la "seconda pelle" che veste e trasforma il corpo del soggetto antropomorfo rendendolo un ibrido unifica due stati dell'essere, rendendo uno ciò che è plurimo, rendendo percettibile l'unità della variabilità della

natura e la sua perennità: *to tin en einai*. Ma torniamo agli stili, anche se i temi ad essi connessi portano a deviazioni nella riflessione e a costruire una sorta di percorso come scatole cinesi e attestiamoci su una estrema sintesi: linguaggio (stili) e pensiero (temi), forma e contenuto si identificano.

Il dato storico è indiscutibile: nelle prime esperienze figurative paleolitiche (ma il discorso potremmo allargarlo alla grande variabilità espressiva del mondo antico nelle diverse civiltà e giungere sino ad oggi), l'uomo ha prodotto infiniti racconti che, all'interno di una trama limitata e molto semplice, ruotano attorno ad un'unica realtà impalpabile, gli stati dell'anima. Come Raymond Queneau nei suoi *Exercises de style* per novantanove volte (i novantanove *texticules*, come egli stesso li definì) racconta il medesimo avvenimento con diverse variazioni stilistiche, allo stesso modo l'estetica dei cacciatori-raccoglitori europei possiede, come attesta la documentazione archeologica, varie possibilità espressive e molteplici registri.

In questo testo, parafrasando un intrigante testo di Carlo Ginzburg del 1988, intendo il termine *stile* in una specifica accezione. Stile non come autonomia estetica, né come mera connotazione morfologica ma come morfologia di un'immagine che esprime la valenza pragmatica, direi dedalica, del gesto creativo, che rende tangibile un contenuto. Stile come mezzo espressivo condiviso all'interno di un contesto storico-culturale.

Lo stile è un atteggiamento sia sincronico sia diacronico, destinato a trasformarsi nel tempo. Se alla sua origine vi è l'irrazionalità del processo creativo, la sua finalità è quella di dare un senso razionale alla vita esprimendo le tensioni interiori individuali e le dinamiche antropologiche collettive. Nella storia dell'uomo la forza dell'impulso creativo si è sempre posta come elemento non statico e codificato ma come tensione verso il superamento di modelli costituiti. La successione degli stili nella storia dell'espressività umana, dalla preistoria ad oggi, mostra in modo indubitabile che quando una tendenza iconografica raggiunge un certo livello di standardizzazione in una sorta di fossilizzazione, ecco che interviene una pulsione verso la trasformazione del linguaggio. Si tratta di un processo dinamico che non è scisso dalle trasformazioni economiche e sociali, ma che interpreta i mutamenti attraverso i diversi percorsi evolutivi. Contravvenire alla stabilità: se i mutamenti dei linguaggi espressivi sono indicativi della naturale pulsione verso il nuovo, ecco che il parametro stilistico diviene segnale dei sintomi evolutivi di un processo culturale che supera i confini dell'iconologia e che investe l'intera storia di una società.

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The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović: In Conversation with the Artist

Marta Rosa

«The Cleaner» was Italy's first major retrospective dedicated to Marina Abramović, hosted at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence from 21 September 2018 to 20 January 2019. The title of the exhibition refers to Abramović's reflection on her life, of which – as in a house – only the essential should be preserved and the rest should be "cleaned". For this reason, with over one hundred pieces of work on display, this exhibition spans a half-century of activity from the matriarch of Performance Art, a woman that has revolutionized the very idea of this art with her personal and professional life over the last decades.

To mark this occasion, I had the opportunity to interview this great artist, who was born on the 30th November 1946 in Belgrade, during Tito's regime in SFR Yugoslavia. Her parents were Partisan war heroes who helped fight the Nazis in World War II and held high positions in the communist government. The artist remembers them as figures who were not very involved in her life, too strict and not at all loving. Likely for this reason, Abramović developed an iron self-discipline, which is evident in all of her performances; not to leave anything to chance she plans the performances to the very last detail, fully aware of the risks that they may involve and ready to face them without fear.

After her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, in the early 1970s Abramović began her artistic career. With her first performances – such as «Rhythm Series» (1973-1974), «Thomas Lips» (1975), «Art Must Be Beautiful/Artist Must Be Beautiful» (1975), or «Freeing Series» (1975) – she tried to free the senses, transcend the limitations of the body, and achieve a higher sense of understanding. These performances also represented her definitive turn away from traditional media, such as painting or drawing, to a complete focus on the use of her own body as an art medium. When she was a student, Abramović worked intensely with painting, repeating almost

obsessively the same themes, such as violent head-on truck accidents or clouds that became geometrical shapes or faceless human figures. However, as soon as she discovered Performance Art, Abramović abandoned all other expressive forms and reached farther than any other artist…

When she decided to leave Belgrade, Abramović arrived in Amsterdam, where on the 30th November 1975 – the day of her 29th birthday – she met the German artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen, who coincidentally was also born on the 30th November) with whom began a tormented romantic and professional relationship that would last twelve years. Abramović and Ulay claimed to be merged into a single hermaphrodite organism, and during this period, they travelled for three years across Europe in an iconic Citroën HY van, following the rules of their manifesto «Art Vital» (no fixed living-place; permanent movement; direct contact; local relation; self-selection; passing limitations; taking risks; mobile energy; no rehearsal; no predicted end; no repetition). The couple collaborated in a series of relational performances – such as «Relation in Space» (1976), «Relation in Time» (1977), «Imponderabilia» (1977), and «AAA-AAA» (1978) –, calling into question the socially defined identities of both femininity and masculinity, and encouraging viewers to participate through their own exploration of gender relationships. In the 1980s they took anthropological research trips in India, Thailand, China, Tibet, and the Australian outback to learn meditation practices. During this "spiritual period", the artists conceived some of their most long-lasting performances, based on the exchange of looks and mental energy between them, such as in the series «Nightsea Crossing» (1981-1987), which the couple performed for seven hour periods over a total of 90 days in galleries throughout Europe, America and Australia. In 1988, with the performance «The Lovers», Abramović and Ulay separated at the Great Wall of China, however the end of this important artistic "marriage" meant, at the same time, a new beginning for the career of Marina Abramović.

Abramović was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale for the performance «Balkan Baroque», was a symbolic act of cleansing from the devastating war in Yugoslavia, a sort of requiem for her homeland, as well as a way of directly confronting death. During this performance, Abramović sat on a mountain of 1,500 cow bones, washing blood from them with a metal brush, continuously singing sad folk songs from her childhood.

In recent years Marina Abramović changed her modus operandi: she transformed her position and became the silent partner of an intimate and energetic dialogue with the audience. That is emblematically testified in 2010 by «The Artist Is Present» at the MoMA of New York. During this performance – which has already become a "classic" of Performance Art –, Abramović engaged in mutual gaze with more than one thousand strangers over the course of three months. Over 850,000 visitors came to see this extraordinary retrospective, and Abramović was inspired by the general public's desire to engage with such immaterial works. Here is when her vision of MAI (Marina Abramović Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art) was born.

The philosophy of the Institute is to teach how it is possible to do Performance Art today, and how to safeguard it. Through the Abramović Method, a physical and mental practice that artists can use to produce a performance, and which consists in different exercises focused on breath, motion, stillness, and concentration, the Institute trains also the audience to attend long duration performances. The audience, in fact, plays a central role in this method, as without an audience a performance could not exist. The audience must learn to stay in the moment and be present in both time and space, only in this way can the performance "work" and transform people.

Performance Art is not only a transformative art, but also an extremely ephemeral artistic form. To maintain a performance, which could otherwise live only as archive documentation, Abramović invents and uses re-performance as a new artistic "strategy". In this way, Abramović has laid the groundwork for going beyond the ephemeral in her work and reinventing the very idea of

performance in the 21st century. Performed by new artists, performances of the past are no longer simply archive documentation, they take on a new second life and change with each performer, exactly as happens with different performances of a musical piece or a ballet, which can change radically from one performer to the next. According to Abramović's herself "a work must have its own life and survive its creator". This approach is evident in exhibitions such as the great «Seven Easy Pieces», presented at the Guggenheim Museum of New York in 2005, during which Abramović re-performed some of the most significant works of pioneers of Performance Art – Joseph Beuys's «How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare», Valie Export's «Action Pants: Genital Panic», Gina Pane's «The Conditioning: First Action of Self-Portraits(s)», Bruce Nauman's «Body Pressure», Vito Acconci's «Seed Bed», and her own performance «Lips of Thomas». More recently, in «The Cleaner» at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the live reinterpretation of Abramović's celebrated performances – «Freeing Series» (1975), «Imponderabilia» (1977), «Cleaning the Mirror» (1995), «Luminosity» (1997), and «The House with the Ocean View» (2002) – was entrusted to a group of performers specially selected and trained by Abramovic's close assistants.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Marina Abramović always gives value to the spiritual dimension of art. The energy that originates from her interactive performances, as well as from her «Transitory Objects», represents the aim of her work, which could be viewed as a "mission" and considered as a tool to radically transform our society and culture.

During the interview, Marina Abramović was in her home at Malden Bridge, New York State, which is known as the Star House for its six-pointed shape. It was 10 am (4 pm in the local Italian time zone) and she appeared very relaxed and answered my questions with a quiet tone of voice. With my interview I have tried to recall key moments of her artistic career, as well as to show the human aspects of the artist that has revolutionized the very idea of Performance Art.

Marta Rosa: You are considered as a pioneer of Performance Art and you have defined yourself as the "grandmother" of this extraordinary and unique visual art. For this reason nobody better than you can try to give an answer to this question: what is Performance Art?

Marina Abramović: Many people, who do Performance Art, can give this answer, and every answer will be very different, as each person has a different relationship with performance. I can only give my own answer. For me, performance is a mental and physical construction that you made at a specific time, in a specific space, in front of an audience, where an energy dialogue is going to happen. This is for me the performance. It is a live form of art and it is also a time-based art: you have to be there to perceive it.

MR: In your early years, during the 70s, Performance Art started as an innovative, radical and exclusive form of art, based on immateriality of art, independent from the economic sphere and commodification. Do you believe that nowadays Performance Art maintains the same features or has its role inside contemporary society and the art scene changed?

MA: I think performance now has a much better position than before. In the 70s, there was a situation of complete rebellion, performance was not accepted as a mainstream art and it was rejected by the general audience; there was only a very small audience following performance. But now, 30-40 years later, performance has become a very important part of art and there are more performance artists, installations, and mixed media in which performance was never before included. Now you have major museums showing Performance Art: this never would have happened in the 70s, the 80s, or even the 90s…

MR: Spectators play an essential role in any performance, but their relationship with performers sometimes appears rather ambivalent and "contradictory". As you describe in your

memoir, «Walks Through Walls»[1], during your performance «Rhythm 0»[2], at Studio Morra in Naples in 1974, you realized that anyone from the audience could even try to kill you; at the same time over 850.000 people rushed from around the world to attend «The Artist is Present»[3], your great retrospective at MoMA of New York. How do you explain this dual approach of cruelty and disregard on the one hand and deep admiration and affection on the other?

MA: There were thirty-six years between these two performances, and I learnt very much over that period. In the first performance, «Rhythm 0», I could not talk to the public, they could do whatever they wanted to me and I gave them permission. The permission was very clear: seventy-six objects [according to the original instructions the objects were seventy-two] for pleasure and for violence that one can use on me as desired. So, I gave people the tools myself, letting them decide how they were going to use them, and I realized that the public can try to kill you. Thirty-six years later [during «The Artist is Present»], I gave the public completely different tools. I gave them just one chair and the instructions were very strict: sit on the chair, do not talk and just engage in a mutual gaze with me; the time is limitless, and you can stay there as long as you want. These were the only instructions. In one case, you lose the spirit of the public by giving them the ability to be violent and the potential to kill you, and in the other case, you elevate the spirit of the public when you give them different tools.

MR: Analyzing your performances, I noticed a constant attempt to establish an energy exchange, an energy dialogue with the audience. That behavior seems to help people to face their fears, pains, and weaknesses and, possibly, to overcome them through direct participation in your performances. This practice reminds one – in a way – of the shamanic rituals. For this reason, I would like to ask you if you have ever felt as a modern "shaman", a kind of alternative therapist who takes care of her "patients" through the energy of art.

MA: I am very interested in shamanism, I study shamanism and I have also done lots of different retreats around the world to learn how I can use my body and also my mental powers, in order to create better performances, because performance is all about immateriality, so you have to project into the mind something that you have to feel. That is very difficult, because it is the "soft matter", so you have to learn to perform with certain emotions. I study all this, but I am still an artist and I would never call myself a shaman. Shaman is a completely different category.

MR: You have spent twelve years of your professional life with the artist Ulay. You have shared with him some of your most important performances, such as «Relation in Space»[4],

[1] Marina Abramović, «Walk Through Walls. A Memoir», Crown Archetype, New York, 2016.

[2] Marina Abramović, «Rhythm 0», performance, 6 hours, Studio Morra, Naples, 1974. Abramovic's original intention for the piece is explained by her written instructions which accompanied the work: "Instructions: There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired. Performance: I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility. Duration: 6 hours (8pm–2am). Studio Morra, Naples, 1974". Thus, for a period of six hours, visitors were invited to use any of the objects on the table – such as a glass of water, a rose, a paper, a pair of scissors, a kitchen knife and a pistol with one bullet – on the artist, who subjected herself to their treatment. The result utterly shocked her and led her to realize how twisted and cruel humanity can be from within.

[3] Marina Abramović, «The Artist is Present», performance, 3 months, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010. During this performance – that represents a full-blown manifesto of Abramović's artistic work – for more than 700 hours, over a three-month period, Marina Abramović stared silently and without moving at 1,675 people who sat opposite her, focusing on the value of energy-based and spiritual communication between the artist and her audience.

[4] Marina Abramović/Ulay, «Relation in Space», performance, 58 minutes, XXXVIII Biennale, Giudecca, Venice,

«Imponderabilia»[5], «Rest Energy»[6], «Nightsea Crossing»[7], and «The Lovers»[8] – the performance that celebrated the end of your romantic and professional relationship. What role did love play in your work during that period? And how did your "personal career" change?

MA: Although this work is important, I do not believe that my most important performances are with Ulay, for the simple reason that this was only a twelve years period and I have been working for half a century. In this half a century I think «Balkan Baroque»[9] is a very important performance, for which I got the Lion; I also think the piece «At the Waterfall»[10], which was work done with the Tibetan monks, is very important. «The Artist is Present» is also extremely important.

I think that my career has an early period before Ulay, twelve years with Ulay, and then all the rest of the time without; and you can clearly see that through the retrospective in Florence of my 50 years of work, in which I show a lot of

1976. This performance was the first from their «Relation Work» series, which was based on the analysis of the male/female principle. At the start of the compilation version of the video registration, Abramović explains the set-up of the performance: "Two bodies repeatedly pass, touching each other. At a high speed they collide." Approaching each other from different sides of the space, Marina Abramović and Ulay collide with each other in the middle and then disappear from view. Sometimes they do not reappear for another twenty seconds before the process starts to repeat itself.

[5] Marina Abramović/Ulay, «Imponderabilia», performance, 90 minutes, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, 1977. Marina Abramović and Ulay stood facing one another in a narrow passageway for 90 minutes, motionless and naked, forcing visitors wishing to enter the museum to pass between them. The performance was supposed to last six hours but the police put a stop to it.

[6] Marina Abramović/Ulay, «Rest Energy», performance for video, 4 minutes and 10 seconds, ROSC'80, Dublin, 1980. The performance was part of the «That Self» series and engaged with the first acceptance of performance, when understood as a body test that can lead to endangering life. Ulay held an arrowhead, which was pointing at Abramovic's heart, and microphones on their clothes picked up their quickening heartbeats and irregular breathing, creating a dense tension.

[7] Marina Abramović/Ulay, «Nightsea Crossing» (the first title of the performance was «Gold Found By the Artists», performance, 7 hours per day for 16 days, The Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1981), performance, 90 days, various locations, 1981-1987. During this performance series the artists sat motionless, facing each other across a table specially designed using numerologically formulated proportions, for seven hour periods over a total of 90 days in galleries throughout Europe, America and Australia. The artists dressed in a particular color at each sitting, believing in the importance of color in relation to the day and its effect on the mental state. Objects were sometimes introduced onto the table (a live python, a pair of scissors). In 1983 a Tibetan Lama and a member of the Pintubi tribe from the Central Australian Desert were invited to take part in a special performance, entitled «Nightsea Crossing Conjuction», 4 days, 4 hours each day, Sonesta Koepelzaal, Museum Fodor, Amsterdam.

[8] Marina Abramović/Ulay, «The Lovers (The Great Wall Walk)», performance, 90 days, The Great Wall of China, 1988. Marina Abramović started the walk across the Great Wall of China in Liaoning Province and proceeded westwards along coastal areas, flatlands and highlands. Ulay proceeded eastwards through the Western Periphery of the Gobi desert and the Helan Shan mountains in Ningxai province. A Chinese support team provided both with food and water during the journey, at two weeks intervals. The performance concluded at the meeting of Marina and Ulay, which meant, at the same time, the end of their romantic and professional relationship of twelve years.

[9] Marina Abramović, «Balkan Baroque», performance, 4 days and 6 hours, XLVII Biennale, Venice, 1997, which earned Marina Abramović the Golden Lion for Best Artist.

[10] «At the Waterfall» (2003) is a video projection of 108 images, each showing a Tibetan monk or nun, chanting in meditative abandon. A "waterfall" of sound pervades the space. The work was commissioned by representatives of the Dhali Lama who assigned Marina Abramović to choreograph the Tibetan monks for their performance in the sacred music festival in Bengalor, India. She spent one month in a Tibetan monastery and recorded the monks and nuns for the work, which designates a continuation of the artist's commitment to Eastern philosophies, tied to the hope of an eventual integration into Western society. The installation is an overwhelming environment of sounds and images and is likely to put almost any visitor under a hypnotic spell.

works from different periods. I think that the work continually develops, there are certain things from the 70s that I would never do today. Everything is developing and changing, and there is still so much more work to be done.

It is really interesting how the public reacts, especially women. They really love the period with Ulay, because it embodies a love story. This is such a sentimental approach. We go to the Great Wall of China, and there we split, and then we say goodbye, and then we cry, and then he comes back… lots of these kinds of stories sometimes is overly emotional and unnecessary. That does not really deal with the concept of art.

MR: In recent years you put particular effort into the teaching and "safeguarding" of Performance Art (I am thinking here of the Marina Abramović Institute and the Abramović Method)[11]: why did you feel the need to do this?

MA: When you have this amount of people in MoMA, you understand that your role has changed. It is not just the role of an artist working, it is the role of somebody who has to bring different ideas to society, and I felt that one of my responsibilities – because I always believed that artists should be servants of society – is to bring these ideas and see how to reflect the problems of today, of people who cannot concentrate on anything, people taking selfies and photos of everything they see without experiencing it. I was looking to this whole thing and I said ok, in order to see the art and listen to the music we need a different approach to media and technology. For this reason, the Abramović Method is really going back to simplicity and teaching people to live themselves again.

MR: In this context you have coined and spread the concept of "re-performance", which seems to have a deep connection with theatre and its artistic way of working, as testified, for example, by «Seven Easy Pieces»[12], presented at the Guggenheim Museum of New York in 2005, and your retrospective «The Cleaner», currently hosted at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. Is there a difference between a re-performance and a theatrical performance? And do you believe that the essence of an original performance can be totally maintained through its reproduction?

MA: The answer is very simple. Take Bach, who is dead now and can never play his music again, as he simply does not exist anymore. If you have twenty-five pianists, and of these twenty-five pianists, twenty-four play really shitty Bach, there is no essence of Bach at all, and then you get one who plays like the master, who brings his own charisma, brings his own talent, and not only plays Bach, but also gives something extra, which is his own self. It is the same with performance, you can have bad interpretations or a sublime one, and when you have the sublime one it is fine! This is what Martha Graham[13] did. The audience

[11] The Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) was founded in 2010 for the preservation of performance works by herself and others. The Institute expands the accessibility of time-based art work, creates new possibilities for collaboration among thinkers of all fields, and is home to the Abramović Method, which is a public participatory event joining people in a communal experience to connect with oneself and with each other, and to engage fully in physically and mentally demanding works (see more at https://mai.art/about-mai, 2018).

[12] Marina Abramović, «Seven Easy Pieces», performance, 7 days, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2005. The event was part of the Performance Art Festival, which is led by the non-profit art organization «Performa» directed by RoseLee Goldberg. In this performance series Marina Abramović re-performed six of the most "difficult" and historically significant performances from the 1970s: Joseph Beuys's «How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare», Valie Export's «Action Pants: Genital Panic», Gina Pane's «The Conditioning: First Action of Self-Portraits(s)», Bruce Nauman's «Body Pressure», Vito Acconci's «Seed Bed», and her own performance «Lips of Thomas». For the occasion, the artist realized a new performance, entitled «Entering the Other Side», during which she was on a stage placed at the center of the Guggenheim Museum, wearing a huge blue dress and looking around earnestly in every direction.

[13] Martha Graham was an American modern dancer

would never get to know her work if it is not re-performed now. I think there is nothing different between dance and performance: they have to be revisited and they have to be re-performed, and the only problem is who is doing it. Right now in Palazzo Strozzi there will be an artist who is re-performing «The House with the Ocean View»[14], which is an extremely difficult performance. I am going there for the closing day to support this event, because the performer is going to be in the structure for twelve days, in total silence and without eating. It is very, very hard! And if you do that, you really change. It is not theatre in any way. It is real, true and a hardcore performance.

Right now, I just came back from Bangkok with my Institute, that is teaching young performance artists from Asia how to perform their own works. They were performing eight hours a day for fifteen days, which they never would have done, but we prepared them for that. They are such amazing artists, we had 72.000 visitors yesterday – that was the closing day – which is an amazing record for seeing young Asian performance artists, which has nothing to do with my work, it has just to do with the Institute. I really support performance as an important transformative tool of today's art practice.

MR: Now that you have reached this point of your artistic path, what are your expectations and plans for the future?

MA: For me the future is always so much work. Right now I am preparing work for the Royal Academy of Arts show, that is going to be in 2020, and it is a quite different work, about which I cannot talk because I am going to present it for the first time there. And then I am also going to direct and play in my opera called «Seven Deaths»[15], dedicated to Maria Callas. And a-part from this, the Institute has his own structure and people, who I sometimes supervise, and with whom I have lots of meetings to see where we could go next, because the Institute is "moveable". In short, we just go there and try to create situations. I am also working in different books: one book is with Ulay, which is based on our memories in our life together, which is coming, probably, next year, on our birthdays[16]; I just finished the book of interviews[17], which was published for Palazzo Strozzi. So, lots of work. It never stops (laughs)!

MR: You asked the legendary Bob Wilson[18] to direct for you a great theatrical performance «The Life and Death of Marina Abramović»[19],

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and choreographer. Her style, the «Graham technique», reshaped American dance and is still taught worldwide.

[14] Marina Abramović, «The House with the Ocean View», performance, 12 days, performed for the first time at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002. The artist spent twelve whole days in total silence and without eating inside a suspended structure connected to the ground by a ladder whose rungs had been replaced by sharp blades. Visitors could watch her sleeping, showering or using the toilet. This work was presented, as re-performance, from Tuesday 4 December 2018 through to Sunday 16 December 2018, during the exhibition «The Cleaner» at Palazzo Strozzi (Marina Abramović was present for the closing day).

[15] Marina Abramović will direct the production, which was originally conceived as a cinematic tribute to her lifelong hero Maria Callas. «Seven Deaths» is due to debut at the Munich Opera House in 2020, with plans for it to tour to Covent Garden in London. The project will see Abramović play Maria Callas dying in seven operas including «Madame Butterfly», who stabbed herself, and «Tosca», who jumped to her death from a parapet.

[16] Each November 30th Marina Abramović and Ulay made a special performance to mark the significance of this day, their respective birthdays.

[17] The book «Marina Abramović. Interviews 1976-2018» (Abramović LLC, New York, 2018) is published in conjunction with the exhibition «Marina Abramović: The Cleaner», Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, September 20, 2018 – January 20, 2019.

[18] Robert Wilson is an American experimental theater stage director and playwright. Since the late 1960s, Robert Wilson's productions have decisively shaped the look of theater and opera. Through his signature use of light, his investigations into the structure of a simple movement, and the classical rigor of his scenic and furniture design, Wilson has continuously articulated the force and originality of his vision.

[19] «The Life and Death of Marina Abramović», theater performance directed by Robert Wilson, premiered on

presented in 2011 in the occasion of the Manchester International Festival. With this epic mise-en-scene you want to tell the story of your life, but also of your death. For this reason I would like to conclude my interview with a question that may seem a bit "dark", but that constitutes a question that any philosopher – as I think you are – has to face: what is your relation with death?

MA: Friendly (laughs). My relation with death is friendly. I am afraid of it like everybody else, but at the same time I try to think about it, every day, so it becomes part of my life. I always say my manifesto: "My biggest dream is to die without fear, consciously and without anger". If I succeed that, I am just going through this passage, because death is something that everybody has to go through. There is no anybody, any living thing in this planet, through plants, animals or human beings, that are not going to that point. It is better to face it and to be ready than to try to avoid it and think it is never going to happen. This is the best you can do.

July 9, 2011 at the Manchester International Festival, The Lowry, Manchester, United Kingdom. At the intersection of theater, opera and visual art, Robert Wilson's reimagining of performance artist Marina Abramović's extraordinary life and work begins with her difficult childhood in former Yugoslavia, and chronicles her journey to the present day. Abramović, who plays herself as well as her imposing mother, is joined by world-renowned actor Willem Dafoe and singer Antony, performing original music and songs created for this "quasi opera".

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Eating an Onion. Notes on Marina Abramović

Andrea Mecacci

Abstract. *The Onion* is a 1995 video performance by Marina Abramović. The essay aims at analyzing some central themes of the artist's path, taking this work as reference text. First of all, by including the artist in the process of dissolution of beauty marking the art of the Twentieth century and regarding performance art as one of the outcomes of this process inaugurated by the avant-gardes. Secondly, by showing the link between the political dimension (in this particular case, the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s) and an existential reflection focused on the role of the artist and the woman in the contemporary world.

Keywords. Marina Abramović, Yugoslavia, performance art, beauty.

Apparently nothing may bond together an American university campus and a small town in eastern Bosnia. But if we could give this nothing a date, we would be given a clue and also probably a meaning. In 1995, Marina Abramović is guest for three months at the University of Arlington and she is working on a video performance. During the summer of 1995 in Srebrenica the most atrocious act of the war between Serbia and Bosnia is consumed, namely the extermination of eight thousand Bosnians by the hand of the Bosnian Serb Army. Filed under "massacre", "slaughter" or "genocide", the stain of Srebrenica, symbol of the Yugoslavian catastrophe of the Nineties, almost seems to mirror itself in the performance by the Serbian author staged in Texas in the February of the same year*: The Onion*.

The Onion is a work of art falling within the artist's ten-year spanning reflection on the Yugoslavian tragedy and on the revisiting of her own past together with *Delusional* (1994), *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995), *Balkan Baroque* (1997), *The Hero* (2001), *Count on Us* (2004), *Balkan Erotic Epic* (2005). Performances, videos, works that probably compose the most incisive portrait of the Balkan crisis and in which Abramović records at the same time the existential discomfort of the private dimension and the ultimate, final political disintegration of a people or, better said, several ones. Notwithstanding their ambiguity, ambivalence and their melodramatic tone (Pejić

[2017]: 242-251), the result of the gaze of the (voluntary) exile's eye casts on her native country – Abramović will leave Belgrade during the mid-Seventies – this decade's performances today represent a transitional phase within the artist's path and, on balance, a dialectic moment necessary to the elaboration of a collective mourning. A huge psychoanalytic setting which *The Onion*, as we will see, boosts to the highest degree. After the totally autonomous beginnings in the first half of the Seventies, after the long-termed collaboration with her partner Ulay (1976-1988), the Balkan cycle, with its sour contraposition of political and private, represents the transition to the phase, still ongoing, in which Abramović's work seems to find its own sense in the shared performance, as shown by the, somehow decisive, performance staged in 2010, *The Artist is Present*. And it is interesting, not to say crucial, to notice the change of the audience's behavior during these stages. Let just compare the aggressive and perplexed participation of the public, for example, in *Rhythm 0* (1975) and the accommodating one, even smug, at times, in *The Artist is Present* (2010). Behaviors, almost at opposites, mirroring themselves in the artist's very status: an unknown performer on her debut and a celebrated star artist of the contemporary scene. This leads us back to the main question framing the whole of performative art and that of Abramović in particular: «Which rule should the audience apply in Abramović's performance?» (Fischer-Lichte [2004]: 12).

DISSECTING BEAUTY

And yet, such long artistic story, today at times mythologized, belongs to a broader that for the performance art stays as the unavoidable landing, if not final, at least hardly surpassable. And therefore, the need for a wider perspective separating itself from the happenings directly related to performance art is mandatory. The perspective we are referring to is the history of the deconstruction of the mimetic and of its main fetishism, beauty. The story that, started by the avant-gardes, will transform art into existential and political practice, at least for a long part of the Nineteenth century, and the artistic gesture (that of representation) into performative act. From the Dadaist happenings to the performance art we attend to an uninterrupted autopsy of the Beautiful. It is a process that has found in the distinction between aesthetics and artistic beauty the last trench where to preserve, and perhaps to safeguard, the role of beauty, a role apparently not easy to dismiss. A distinction that, elaborated almost as a manifesto of Modernism by Roger Fry – «the apparent contradiction between two distinct uses of the word beauty, one for that which has sensuous charm, and one for the aesthetic approval of work of imaginative art where the objects presented to us are often of extreme ugliness» (Fry [1909]: 20) – will be resumed and updated by Arthur Danto, in his book of 2003 *The Abuse of Beauty*: «to distinguish between *aesthetic* beauty and what we might call artistic beauty. It is aesthetic beauty that is discerned through senses. Artistic beauty requires discernment and critical intelligence» (Danto [2003]: 92).

It is well known that beauty is precisely the great problem of Twentieth-century art, or as the unbearable burden of the classical tradition or the object of kitsch fetishization on the part of the bourgeoisie and later of the mass consumption. Stated the impossibility to give an exhaustive account here, we can, however, provide two programmatically extreme examples of this rejection, symbolically summarized in the image of the Parthenon. So Picasso said in 1935: «The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, Nymphs, Narcissuses are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon» (Picasso [1935]: 271). And Julian Beck, right after *Paradise Now*, could affirm in name of the Living Theatre: «The Parthenon? Its geometry? Its splendor? Beauty and philosophy are not enough» (Beck [1972]: 71). Thus, the title Abramović chose for her performance of 1975 *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* remains, apparently, surprising. The performance, executed in Copenhagen and recorded in a video, is so simple as much as incisive. Abramović

sits naked in front of the public for one hour, forcibly combing and ripping her hair, while wounding herself in the face. The whole act is accompanied by a relentlessly repeated sentence: «Art must be beautiful. Artist must be beautiful». Two levels overlap and the least explicit one is suggested just by Abramović: the evident aesthetic offence, in fact, goes hand in hand with a political dimension. A young nude woman combs her black hair: exercise of seduction and pure rituality of the female beauty. The artist herself underlines the initial sensuality of the gesture: the artist must be beautiful too. But the performance quickly turns this set of plain sexual appeal into its exact opposite. By evoking beauty *ad libitum* hence depriving the word of its sense, the hairbrush does not comb anymore, it tears the hair off, while injuring the skin. The audience, at first enmeshed and now disturbed, if not disgusted, seems to refuse the promise of beauty previously offered by that young body.

> *The piece was profoundly ironic. Yugoslavia had made me so fed up with the aesthetic presumption that art must be beautiful. Friends of my family would have paintings that matched the carpet and the furniture – I thought all this decorativeness was bullshit. When it came to art, I only cared about content: what a work meant. The whole point of Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful was to destroy that image of beauty. Because I had come to believe that art must be disturbing, art must ask questions, art must predict the future. If art is just political, it becomes like newspaper. It can be used once, and the next day it's yesterday's news. Only layers of meaning can give long life to art – that way, society takes what it needs from the work over time. (Abramović [2016]: 79-80)*

The comment Abramović gave to *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* could not have been more linear. However, there are a few things that must be underlined. The refusal of the codified and stereotyped taste, eloquently identified with that one of the socialist Yugoslavia, that is the idea of the beautiful as decorative, a window-dressing of social expendability (the furniture in bourgeoisie's houses in Belgrade, the class the artist's family belongs to). An aesthetic experience, that one of kitsch, which as a transversal grammar of the Twentieth-century taste – the well-known idea by Greenberg of kitsch as a «universal literacy» (Greenberg [1939]: 9) tying together the tastes of the American clerk, the Nazi hierarch and the Russian peasant – is circumscribed by Abramović to her own reality, almost bringing out the «melodramatic» conviction, as Bojana Pejić would say, that a universal content (what art should be, as the artist herself suggests) may only arise from one's own personal, family experience. The Yugoslavia of her youth displays the target to hit. But in order to «destroy that image of beauty», art must transcend its own journalistic dimension, that of a mere commentary of the present time. History must replace the chronicle, just like the personal experience must turn into the public, if not political, domain. And only an art capable of developing its own meanings («layers of meaning») can achieve such project which is totally inner to the Twentieth-century art: and the layers, here metaphorically evoked, are going to be exposed in a literal way by the image of a bulbous plant in layers, an onion, almost twenty years later.

But not only art must be beautiful thanks to the beauty finding a new form in the conflict and in the critical tension, and not in the gratification of pleasure: the artist too must be beautiful. And it is this perspective, centered on subjectivity, that is developed by Abramović in one of her less celebrated although perhaps most disturbing and problematic works (Novakov [2003]: 31-35), still of 1975: *Role Exchange*. Moving away from a performance hinged on physical suffering (Richards [2010]: 14), *Role Exchange* explores the nullification of one's own identity through the commodification of the self. The exchange is very simple: a Dutch prostitute (S. J.) would replace Abramović at the opening of an exhibition at the De Appel Arts Center in Amsterdam, while the artist would replace the prostitute for four hours in her window in the Red Light District: to the embarrassment of the prostitute, suddenly fell into the world of contemporary art, the artist's

observation replies as follows: «I was sitting there with everyone looking at me, violently crushing my ego down to zero» (Novakov [2003]: 32)». Extreme assumption of the equation between art and prostitution – already announced by Baudelaire in his famous motto «What is Art? Prostitution» – *Role Exchange* exposes the other dark side of the beauty in *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*. The idea of a beauty capable of being merchandised is always complementary to a codified beauty. But if in the previous performance Abramović was only seen by the public as an artist, in *Role Exchange* her identity is conveyed by the eyes of customers: to assume the role of the most socially condemned practice also means to exhibit, by contrast, the status of the contemporary artist, seller of himself. It is not known whether the still vouyeristic borders of *Art Must Be Beautiful*, were surpassed in *Role Exchange* and to what extent the equation between art and prostitution was realized. Ulay (who – hidden in a vehicle in front of the window – took pictures of Abramović to record the performance) said that the curtains were lowered a couple of times, probably alluding to real intercourses (Richards [2010]: 16), while the artist declared that only three men approached without any sexual encounter taking place (Novakov [2003]: 35).

The two performances clearly show the negative value taken by beauty in the contemporaneity: kitsch ideology or instrument of absolute commodification. And yet, at the same time, they exhibit its character of challenge and utopia. Destroying beauty, consumed and hypostatized as commodity and fetish, means to think to a new possibility, because art must be beautiful and it is in this obligation, perhaps in this contradiction, that beauty becomes a task to be achieved rather than an established value. These are questions rather than answers, as Abramović recalled while commenting *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*. This means to take a full responsibility for one's own social role, as the alienating experience of *Role Exchange* showed. We see the unavoidable overlapping of the exploration of aesthetic possibilities with the dimension of ethical conflict. A tension that can be fully traced in the words, almost a testament, that Julian Beck transcribed in Rome on November 3, 1982, three years before his death, and which can be taken as a conclusive synthesis of that great process of dissecting beauty the art of the Twentieth-century was:

> *Morality and beauty are identical. Plato, The Republic. That is why the definition of beauty is so important, we have to know what is beautiful. Then how to attain it. And how not to confuse the mask of beauty with the entity. Keats dwells on truth, and it rings a bell, but truth like beauty needs constant definition and redefinition. What we think is truth may not be truth. What we taught was true in other times and in other times, we know now is not the truth. […] The world is not flat, and Aristotle is not infallible. (Beck [1992]: 76)*

BITING AND CRYING

Yugoslavia has always been present in Abramović's work: mother, stepmother, homeland, always repudiated (in the choice of voluntary exile) and always accepted (in the exploration of its origin). It is an immense wound, as proven by the five-pointed star that the artist cuts into her belly in that which remains her most complex performance, probably the most memorable and actually the most complete manifesto of all her art (Fischer-Lichte [2004]): *Lips of Thomas* (again in the fatidic 1975). Engraving the five-pointed star of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia with a razor blade on her belly. The five-pointed star had already appeared, threatening and funerary, the year before in the performance *Rhythm 5* (the number indicates exactly those five spikes) in Belgrade, at the SKC (Student Cultural Center), where the artist set fire to the edges of the star, made with wood shavings, and then laid herself down in the empty space in the center. Only the intervention of two spectators could prevent the artist, who had lost consciousness due to lack of oxygen, from getting burned. The centrality of a star: the star at the center of the artist's body, engraved in blood, or the artist at the heart of

a star on fire. «Why a star? It was the symbol of Communism, the repressive force under which I had grown up, the thing I was trying to escape – but it was so many other things, too: a pentagram, an icon worshiped and mystified by ancient religions and cults, a shape possessing enormous symbolic power. I was trying to understand the deeper meaning of these symbols by using them in my work». (Abramović [2016]: 65). The star will have a comeback in 2004 in *Count on Us*, a final confrontation with the post-war Yugoslavia.

While in these early works Yugoslavia is a metal phantom, the razor of *Lips of Thomas*, or one made of fire, namely the flames of *Rhythm 5*, the scenario of a political and existential repression, in the works of the Nineties it turns into an immense showdown. For Abramović, the answer to the tragedy of the war of the Nineties takes on the shape of a problematic primary scene. The disintegration of Yugoslavia, which the parents, heroes of the partisan resistance, had contributed to found, is not only the definitive confrontation with her own family, but also an unsettled meditation on how art and history might intertwine defining the identity of an individual. *The Onion* is this place of collective and private unconscious, of history and subjectivity. The explicit symbolism of the star is now replaced by the less disturbing, but also less readable, image of an onion.

Drawing inspiration from a fragment of the theatrical performance of the previous year (*Delusional*), in 1995, in Texas, Abramović stages the video performance *The Onion*: «I was shot against a bright-blue-sky background, wearing bright-red lipstick and nail polish, while I ate an entire onion (just as in *Delusional*) and complained about my life. As I complained, I gazed heavenward, like the Madonna suffering. And since I was eating a raw onion, with the skin, the tears streamed down my face» (Abramović [2016]: 229). As we look at a minimal scene, a woman biting an onion, we also hear a voice off, the voice of the artist marking the litany of her own lament.

> *I am tired of changing planes so often. Waiting in the waiting rooms, bus stations, train stations, airports. I am tired of waiting for endless passport controls. Fast shopping in shopping malls. I am tired of more career decisions, museum and gallery openings, endless receptions, standing around with a glass of plain water, pretending that I am interested in conversation. I am tired of my migraine attacks, lonely hotel rooms, room service, long-distance telephone calls, bad TV movies. I am tired of always falling in love with the wrong man. I am tired of being ashamed of my nose being too big, of my ass being too large, ashamed of the war in Yugoslavia. I want to go away, somewhere so far that I am unreachable by fax or telephone. I want to get old, really old so that nothing matters any more. I want to understand and see clearly what is behind all this. I want to not want anymore. (Abramović [2016]: 229).*

In her autobiography *Walk Through Walls* Abramović has strongly claimed the importance of this work. As an existential balance of a mid-life crisis and, in its own way, a work summarizing her own path, *The Onion* shows the inseparability of what we see, the act of eating an onion, and what we listen to, the scanning of a lament. If the star was an obvious (perhaps too much?) symbol, why to opt for an onion? Obviously eating an onion is an unequivocal physical gesture, experienced by everyone, in which taste is quickly transformed into disgust, a disgust that is easily shared by the viewer. A strategy, therefore, perfectly internal to the logic of performance art: to what extent can one bear the disgust? But this physical and bodily perspective immediately dissolves, to an attentive eye, into the interpretative effort. The layers of the onion seem to allude to the layers of life, to those socio-cultural masks (Richards [2010]: 29) with which the ego conceals its own identity and which, in the lament, express themselves in the hypocrisy of the art world, in the never-ending journeys, in a worldly exposition that is barely capable of masking the voids of existence. The onion does not have a bulb, it have neither a core nor a centre: layer by layer we arrive to the nothing. As *Role Exchange* questioned Abramović's role as a woman and an artist, *The Onion* now digs into the fragile, if not artificial, construction itself of the personal identity and, more broadly, the

whole Yugoslavian national identity. Each layer of the onion could also recall the several nationalities composing that Yugoslavia which at this time, in 1995, had discovered the absence of a bulb, an absence that Abramović made break in the most unexpected and assertive way by the text: «ashamed of the war in Yugoslavia».

The unavoidable weeping caused by the onion, the physical cry, turns into the weeping of a mourning, the spiritual cry. In Abramović's words also beauty dies, that beauty evoked as the duty of an artist twenty years earlier and which is also that one of a woman who now sees herself grown old and fading («ashamed of my nose being too big, of my ass being too large»). The onion, fruit of the ground (Yugoslavia), can only produce tears for a land that is dying. A food that does not produce life, but evokes loss, a bulimia that gets the nothing.

Although they are distant and alien to Abramović's path, we might recall two works that significantly link death to the act of nourishment or to food. In 1962 the pop artist Robert Indiana composes the diptych *EAT/DIE*. An obvious accusation to the ideology of consumption, if we remain in the context of Pop Art, but which takes on different contours if we broaden our gaze to the artist's biography: the binomial eat/die is in fact a private cipher expressing Indiana's childhood traumas. Maybe it was because of «the outlays of food connected with family funerals», maybe for the fact that «*eat* was the last word spoken by Carmen [Indiana's mother] on her deathbed» or also because in family portraits the artist's mother is always dressed in red, the color of *EAT*, while the father in dark gray, the other part of the diptych, *DIE*, is black (Ryan [2000]: 182). By the end of 1963, Indiana was a protagonist in *Eat*, a short film by Warhol, a twenty-minute shot featuring Indiana eating a mushroom. Just like in *The Onion*, the subject is filmed while he is in the act of eating. If the onion directly evokes disgust, but also the stratification of existence, in Warhol's *Eat* the mushroom, a tasty but also poisonous food, recalls two unexpected dimensions: the collective fear of the nuclear mushroom, extensively widespread in America during the early Sixties, and the childhood of Indiana who loved to pick mushrooms to give to her mother who loved them very much. The woman, regardless of their potential danger, used to simply cook and eat them. A habit that would be echoed in her last sentence on the verge of death: «Did you have something to *eat*?» (Ryan [2000]: 187).

Complementary to *EAT/DIE* by Indiana there was another work belonging to Pop Art, *Tunafish Disaster* by Warhol of 1963. Part of the more appraised Warhol cycle, *Death and Disaster*, the painting resumes the pictures of an article appeared on "Newsweek" on April 1st 1963. Two housewives from Detroit had died by poisoning after having eaten rotten tuna. The photos of the two anonymous women (Mrs. McCarthy and Mrs. Brown), and of the poisoned can, spookily summarize the other side of that food industrialization exposed in the 1962 cycle, *Campbell's Soup Cans*. If Abramović's onion discovers its own nothingness layer by layer, if the individual or national identity is just an unstable and fictitious construction, Warhol's little can reveals the void behind the packaging. Yet another mystifying mask. Even food has its own deadline, nothing escapes the law of time. Everything is perishable, human beings and industrial products.

BEAUTY AND WAR

An emblem of death and loss, Abramović's onion possibly reveals an even deeper penitence. It takes us back to the decisive moments of Western culture. It is the oblique reference to the forbidden fruit of a never known Eden, but also the opaque reference to the beginning of all wars, of which the Yugoslavian one, in 1995, is but a more recent variant. It is the reference to the golden apple of discord, the moment when Eris threw the fruit at the wedding banquet of Pelus and Thetis, so opening the dispute on who was the most beautiful goddess. We know from the myth that when Paris chose beauty – Aphrodite promised, if she had been chosen, to give Paris the most

beautiful woman in the world – he also chose, unknowingly, the war, the Troy war, that is, the future destruction of his homeland. The beauty that Abramović invoked in 1975, one capable of unhinging the established order of social reality, becoming a faithful adept of the teaching of the Twentieth-century avant-gardes, also recalls another work leading from history to myth: *Balkan Erotic Epic* of 2005. Eroticism as an archaic ritual force. A video installation that shows Balkan peasants engaged in rituals for the fertility of the land. Men copulating with the soil and women exposing their vaginas to the rain, an obvious symbol of the seminal fluid. A Dionysian dimension that brings us back to the heart of a 1931 short novel by Ivo Andrić, *Anika's Times*, in which the beauty of a woman shocks Višegrad, a small town, a *kasaba*, in Bosnia, seducing the entire male population. Only the killing of Anika, a female Dionysus, will restore order.

> *Anika's death changed Višegrad, as it had to. The speed with which everything was restored to the old rhythm was indeed almost hard to believe. No one was curious to know where the woman had come from, why she had lived, and what she had wanted. She was harmful and dangerous, and now she was dead, buried, and forgotten. The kasaba, which had been momentarily deranged, could again sleep peacefully, walk freely, and breathe regularly. If a similar blight should occur – and it will at some point – the kasaba will again resist it, succumb to it, struggle against it, break it, bury it, and forget it. (Andrić [1931]: 439).*

The repression of beauty is always the safest way to reaffirm power as Andrić seems to suggest and as Abramović would have stated decades later in her exploration of a beauty beyond any restriction of which the five-pointed star is the never dismissed synthesis. But all this has a price. And if identifying Anika with Abramović can be excessive and somewhat rushing, falling into the easy Western cliché of the wild and sensual, if not sexualized, Balkan woman (Pejić [2017]) – after all, is not the panther woman of *Cat People* (1942) the Serbian Irina Drubovna? – or subtly mythologizing, as always happens when a person is compared to a literary character, *The Onion* still shows a truth of its own. Does not the act of eating an onion in the midst of a war reintroduce the idea expressed by Eliot that true poetry, and therefore art as a whole, lights up only by the moment in which the utmost individual touches the universal? In 1942 Eliot was asked to write a poem to be included in a collection remarkably entitled *London Calling*. These are the last two stanzas of that poem written under commission, "A Note on War Poetry".

> *War is not a life: it is a situation;*
> *One which may neither be ignored nor accepted,*
> *A problem to be met with ambush and stratagem,*
> *Enveloped or scattered.*
>
> *The enduring is not a substitute for the transient,*
> *Neither one for the other. But the abstract conception*
> *Of private experience at its greatest intensity*
> *Becoming universal, which we call "poetry",*
> *May be affirmed in verse. (Eliot [1942]: 215-216).*

It is probably with these words that we may think, as if they would belong to the same story, and they do indeed, an American university campus where a woman bites an onion and cries while lamenting, and a small town in oriental Bosnia where eight thousand people get murdered.

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Aesthetics, theatricality and performativity: an introduction

Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis

Abstract. Contemporary theatre allows for a script, a scenario, that is exclusively visual. If action is no longer supported by dialogue, this does not mean that it will disappear. It will undoubtedly return in gestural exchange and in a temporality that is expansive or contracted and condensed. Action becomes an opaque enigma. The interpretation of performative action is a journey that the spectator undertakes in a foreign country, where we are forced to learn a new language. It remains to be seen what the reaction and the work of interpretation of the spectator would be when confronted with an action knowingly deprived of any meaningful anchor or referent. Would it merely be confusion? Confusion and an interpretative effort that often comes to an end by a harsh defeat: the aesthetic of the performative represents a moment of rupture in the process of rethinking of the traditional relationship between artist and spectator.

Keywords. Performance, Theatricality, Marina Abramović; Aesthetics.

PERFORMANCE AND THEATRICALITY

On October 24, 1975, a curious and memorable event took place at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck. The Yugoslavian artist Marina Abramović presented her performance Lips of Thomas. The artist began her performance by shedding all her clothes. She then went to the back wall of the gallery, pinned up a photograph of a man with long hair who resembled the artist, and framed it by drawing a five-pointed star around it. She turned to a table with a white table-cloth close to the wall, on which there was a bottle of red wine, a jar containing two pounds of honey, a crystal glass, a silver spoon, and a whip. She settled into the chair and reached for the jar of honey and the silver spoon. Slowly, she ate the honey until she had emptied the jar. She poured red wine into the crystal glass and drank it in long draughts. She continued until bottle and glass were empty. Then she broke the glass with her right hand, which began to bleed. Abramović got up and walked over to the wall where the photograph was fastened. Standing at the wall and facing the audience, she cut a five-pointed star into the skin of her abdomen with a razor blade. Blood welled out of the cuts. Then she took the whip, kneeled down beneath the

photograph with her back to the audience, and began to flagellate her back severely, raising bloody welts. Afterwards, she lay down on a cross made of blocks of ice, her arms spread out to her sides. An electric radiator hung from the ceiling, facing her stomach. Its heat triggered further bleeding from the starshaped cuts. Abramović lay motionless on the ice – she obviously intended to endure her self-torture until the radiator had melted all the ice. After she had held out for 30 minutes without any sign of abandoning the torture, some members of the audience could no longer bear her ordeal. They hastened to the blocks of ice, took hold of the artist, and covered her with coats. Then they removed her from the cross and carried her away. Thus, they put an end to the performance. The performance had taken two hours. In the course of these two hours, the artist and the spectators created an event that was neither envisioned nor legitimized by the traditions and standards of the visual or performing arts. The artist was not producing an artefact through her actions; she was not creating a fixed and transferable work of art that could exist independently of her. Yet her actions were also not representational. She was not performing as an actress, playing the part of a dramatic character that eats too much honey, drinks wine excessively, and inflicts a variety of injuries on her own body. Rather, Abramović was actually harming herself, abusing her body with a determined disregard for its limits (Fischer-Lichte [2004]: 11-12).

It is with this paragraph that Erika Fischer-Lichte opens her book *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*. What interests me the most about her allencompassing study is the fact that, as is evident in the passage above, the aesthetic of the performative (of "body art", in the particular case cited) represents a moment of rupture in the process of rethinking of the traditional relationship between artist and spectator. Yet the challenging shift in the connection of such a closely linked pair does not equally upset other traditional elements of theatre: the role of acting, the mandatory and painstaking planning of each and every action on stage, and the ineliminable component of the proper *mise-en-scène* itself.

These final three elements, which make theatre what it is, destabilise any kind of clearcut distinction between the performative and the theatrical. Furthermore, the possibility of the repetition or even of the replication of a performance poses the problem of the performance's double identity: namely, as both in the "here and now" and as "replicable", bringing into play not only its indissoluble link with theatricality but also its foundations as a work of art. As, with the benefit of hindsight, we now know well, a performance can be pinned down and reproduced, perhaps even more faithfully than a director-led theatrical production.

In 1974, at Studio Morra in Naples, *Rhythm 0* by Marina Abramović was being staged: it is a performance in which the dynamics of passive aggression are explored. Marina Abramović stands near a table and offers herself passively to the spectators who can do whatever they wish on her body, with a range of objects. A text on a wall reads as follows: «There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired. I am the object». The range of objects includes: a gun, a bullet, a saw, an axe, a fork, a comb, a whip, a lipstick, a bottle of perfume, paint, knives, matches, a feather, a rose, a candle, water, chains, nails, needles, scissors, honey, grapes, chalk, sulphur, olive oil. After six hours, at the end of the performance, the clothes were torn. Her body was cut, painted, cleaned, decorated, crowned with thorns and made to feel the pressure of a loaded gun (Warr et al. [2000]: 125). A stripped, touched, possessed body. The statue came down from the pedestal, became flesh and allowed itself to be touched, embraced, undressed, tied, struck. Pygmalion has attained his purpose.

In the Sixties/Seventies, the use of the body was a practice, an obligatory step to the point that it became "academy", it became a school and was no longer provocation (provided that the provocation was the end).

The overture to the excess, to the disobedience of the body, to the codes imposed by both the artistic conduct and performance and by society, may be an end in itself and not require being "perceived":

Being, for the actionist artists[1]*, is not so much «being perceived» as in Berkeley's view, as being themselves absolutely, even against themselves, pushing themselves, when necessary, beyond their own strengths and even in the context of performances in which the body could suffer the consequences of the gesture to which it lends itself and pay a high price for the risks taken to test its limits. (Ardenne [2001]: 204)*

However, the problem of exposure, display, exhibition, turns out to be, on the one hand, a false problem when this art is nonetheless consumed and, as in the case of *Rhythm 0*, also acted. An action by the spectator who is a consubstantial part of the performance.

Yet, what happens when the performance is no longer enjoyed in the throbbing excitement of the reality of the performance, but in the filmic or photographic re-presentation? If what happened is today viewed as "history", the issue immediately stands out as paradoxical: it means to become now adapted to a historical reality that has now become museum. And the issue of the statute of images, photographs, 16 mm films, videos – that have now become what they should not have become, relics of a body once active and now subject to repetition and to the subjection of the eye, to the standardization of the structures of circulation – it's a pressing question.

One of *Body Art*'s slogans was that of butchered meat just to recognize itself in the living and palpitating flesh, in the flesh that suffers. Performance art has had the opportunity to bring out the body from the picture, thus restoring it to its carnal, passionate, throbbing, erotic, painful, excrementitious existence. What is left of all this? A standardized code, a reproducibility that cancels the here and now. So, again: performance.

My task might now be accomplished: what is "performative" in the moment in which the concept of theatricality comes into play? Is it in the moment in which the performance could be categorised as an artistic object? I say that my task *might* be accomplished because the resolving of these kinds of general problems is rarely accomplished. But, like most problems, this one has a story and an ineliminable theoretical and aesthetic complexity.

THE BODY AS PANTOMIMIC EXPRESSION

For a long time aesthetic reflection, when it ventured onto the slippery terrain of action as corporeal practice, stirred up a series of interdependent questions such as those concerning sensibility or emotion, while more indirectly addressing those which take root in the domain of action, such as movement or correlated expressive dynamisms. The relations between body and action should instead be thought of by considering action in terms of its communicative value, which means the articulation of possible movements around the necessary constraint that is the body's limit. The expressive component thus brings action into play, which takes the form of education, technique, praxis, but also creativity, capable of transforming the body of the performer in canvas, paintbrush and the artist's hand all at once.

There is a margin in performative action between the precision of the gesture and the imaginative elaboration of expressive content into action. The more this margin narrows, the more the success of the performance will become evident to the artist. In other words, the more an action becomes an artistically expressive form, the more the gesture becomes complete and meaningful.

The body of the performer in action will give rise to numerous elements that have no purpose at all, automatic responses or movements that are simply functional in terms of posture rather than an expressive objective. On the other hand, a kinetic activity that is completely free is obviously also possible, but always within the limits of expressive potentiality: while it may exert a very powerful effect on the scene when it becomes the vehicle for emotion or of sentimental urgency, it can also overcome any expressive limit and turn into a kind of schizophrenic solipsism.

The relationship between action, space, and time is obviously very close. The body of an actor

[1] The reference is made to Viennese Actionism.

traces expressive figurations in which gesture can become meaning. Where to situate the action and how long it should last are elements essential to any interpretation that does not overlook the body. As such, one can also speak of the correlation between action and form, or rather of form as body in action. The performers, acting, detach themselves from the real world, entering into an "as if" world in which they have a monitored freedom; monitored by their own expressive potentiality or capacity.

The use of gestural language in theatre is the use of a language that has its own rules, and as such the body of the actor becomes the vehicle of another language. Diderot, whom Fischer-Lichte cites with regards to her argument, knew this well. The gestures and pantomimes that the actor portrays onstage in order to captivatingly represent pathetic images – in accordance with the Enlightenment style, for example – are inexpressible through oratory eloquence alone, or the energetic force of spoken language. The worth of gestural language resides in expressivity, in immediacy, and thus also in its specificity and untranslatability. The actorial gesture should be understood in the light of its peculiarities, of its essential structural characteristics, which render it a "spatialized feeling".

Theatrical language is physical, and breaks free from the absolute dominion of the word. The element of pantomime is the strength of theatrical art. The physical and temporal transformation of the text through performance, the representation of the human through the human being itself, the supremacy of the body in relation to the word – which stands by its side, amplifies it, but never fully substitutes it – renders performance a concrete action. This is the lesson of the Eighteenth century, in which the art of gesture is exalted as a way of "painting in space" and when body language is rediscovered. This will be the starting point for establishing an idea of expressivity, which in its development and in its meaning, is directly influenced by pantomime. It is a meaning which, in the silence of the word, or even in contrast with words, is formed through the signification of posture, gait, the face and the gaze (Barnett [1987]).

The dramatic and theatrical "I" is overloaded by the presence of a "here and now" that is very closely tied to the personality of the actors, their characteristics and potentialities. Diderot is well aware of this when he analyses the performance of the great actor Garrick, a prominent performer of Elizabethan and particularly Shakespearean drama. Diderot commented that his performance was worth the trip to England, just as the Roman ruins are worth the trip to Italy[2].

One day, Garrick made a son of a simple cushion: he stroked it, kissed it, and at the end pretended that it had escaped his grasp; the cushion fell out of a pretend window. The audience fell into such a confusion that many left the show. The pain of a father or of a son has a gestural quality that surpasses any convention, any technique of acting. It is the language of a pathos that is valid in every era, and anywhere. It is the language of nature. It is the language of the "man of genius" who creates the rule and gives it to art.

Another day, Garrick sticks his head through the shutters of a door and, in the space of four or five seconds, changes his expression from «insane joy to moderate joy, from this to calm, from calm to surprise, from surprise to awe, from awe to sadness, from sadness to dejection, from dejection to fear, from fear to horror, from horror to despair, and from this last to return to the first» (Diderot [1830]: 26). Here the lexicon of emotions creates an autonomous expressive space that is full of meaning, beyond any context. Garrick is communicating: this is the work in itself. It is a display of actorial virtuosity. It is, to follow Lessing, a kind of "transitory painting".

SUBJECT AND OBJECT

As Simmel points out, the actor should not «imitate» the signs of passion, but «express» them.

[2] Garrick famously undertook a trip to Paris, first in 1751 and then again between 1764 and 1765. He was admired by the French for the work of cultural mediation that he was able to carry out between Shakespeare the "barbarian" and refined French culture.

The body of the actor is the vehicle of a truth that follows, and sometimes even contradicts, that of the verb. It is a truth that sometimes disregards the word, or doesn't need it at all. The performer embodies an art that is different to any other. It detaches itself from life in order to return to it.

> *In examining the complete error of the idea that the actor "realizes" the literary creation, whereas in fact he exercises with regard to this creation a special and unique art that stays as far from reality as the literary work itself – we grasp right away why the good imitator is not a good actor, that the talent of imitating people has nothing to do with the actor's artistic and creative gift. Because the imitator's object is reality, his goal is to be taken for reality. The artistic actor, however, is no more the imitator of the real world than is the portrait painter, but rather the creator of a new world, one that certainly is related to the phenomenon of reality because both are nourished by the stock of the contents available to all beings; only because reality is the earliest form in which we encounter these contents, the first possibility of knowing them – that gives rise to the illusion that reality as such is the object of art. Finally the most subtle seduction, that of detaining the actor's art in the sphere of reality, lies in the fact that experienced reality, into which the actor descends as his material, is essentially an inner reality. The writer's words require a reconstruction from psychological experience; it appears as the definitive task of the actor to make the words and events written in advance comprehensible to us as spiritually necessary, his art is applied or practical psychology. To set before our eyes a person's soul with its inner determination and its reaction to fate, its passions and its upsets, convincingly and understandably – that exhaustively describes the actor's task. (Simmel [1912]: 3)*

The actor is the evident example, the living proof of the existence of a unity in principle between subject and object. In actorial aesthetics, man is both raw material and instrument; a means to an end. In action, the actor revives the content of his art as if it were life, simultaneously exceeding the contingent reality. «Let us grasp the actor's art as a wholly primary artistic energy of the human soul, such that it assimilates both the writer's art and reality to its processes of living instead of assembling itself from them, so now its meaning also flows into the great current of the modern understanding of the world» (Simmel [1912]: 5).

The actor is thus essentially action, a scenic and therefore physical element. But where is his essence? Does it reside in the body or in the soul? These are certainly Diderotian paradoxes, but, whether one tends towards one or the other, they give life to ways of thinking, interpreting, understanding, and creating performative art.

How can one forget, then, Mejercol'd, for whom basing theatre on psychology is tantamount to depriving it of foundations? The body is the most important of all: its action is like that of a puppet, such that the same movement can be played and replayed without forgetting the unifying force that is the centre of gravity, from which the very same movement draws its impetus. This is the foundation of theatrical biomechanics: it is the study of a kinetic system mediated by the study of the movement of Italian actors at the time of the *commedia dell'arte*. These are the very same actors whom Diderot admired greatly because of their closeness to pantomimic interpretation. An actor in the style of Mejerchol'd practises using the exact sciences that develop and train the intellect, as well as sport or biomechanics. In the same way as one can detect in the gestures of a skilled workman the absence of superfluous movements, an evident element of rhythm, the awareness of their own centre of gravity and a form of "resistance", so the actor and the dancer display the same features, albeit applied to expressive art.

Later, with Grotowski, the culture of the body surpasses even the limits of theatre: the profound significance of a ritual is found in the physical action of the actor, in their gesture. Through an inductive technique, the actors can overcome any barrier, giving themselves up within an ascetic theatre where actor and audience are all that remain. This paradox leads Grotowski's experience out of the context of the theatre, searching for an alternative that focuses on a more human concept, that is the intermediate dimension between the soul and the body.

Grotowski seems closer to Aristotle, for whom essence was that of the body and not in the body, and could articulate itself only through a deed. In that sense – and that seems to be the conclusion of several threads of thought in connection with Fischer-Lichte's book – it is not the embodiment of the mind/soul/consciousness that the spectator sees, but rather he or she witnesses the being itself – he or she is no longer the subject relating to an object, since the object-body vanishes in transparency. This shift of perspective from one that maintains aesthetics distance to one that doesn't marks the transformation from spectating to co-being, or to being-towards, and ultimately changes the meaning of theatrical experience. The key in this change is the vanishing of traditional spectatorship, or the death of the spectator followed by the birth of the witness. (Salata [2013]: 50)

If, as Simmel highlights, other arts address one sense at a time, thus opposing the reality of things that "effectively exist", then performative practice calls upon a multiplicity of "real or possible impressions" that only the body in action can solicit. I could beat the surface of a painting like a drum, but its purpose remains to be viewed. The active and sensible reality of the performer does not produce a work of art that exists apart from him. Rather, his action is his essence. Yet the work is performative action, and the action is art, which can even be pinned down. Nevertheless, and this is also a fact, the specificity of theatrical and performative art is created, and each time anew, through the meeting between the actors and the audience in the specific space and time of the show.

AN OPAQUE GESTURE

Contemporary theatre allows for a script, a scenario, that is exclusively visual. If action is no longer supported by dialogue, this does not mean that it will disappear. It will undoubtedly return in gestural exchange and in a temporality that is expansive and dilated, or contracted and condensed, and in the "actions of detail". We know well that with Tadeusz Kantor or Pina Bausch (to name but a few examples), gesture lost its transparency. Action itself became tension and an opaque enigma. It does not indicate, it possibly shows. Sometimes it evokes only an emotional state. The interpretation of performative action is, as Emma Dante maintains, a journey that the spectator undertakes in a foreign country, where they are forced to learn a new language. And it is from this anti-mimeticism that the dimension of the uncanny dream is born: "uncanny" because it is understood perceptively, it is familiar yet strange, out of place, out of measure, out of time. It is exempted, like a dream, from the proof of reality.

Obviously, actorial action does not only entail the creation of a gesture, but the creation of a gesture we must "believe" in. It is a double and unavoidable movement. No performer can not "believe" in their own action. Here I mean "believing" in the sense of attributing a meaning or a non-meaning to a gesture, and that such a choice should be a conscious one for the performer. It remains to be seen what the reaction and the work of interpretation of the spectator would be when confronted with an action knowingly deprived of any meaningful anchor or referent. Would it merely be confusion? Certainly not. Confusion and an interpretative effort that comes to an end only by a harsh defeat. There is no story to tell, there are no narrative relationships, everything disappears in the face of the staging that represents only the extremization of an event in a single continuous display.

If we think of the performances offered by the *Compagnia Pippo del Bono* or by the *Societas Raffaello Sanzio* at the *Teatro della Valdoca*; if we consider Jan Fabre, or Rodrigo Garcia; or we watch, on a different note, Marco Paolini's narrative theatre or the vast gamut of 'experimental theatre' (here it is worth mentioning Leo de Berardinis, Remondi e Caporossi, the *Compagnia Gaia Scienza*, *Fura dels Baus*, and *Fortebraccio Teatro*), a link between such diverse experiences can be found in the possibility of matching them with concepts of limit and threshold. Interpreters and spectators are faced with a limit that can be dangerous to cross and at the same time they open a thresh-

old, a space that determines a change or a series of alterations on an emotional and physiological level. It is true that in this line of study – in which we can also include paths traced, in the history of theatre, from Tadeusz Kantor to Bob Wilson, from Shaubune in Berlin (Botho Strauss/Peter Stein) to the OntologicalHysteric Theatre (Richard Foreman), from Odin Teatret (Eugenio Barba) to Peter Brook, and to Ejmuntas Nekrosius – the spectator is often called to an activity that is more perceptive than interpretative.

SYMBOLS

For instance, attempts to systematize and to provide a symbolic interpretation often fail spectacularly. Interesting evidence that the meanings of performances often go well beyond any preexisting symbology can be found in a statement given by Marina Abramović during an interview. It is the body that speaks, the gesture. The five-pointed star Marina Abramović draws on her belly during *Lips of Thomas* for instance, is directly connected to the flag of Yugoslavia. The symbology deployed is often much more straightforward than one may think. On the contrary, the suffering body prompts our astonishment and puzzlement.

> *I don't like religions at all. Religion for me is very close to an institution and I don't like what institutions stand for. I want to divide religion and spirituality. Religion I don't like, spirituality – yes. When I was born, my parents were busy making their Communist careers, so I was raised by my grandmother until I was six. And my grandmother was deeply religious, I spent all the time in the Orthodox church. The priest was always in our house. I remember all those rituals with candles. I'm interested in everything to do with aestheticism, high spirituality experiences and ecstasy. In performance, when you push your limit to a certain point and overcome the pain, you reach a state of ecstasy, which is very similar to religious and spiritual ecstasy. All of those pure saints had that aspect. There's a deprivation of food, the solitude, the silence, all the techniques I'm using. For the MoMA show, I stop talking for three months. I cut everything out of my life. No computers, no emails, no telephones. Everything is very minimal. When you cut off all that, then you really concentrate on yourself. Then your inner life becomes really alive. This is the way. When you purify yourself, you can create a charismatic space around you, which is invisible, but you can feel it, the public can feel it. The public is like a dog. They feel insecurity, they feel everything. When you're there 100%. The only thing I'm concerned about is to be in that state. The moment I'm in that state, everything's going to be fine. To reach that state is the most important goal for me. (Mogutin [2010])*

To sum up, looking to the spectator is still problematic. It is for this reason that Fischer-Lichter places the "science" of theatre and its tradition at the centre of her treatise. It is an aesthetic of theatre that cannot but be reviewed, revisited, and reformulated in the moment in which theatre becomes pure action, and the sole presence of a body in the here and now. In the moment in which the performance becomes an awakening for the spectator, not only in terms of empathy but also in terms of ethics. The men and women who carry away Abramović's body in the performance described at the beginning of my speech, are compelled into action by an awakened morality that forces them to enter into the performance and thus become an unavoidable part of it. Is this enough to eliminate the fourth wall? I don't know. But what is certain is that the problem is open.

THE RETURN TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: A CONCLUSION

To conclude, we must develop an aesthetics of the performative that always takes into account both its past and the foundations of its theorizing. The return to the Eighteenth century is then far from unwarranted. Fischer-Lichte herself closes her book by returning to the century of the Enlightenment, when the aesthetics of the performative makes it possible to experience a restoration to the world of the enchanting, especially by highlighting self-referentiality and the abandonment of all claims to understanding.

Even if the aesthetics of the performative enables us to experience the re-enchantment of the world through emphasizing self-referentiality and relinquishing our efforts to only think rationally, it should not be understood as a counter-Enlightenment tendency. Instead, the aesthetics of the performative marks the limits of the Enlightenment by undermining Enlightenment reliance on binary oppositions to describe the world, and by enabling people to appear as embodied minds. Thus, the aesthetics of the performative reveals itself as a "new" Enlightenment. It does not call upon all human beings to govern over nature – neither their own nor that surrounding them – but instead encourages them to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world. This relationship is not determined by an "either/or" situation but by an "as well as". The re-enchantment of the world is inclusive rather than exclusive; it asks everyone to act in life as in performance. (Fischer-Lichte [2004]: 336)

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Doubt and Indifference: Threshold Conditions within the Work of Art

Andrew Benjamin

Abstract. The project of this paper is part of a larger attempt to develop a philosophy of art. Integral to that project is the distinction between aesthetics and a philosophy of art. It is always possible to consider affect as an end in itself if what is at stake involves a series of psychological claims. Equally, it is possible to engage with such claims philosophically. However, there is no clear connection between either possibility and a philosophy of art. In the latter the presentation of affect is always located within images. Images are produced by the work of materials. Images have to be understood in terms of that production. They have a material presence. If there is a failure to insist on the complex materiality of art's work as comprising a locus of philosophical inquiry, then any subsequent theory of the image is unable to contribute to the development of a genuine philosophy of art. Moreover, within the history of art images are informed form. The informing of form has two elements. Form is informed firstly by the history in which those images are located, and secondly by their capacity to be reworked. The latter can be understood as a futural coming-into-relation and thus the possibility that images and the elements from which they are comprised are able to have an afterlife. The afterlife is forms' capacity to continue to be informed. It is this latter possibility which necessitates that hermeneutic concerns supplant aesthetic ones in the creation of a philosophy of art.

Keywords. Doubt, Indifference, Gesture, Threshold, Deposition, Rosso Fiorentino.

The presence of doubt, uncertainty and indifference, at least at the beginning, cannot be differentiated from the realm of feeling. At the outset, therefore, they are aesthetic. Descartes for whom doubt provided the possibility of a radically new beginning – another point of departure for philosophy, this time one grounded in certainty – had to start with a form of awareness inextricably tied up with doubt. The affective has priority insofar as it yields an opening. There is an accompanying form of perception. And thus, an awareness, on Descartes part, that he had been deceived. The initial principles on which he had based his earlier beliefs were at best uncertain. He had taken «the false for the true (*falsa pro veris*)» (Adam, Tannery [1985]: VII, 17). This perception and its initial connection to doubt opens the way, for Descartes, to a rethinking of the self. Within it the passage from doubt leads to the centrality of the subject and with that centrality to the primacy of thinking. Within

the movement of the *Meditations* the possibility of certainty is then linked to the redescription and thus the reconceptualization of the subject as that which thinks and thus to a generalised conception of the subject as *res cogitans*. Nonetheless, the point of origination has a different quality. Doubt and an accompanying form of awareness that is bound to the realm of feeling, and thus to the aesthetic, once taken together, identify then delimit the point from which the philosophical can start. Note Descartes language. In the French translation of which he approved he wrote «*je me suis aperçu*», while the original Latin, which is of course the opening word of the *Meditations* proper is *Animadverti*. Descartes writes in an autobiographical mode; he «noticed». What he «noticed» was the presence of the doubtful or the uncertain. (Though it should be added that the registration of this uncertainty was a feeling, which is inextricably bound up with the presence of doubt). There is a founding relation between feeling and doubt. Even though that relation does not itself lead to certainty and the overcoming of doubt – both of which will always have to be methodological – nonetheless it prepared the way for that overcoming. What is important in the context of the *Meditations* is that "noticing" or "remarking" are modes of perception. They lead to a situation in which doubt will have been overcome. Nonetheless, the key point is that as modes of perception they have to be radically distinct from the mode of perception that will be named by Descartes, by the time he reaches *Meditation 4*, as «clear and distinct perception (*claram & distinctam perceptionem*)» (Adam, Tannery [1985]: VII, 61). Perception has two different qualities therefore. In the move from one to the other a threshold will have been crossed. The significance of doubt in this context is that doubt does not just occur at a threshold. More is at stake, doubt as originating in a feeling also works to constitute the threshold. Taken together, feeling and doubt establish what might be described as the fleeting primacy of the aesthetic.

In sum, both doubt and the feelings and perceptions that occasion doubt as well as mark its presence, occur within the domain of the felt and thus the realm of experience. At the beginning therefore doubt has an inherently aesthetic dimension. And yet, as has been suggested, what is constructed is a threshold condition. And it is precisely because doubt occurs at the threshold, while simultaneously constituting and sustaining the threshold, that doubt cannot remain tied to a purely aesthetic occurrence. Even if the aesthetic were repositioned such that its equation with a form of cognition would allow for claims concerning universality (no matter how putative such claims may in the end actually be) the aesthetic always opens beyond itself. This is the point at which it is possible to approach the role of the aesthetic within a philosophy of art. Such an approach has a certain exigency. It emerges once it can be argued that if there were to be a genuine philosophy of art for which one possible locus of engagement would be the work of figures within art's work, (knowing, of course, that the philosophy of art has greater extension, hence the figure is simply one domain of philosophical inquiry amongst others), then the presence of a threshold condition would be central because bodies, thus figuration which is the movement of bodies, have an already present affective dimension that occurs at the threshold. The occurrence works equally to sustain the threshold. The threshold condition however is not the simple coincidence of the aesthetic and the ideational (or the conceptual). Rather, it is the point at which there is the demand that they be thought together. If this were taken as the point of departure for a philosophy of art, then it follows that such an undertaking would be dependent both on the recognition that the aesthetic constitutes a threshold condition and that thinking art occurs with the necessity of that which occurs at the threshold; i.e. thinking is conditioned by the relation between the aesthetic and the ideational. A philosophy of art therefore cannot remain on one side of a threshold. The threshold as constituted by the aesthetic is an opening rather than a limitation. The initial difficulties inherent in such an undertaking are part of what is of concern here.

There are two positions that arise in this context. Both demand consideration. As a beginning, it might be thought, in opposition to the possibility of the incorporation of the threshold within the move from the aesthetic to the philosophy of art, that each domain could have been able to function as an end in itself. There would then be two positions to be considered. The first would involve the claim that the affective would have been overcome completely. From within this purview the affective would then be understood as having yielded completely to thought, a positioning which would lead to the effacing of the affective in the name of the conceptual. As a result, what this would entail is that the threshold, rather than being thought, is in fact effaced by the effective removal of an aesthetic dimension in the name of the conceptual. The second is the converse. A position that involves holding to the affective – thought, for example, in the realm of figuration in terms of the singularity and purity of gesture – as the presence of pure self-expression[1]. As though what was located on the other side of the threshold was pure affect. Then there would be a commitment to the expression of the affective as though it could be extracted from the possibility of its traversal. In the first instance the aesthetic remains unthought. In the second, there is the refusal to allow for the possibility that the aesthetic, understood as incorporating the movement of the body, thus the body as expressive, hence the presence of a certain conception of gesture, is itself already the site of the ideational. In regard to the latter formulation what is excluded is the possibility that form is always already informed; in other words, the claim is that form cannot be held apart from either the already present registration of the conceptual or the ideational, or their potential registration. The primacy of the aesthetic therefore is premised on the exclusion of the possibility of the already present informing of form. (The broader consequence is, of course, that the aesthetic as having priority is a produced state premised on a founding exclusion). Both positions, present as a type of either/or, are structured by exclusions and modes of delimitation.

The exclusions, which are limitations, within both of these positions have to be noted. As with all limitations, and this despite an intention to circumvent thought, they provide openings. The project here involves distancing the either/or noted above and then working with the retention of the threshold. Working with its retention means accepting the presence of the threshold as integral to the role of figuration within and as the work of art. Figuration, as has already been intimated, is the presence of form as always already informed. The problem to be investigated here, once the threshold is maintained, concerns how the copresence of the affective and the ideational, as a workful presence within works of art, is to be understood. The question has a particular locus of concern. Rather than investigate the question in the abstract, as though it could be reduced to a question both posed and answered abstractly, it will be pursued here by looking at two specific paintings; two 16th Century Italian figurative paintings. Both are Depositions from the Cross. Each painting forms part of an established genre. Each one stages therefore, as the work of art, differing responses to the event of Christ's crucifixion. What is important about both is that they open up the possibility of an engagement with the threshold since they both inscribe affective positions within them. In addition to lament and mourning, which are both direct and emphatic, there is also the presence of doubt, uncertainty and indifference. Hence the important point is that the event, which as indicated means the Crucifixion as an event, does not yield an unanimity of affective responses. Two points need to be argued. The first is that the plurality of responses which in the end are both affective and conceptual define the quality of the Crucifixion as event, while at the same time introducing the problems that the retention of any singularity as a singularity will always have. (The contention is that this retention is both undone and sustained. Unity is both demanded and refused demanding thereby a rethinking of what consti-

[1] This paper continues and draws on earlier work of mine on gesture. See: Benjamin (2016), Benjamin (2017), Benjamin (2019).

tutes an event). The second is that doubt, uncertainty and indifference as responses to the event work through the body. The indifferent body, for example in the context of a Deposition, acquires its force as a result of its relation of non-relation to the lamenting bodies or to the bodies who witness the event. As such, not only is any singularity already relational, singularities acquire meaning within and through those relations. While this position is true in principle, and thus accounts for the way in which singularities are meaningful, its force as a position can only be addressed on the level of the singularity itself.

These affective states are incorporated from the start into the history of gesture precisely because they are modes or instances of the body's comportment. Doubt and uncertainty, which define the stance of bodies and thus are inherently gestural, are affective states that take place in relation to the Deposition as event. Indifference becomes the refusal to allow the event to be present as an event, (were the event to be a singularity to which there would be a correspondingly singular response). In the overall context, doubt, uncertainty and indifference mark and sustain threshold conditions. In so doing, they allow for forms of reflection on the necessity of the affective; that necessity is gesture's ineliminability within the work of figuration. The necessity however is not to be located in the equation of works of art with affect or the aesthetic but with the fact that the affective is itself only possible as the marker of a threshold condition. Emerging as impossible as a result is any possible evocation of the equation of the gesture with pure expression. What demands consideration in this context is how doubt and indifference work as threshold conditions within (and as) the work of art.

1.

Both of the paintings under consideration are now located in the Pinacoteca in Volterra[2]. The first painting is a Deposition by an unknown Umbrian-Sienese painter, though it has been attributed both to Bartolomeo Neroni and equally to an anonymous «seguace del Sodoma»[3]. [Figure 1] (Henceforth the *Anonymous Deposition*). It dates from the early 16th Century. The second is the famous *Deposition* by Rosso Fiorentino. [Figure 2] The latter dates from 1521. Rosso's painting was originally located as an altarpiece in the *Cappella della Croce di Giorno* which was itself located in the *Cappella di San Francesco* in Volterra, while the earlier Deposition was transferred to the *Duomo* in Volterra from a what is now assumed to be an unknown location[4]. The *Anonymous Deposition*

Figure 1.

[2] I want to thank Dr. Alessandro Furiesi, director of the Pinacoteca Civica di Volterra for the informations on both works.

[3] Corrado Ricci attributed it to Bartolomeo Neroni. The catalogue of the Pinacoteca lists the painting as having been done by a «seguace del Sodoma».

[4] For a detailed account of the history and location of Rosso's Deposition see Smith (1976): 67-70.

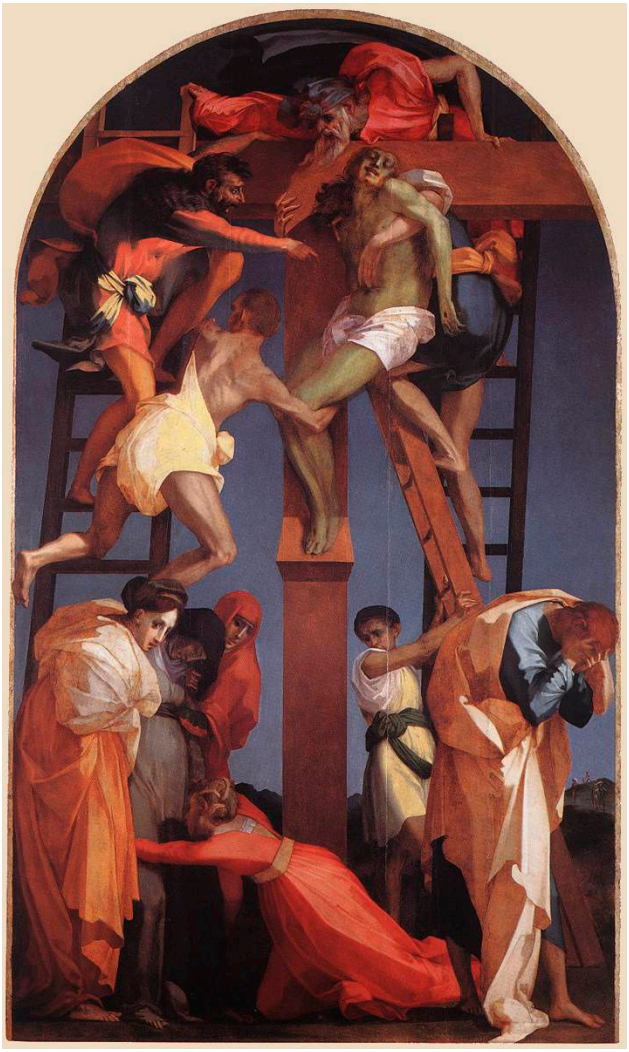

Figure 2.

contains few surprises. It is positioned from the start within what would be the formal structure of a Deposition. In the painting itself there are differing locales of activity, each with its own affective dimension. The question that arises concerns how the relation between these locales within the painting is to be understood. The methodological question concerns the possibility of their unity and thus the possible conditions under which the painting is a unified singularity.

In the *Anonymous Deposition* Christ's body is being lowered gently from the cross. The figures lowering and receiving it are therefore implicated in the event. The lamenting female figures, dressed as nuns with exception of Mary Magdalen, are to the left of the cross. One gazes at the figure of Christ; the one whose death has occasioned different degrees of lament. Lament opening to mourning comprises a necessary response; moreover, it is one that concedes the humanity of Christ. Christ is the figure who is not simply able to die, he dies as a human and thus it is a death that can be lamented. He can be mourned. The figures on horses to the right of the Cross balance the painting. More significantly they function as witnesses to the event. Witnessing, here, is an act whose incorporation within the frame forms part of the event's constitution as an event. There is the inscription of spectator as witness. Though as will emerge what is equally as significant is what they do not witness yet which is equally part of the event. What this means, of course, is that the event *qua* event cannot be equated directly with what is witnessed. (This is of course what the painting's viewer actually «witnesses».) The recognition here of both the necessity and the limitation of witnessing within the frame will further an understanding of, firstly, what maintaining the threshold entails and then secondly of the complexity inherent in the construction of the event. The final element within this particular work, though the one that will be central for the analysis to come, is the presence of the young man or boy with his hand on the ladder. Even though a similar figure is also there in Rosso's painting the difference between them is of fundamental significance.

In the *Anonymous Deposition* the young man is positioned within the frame. [Figure 3] Neither witnessing nor lamenting, he is equally uninvolved in the process of the body's actual deposition. Neither witness nor witnessed with the logic of the frame, and yet he is there. He stands beneath the cross. His hand is on the ladder. His left hand is cocked and placed on his hip. However, it is not as though his right arm could be exerting any force. It is simply placed on the ladder. His weight is taken by his left leg. The right foot is raised; it casts a shadow. His leg bends at the knee. The raising of the foot and the bend of the knee make it clear that the leg is not bearing any weight. Neither the

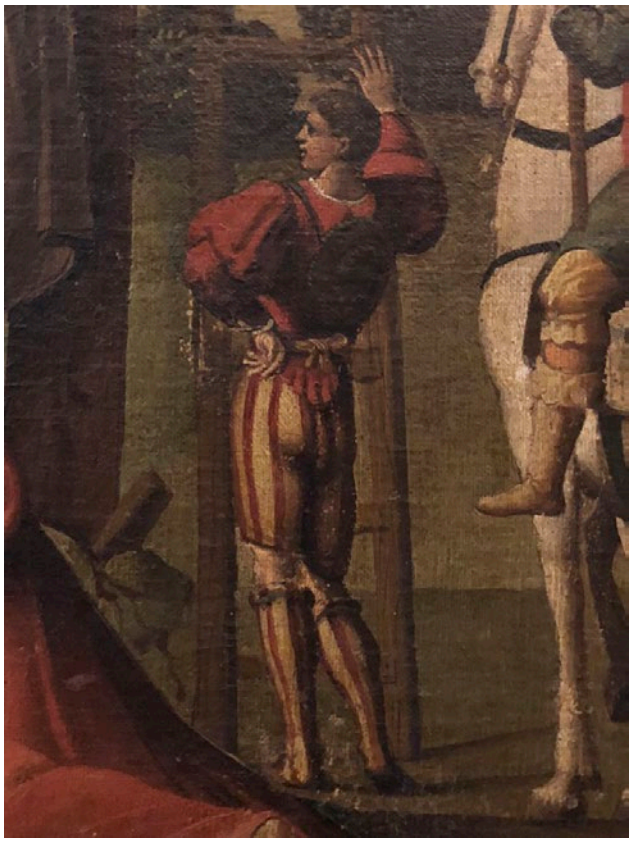

Figure 3.

weight of the cross nor the real or symbolic weight of Christ's body register on his body. His stance is other. He strikes a nonchalant pose. He is looking neither at Christ nor at any one group of figures. He looks across the frame. Neither out of frame nor into it. No eye returns his. He is the figure of indifference. His eyes – specifically their directionality – are integral part of his presence as indifferent. The presence occurs at the threshold. While his indifference can be noted, noticing cannot be separated from the presence of indifference as a question: what then is indifference?

Within both of these paintings each group is defined by their activity. Witnessing, lamenting, engaging the body of Christ (an act in which Christ is equally engaged) are all activities. Each one has therefore a specific economy. The economy in question is positioned in relation to what has already been identified as the threshold. Lament is bodily. Equally, of course, lament is a form of affect. Affect and the position of bodies are the work of that economy. Taken together they create form. The same position can be developed in relation to the other groups. In each instance, it is possible to identify the presence of affective states, a presence held in place by the movement and position of bodies. This is, of course, the place of gesture. Gesture within paintings of this nature comprises the threshold condition. The particularity of the work of art has to be maintained. The threshold in Descartes' *Meditations* is the point at which the affective opened the way to the conceptual such that what was significant philosophically was the impossibility of restricting that movement. Moreover, philosophy then can be understood as the passage from affect – the realm of the aesthetic *stricto sensu* – that incorporates the affective. Both obtain. Then taken more generally this claim about the philosophical needs to be understood as the claim that the threshold at which doubt and the affective are at work can never retain the affective as an end in itself. Figuration within art is art's presentation of the truth of this proposition. There is a double movement; affect occasions thought, and, affect can be thought. Thinking affect is not the elimination of the affective. Rather, it is the recognition that affect is always already the site of meaning. Again, this is the opening to a reconceptualization of gesture as informed form.

Despite its misleadingly restrictive quality and thus its inherently problematic nature the movement of reconceptualization has to start with the proposition that gesture might be pure expression. Were it to be then it would be expression expressing itself. Gesture thus construed would then be the locus of the purely affective. Gesture begins as the body's turn. And precisely because it is the turn of the body, gestures cannot be equated absolutely with the affective and thus identified with the strictly aesthetic; indeed, the contrary is the case. What has to be argued is that gesture understood as expression and thus as a form of expression, gestures as form, is always already informed. There is an additional point that has to be made. Namely, if affect's figured presence is form as always already informed, it is the informing of

form that allows gesture to be expressive. The related point is, of course, that the informing of form is the affective. (Hence, there cannot be the affective as such). As has already been suggested – though the analysis integral to its demonstration awaits – arguments for the purity of expression, and thus arguments for the purely aesthetic, are premised upon the refusal of that original informing. And it is precisely because what is at stake is gesture that what then has to be taken into consideration is the relation between gesture and meaning. While lamenting, for example, may be an affective state in regard to which the interplay of the ideational and the affective is clear, the possibility of responding to lamentation necessitates a certain form of recognition; that recognition is an occasioning, one held in place by the interplay of the affective and the ideational. The lamenting body is informed form. The more complex form of presence is however indifference. Thereby raising the question of the status of indifference. The question needs to be asked again: what is indifference?

In the *Anonymous Deposition*, the boy stands beneath the cross. While his clothing identifies him as holding a specific position within an already established social hierarchy, what matters here is his body. How does his body register? Its own specific determinations were noted above. The body betrays nonchalance. He is indifferent. It is not just that nonchalance and indifference are contextual, the position is more complex than it appears. Indifference has to be located in relation to that which is taking place around him; namely, the differing economies of depositioning (*Apokathelosis*), lamenting, witnessing. While singular individual figures may have a discernible set of particularities, any singularity is already located within the economy sustained by that singularity. Moreover, it is not just that economies are relational, the painting's work, in this instance, is established by a network of relations. The question of what indifference is needs to be posed within this exact context. In other words, even the question of indifference has to be thought in relation to the insistent presence of the threshold. Indifference is not automatically disavowal. Indifference might be described as the possible relation of non-relation that attends any event. The quality of indifference depends upon the demand made by the event. Here the Deposition cannot be radically disassociated from what is more generally understood as the Passion. As occurrences they create a setting in which central to each is, firstly, the identification of the insistence of Christ as having a specific quality (i.e. human and the son of God) and then, secondly, that the event involves the actualization of that which has universal force. The description of Christ in *John* 1.14, «the word become flesh» (ο λογος σαρξ εγενετο) attests both to the necessity of the interplay of universality and particularity on the one hand, and the equal necessity, on the other, that the interconnection of particularity and universality be recognised. Namely, that the flesh be recognized not as just flesh, which would be the form of flesh, i.e. flesh as mere body. Recognition, in both its positive and negative dimension, brings form as already informed into play. The latter point is essential. Integral to the constitution of this occurrence as an event is the recognition of its universality. What is problematic therefore does not lie in the universality but the dependence of that universality on its being recognised as such; which here amounts to informed form having a specific determination. (This will be the case even if the body becomes the locus of conflicting interpretations and thus is present as an already plural locus of signification). Here, lamenting attests to the suffering while underscoring the quality of the one who has suffered; witnessing reinforces the reality of the event. Refusal or disavowal would demand specific forms of activity. All these positions are defined by the event. Indifference, as exemplified by the bodily stance of the young man in the first of the paintings under consideration, defers having to respond.

While the continual registration of deferring creates an opening, the central point is not just that its creation is effected by a set of relations, deferring responding is only explicable in terms of those relations. Indifference however exerts complex demands. Its complexity resides

in the fact that indifference need not be intentional. Rather, the expression of an indifference to the event necessitates the presence of a position from which what is seen, namely the bodily presence of the young man, be seen as indifference. Seeing him standing beneath the cross leaning on a ladder is to encounter indifference. There are two possibilities here. Either indifference is unintentional; indifference would be present then as a form of distraction. Or, there might be intentional indifference. If the latter obtained, then indifference would be a stand taken in relation to the event, which could be understood as *being-indifferent*? These two different conceptions of indifference should not be seen as suggesting abstract possibilities. They only emerge as a result of an observation of the young man's body. The body is present as gestural; almost, as its own economy of gestures. The hands, the feet, the distribution of weight – and details could continue to be added – are such that the boy evinces indifference; his stance is nonchalant. The question concerning the possibility of the state of *being-indifferent* is of great importance since it allows for indifference to be understood as an affirmed mode of existence. However, what then has to be argued is that the attribution of indifference, and this will be to allow indifference to be present as a form of resistance and thus allow the young man to be resisting, though equally it still allows for indifference to be no more than an aesthetic disposition, are identifications made in relation to the location of the boy (the boy, equally, there as his body) within a network of relations that are themselves structured by the presence of interrelated and complex economies. As a result, even if indifference and nonchalance were to be understood as modes of existence in which *being-indifferent* as intentional is there as a continual possibility, it remains the case that observed indifference, and what is observed will retain its ambivalence, is an after-effect or relations that position indifference at a threshold created by those relations. In other words, indifference as a mode of resistance, or as the merely aesthetic, acquires the power that it has because of the interplay of the ideational and the aesthetic; i.e. its power results from the threshold condition. Moreover, looking at the young man, which has to entail perceiving his body as a locus of gestures, means that observing the site of indifference is itself dependent upon recognizing the threshold. What is recognized, thus its conditions of recognizability, do not just demand the threshold condition, recognition depends upon it. Recognition is the threshold as an object of thought.

2.

Rosso's 1521 *Deposition* warrants a long and detailed investigation in its own right. Here, however attention will be given to what might be taken as two of the marginal figures within the overall work. The first is the figure of the young man or boy beneath the cross. [Figure 4] The second is one of the lamenting women. [Figure 5] A start will be made with this woman. She is one of the mourners. She laments. She is positioned within an overall of economy of lament and mourning. However, specifically, she is looking out of the frame towards the viewer. What has to be argued is that the direction of her look, even the stance of her body, fractures the overall economy in which she is positioned. This occurs because she cannot be located within it if location means complete definition. And yet, of course, she is quite literally located within it. She is lamenting, though she is not given over completely to that affective stance. Neither mourning nor lament complete her. She looks at the viewer. What however is the nature of that look? The first thing to note is that she too is supporting the Virgin. As such, she is initially defined by an economy of lament and mourning. She is a part of it. However, while she touches others her gaze is elsewhere. Her cheeks are red. A colouring held in place, firstly, by the line of white along her nose, highlighting it and then secondly the gradual pinkening that is the creation of her nostrils. While tears are absent she has been crying, however as she looks out she is crying no longer. Something else is at work. Colour, the effect of colour, is central to the

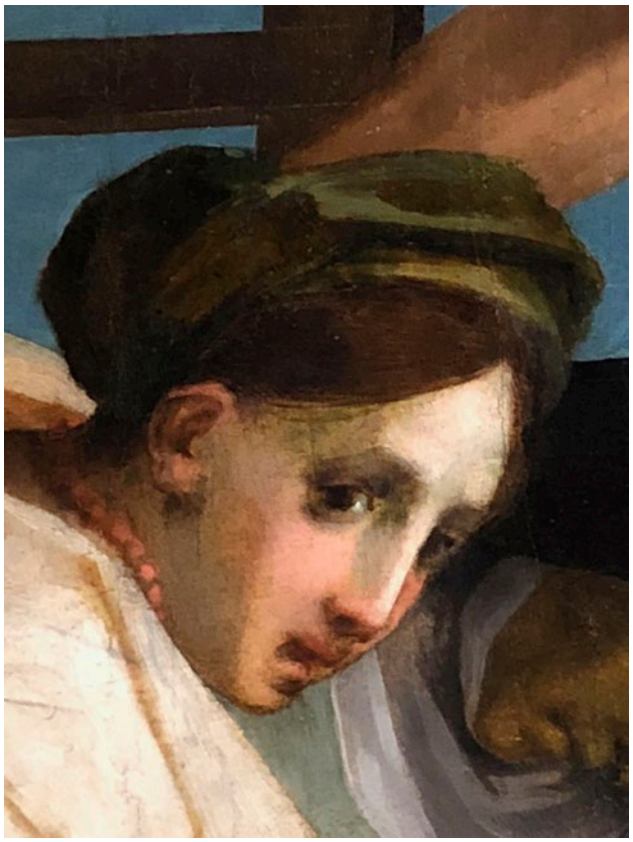

Figure 4.

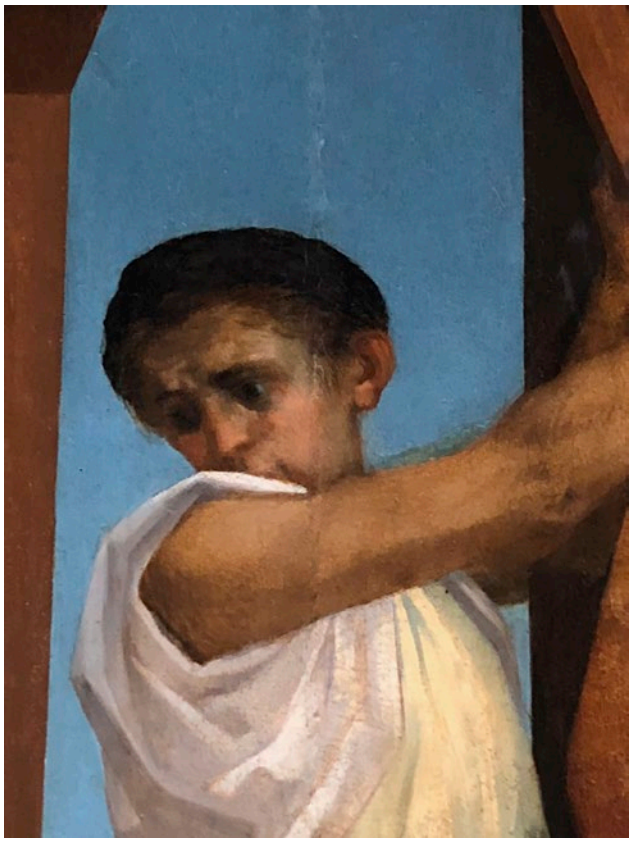

Figure 5.

movement of location and dislocation. Her face acquires its particularity as a result of the work of colour. Colour is part of meaning. Her face is there. It is as though her eyes, and the effect of her having cried, define her gaze in terms of an anxious plea. It is as though she is pleading that what has occurred become the event. It has to register as what it is. Though, and this is what turns her gaze into a plea, her face having become the face of doubt, the gesture of doubt, there is the accompanying fear that what has occurred might not be recognized for what it is. Were it to be a mere occurrence, rather than an event, it might then slip back into history. And thus, in slipping back, what occurred becomes no more than a moment in the passage of historical time. Recognition, which is the move from occurrence to event, would, however, allow it to be lifted out of mere time. The latter, namely "mere time", is the identification of historical time with chronological time. Overcoming that identification of time with chronology allows the event to be that which announced another time. Her gaze marks the presence of the continual threat of the event's disavowal. The problem is clear. Her anxious plea grounded. Since the event *qua* event cannot control let alone obviate the possibility of disavowal. Control will move beyond the singularity of the event and then come inscribe itself within the complex continuity of the policing of the event. A policing whose project is to hold the event apart from its presence as just an occurrence; as just another crucifixion. Her head turns. She looks out. The plea for the event's recognition, the related and ineliminable doubt, knit together the lines of possibility noted above. Her face is, of course, the threshold condition.

Again, there is a young man next to the ladder. He is holding on to the cross; clinging rather than leaning. The muscles in his arms are flexed.

(Consciously or not will always remain an open question.) He is clearly looking at Mary Magdalene. Almost indifferent to the Virgin's presence, thus he is indifferent to an economy of relations defined by lament and mourning, Mary Magdalene holds his attention. In looking at her comforting the Virgin, the registration of a unified economy of lament is, once again, unsettled. He seems distracted. Mary Magdalene's tunic is a deep red and while there are obvious symbolic reasons for the use of this particular colour, its use still leaves open the question as to whether the young man was aware of the symbolic dimension of the colour. (The symbol's immediacy is undone in advance by the possibility of such a question). Could it be that his eyes were diverted by the colour alone?[5] Was he distracted? His thoughts, though not his eyes, would be flitting between her presence, the colour of her garments and her place kneeling before the Virgin. In other words, what he registers, what therefore is registered on his face thus what his face presents, his face as gesture, is a state of distraction and thus a founding lack of surety. And yet, distraction does not have a single or unified single quality. As a result, there is an opening in which what endures as a question is the extent to which distraction may be a form of ambivalence. The possibility of ambivalence is a position staged by the painting in terms of the physical indifference of his head in relation to his body. The turning of the head makes the use of the arms almost effortless (though the way they are painted indicates that this is not the case since muscles flex). In addition, his own lack of engagement in the task undertaken by his arms, leaves him free to be distracted. He does not need to look in order to hold the ladder. Equally, he can look while forgetting or remaining oblivious to the fact he is indeed holding the ladder. Distraction and ambivalence introduce into what would have been a stable economy of mourning and lamenting another figure that works to destabilize its overall effect. What can be described, more generally, as the boy's ambivalence, and this is a position maintained by his body, once understood within the context of the painting as a whole, fractures the economy sustained by lament and mourning. There is a further point that needs to be made concerning the boy's presence. If the space beneath the unity of activity occurring in the top half of the painting in which Christ and those lowering his body figure was intended to have been replicated beneath the cross, then it is clear that the ambivalence of the boy undoes that possibility or expectation. Both his gaze and his body understood as threshold conditions: i.e. as the opening in which the affective opens to the ideational revealing the already informed nature of form.

The boy's body as well as his face evince a specific form of distraction and ambivalence. Gesture has therefore an already present and specific determination. The woman who turns and looks from the frame, while positioned within a more general economy of lament and mourning, equally has a specific determination that while related to that setting is not, as has been mentioned, defined by it. She is pleading. Equally, her face maintains a prevailing sense of uncertainty. Her uncertainty is set both within (and against) the certainty and unity created by mourning and lamentation. The latter comprises an already defined and unified interplay of location and activity. The boy's ambivalence has to be set, in addition, against the activity of Nicodemus and the others as they orchestrate the lowering of Christ's body. There is therefore the presence of a complex setting. The question pertains to how this complexity is to be understood. A lead is given here by the way Nagel and Pericolo define a project that is linked to what they term the «aporetic». They argue the «goal» of an «aporetic methodology» is to understand within a «work», what they describe as its «contradictions and non-resolutions» and thus how the latter «participate in its identity even as they render a fixed identity questionable» (Nagel, Pericolo [2010]: 10). The project here has been to follow a similar trajectory. The presence of the young man in the *Anonymous Deposition*, coupled to the pres-

[5] Colour is an important topic in its own right in Rosso's work. See in this regard: Carson (1998): 355-378.

ence within Rosso's *Deposition* of the boy holding the ladder and of the woman who looks beyond her location in an economy of lament and mourning can be understood in terms of the construction of an aporetic presence. What that means here is that each affective state located at, and as, a threshold condition. To the extent that such a possibility can be maintained – and the project here has been to help secure this position – then the methodological demands involved the necessary presence of gesture, now the coincidence of the movement of the body and meaning, and thus never the gesture "as such". Precluded therefore is the reduction of gesture to the presence of pure expression. Gesture as part of the threshold condition stages the necessary presence of form as informed.

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The project of this paper is part of a larger attempt to develop a philosophy of art. Integral to that project is the distinction between aesthetics and a philosophy of art. It is always possible to consider affect as an end in itself if what is at stake involves a series of psychological claims. Equally, it is possible to engage with such claims philosophically. However, there is no clear connection between either possibility and a philosophy of art. In the latter the presentation of affect is always located within images. Images are produced by the work of materials. Images have to be understood in terms of that production. They have a material presence. If there is a failure to insist on the complex materiality of art's work as comprising a locus of philosophical inquiry, then any subsequent theory of the image is unable to contribute to the development of a genuine philosophy of art. Moreover, within the history of art images are informed form. The informing of form has two elements. Form is informed firstly by the history in which those images are located, and secondly by their capacity to be reworked. The latter can be understood as a futural *coming-into-relation* and thus the possibility that images and the elements from which they are comprised are able to have an afterlife.[6] The afterlife is forms capacity to continue to be informed. It is this latter possibility which necessitates that hermeneutic concerns supplant aesthetic ones in the creation of a philosophy of art.

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[6] For the development of this argument see Benjamin (2015).

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Theatricality in Installation Artworks: An Overview

Elena Tavani

Abstract. The article is an investigation into theatricality from various standpoints (among others those of Michael Fried, Claire Bishop, Juliane Rebentisch and Samuel Weber) in order to focus on different views on *theatricality* considered as partially emancipated from *theatre* and to verify if and to what extent each of them can apply to installation artworks as environments and intermedial devices. Ultimately the article propounds the idea of a paradoxical anti-theatrical theatricality of installation art, grasped in its very connection to site-specificity, critically engaging Martin Heidegger's insights regarding the «Gestell» and the «work-being» of the work of art, as a general theoretical basis through which a particular focus of 'specificity' of installation is endorsed.

Keywords. Aesthetics, theatricality, installation art, Heidegger, site-specificity.

1. INSTALL AND PUNISH

For several decades now performance art in general has been bathed in a masochistic atmosphere. Sometimes displaying living sculptures (Josef Beyus, Marina Abramovic), filling the space with mixtures of deteriorated materials evoking torture chambers or killing fields – sometimes outlining an «offertorium», a «neutral social space» created by performance or installations, where implements and objects of some apparent sacred ritual are simply put on display, given to contemplation.

In a recent essay Hans Giesbrecht highlighted the "offertorial" character of the installation, its ritual structure and the potential cathartic effect: the Offertorium he maintains, is here conceptualized «by analogy to the feature of traditional Christian Mass»: "offertory" is the moment of ritual sequence before consecration of the host, which becomes metaphor for the encounter with contemporary art. Therefore art «becomes an energic point of contact in which the narcissistic condition is momentarily reconstituted, […] rejoined with what it has disavowed through projective identification with the aggressor: its abjection» (Giesbrecht [2012]: IX, 51).

The offertorial scene persists, often much diluted, even when it does not involve restoring a contemplative moment of spectatorship, and the work instead requires an interactive response from the audience. The circumscribed territory of the work remains a 'field' in which the opposition of sacred and profane remains suspended. In the first case, as in Marina Abramovic's *The Artist Is Present* (MoMa 2010), the contemplative moment proves to be equipped with an action force that is ritually very powerful – and is used as such by the artist. But also in the case of interactive performances where there is a prevalence of the element of distraction together with curiosity and playfulness at the moment of entering the magic circle of the installation, the rituality and the reiteration, with few generally prescribed variants, of the same gestures or actions on everyone's part, ends up by seriously satisfying the game of the installation that in the visitors finds, insatiably, its living material. In this too the installation seems to fall into, albeit more weakly and with much more 'noise' compared to the happening's communication, the category of the *offertorium*, in the sense described above.

Although being realized these days in many ways as practices that have metabolized the fluid and performative character of twentieth-century happenings and site-specific works, the multimedia installations of the last fifteen years tend nevertheless to emphasize their nature as construction of sites (Rachel Whiteread, Do-Ho Suh) and to draw a new ambit of values and spatial and aesthetic potentialities, in the perceptive and evaluative sense (Tavani [2018]: 136-144). At the same time, alongside the persistent process-based and non 'objectual' character of the installation, the technical challenge should also be recorded. This last sees the logic of the virtual–digital rebound onto technical devices of a mechanical type, as a further sounding board – and no longer neither primary nor exclusive – of the overall logic of the installation as a setup composed of heterogeneous aggregated materials.

There is no doubt we must bear in mind that since it forms part of events inserted in the circuit of a widespread cultural tourism, the latest frontier of the «culture industry»[1], the artistic installation too, as with other performing arts and as with architecture, must «create an experience» and must give way to a «sense of place» for «its increasingly demanding audience», becoming a bearer of «intangible values» that allow the artistic event to compete with home entertainment in the market of culture-entertainment (Hammond [2006]: 25). It seems, however, that the installation appears to be equipped not just to draw on – and to nourish – a specific symbolic capital and thus to participate also in its accumulation and its profits, but also to highlight the ambiguities linked to the particular anti-theatre 'theatricality' of a work that one wishes to be open and which, nevertheless, as we shall see, does not present itself in a total transparency.

2. WHAT DOES «THEATRICALITY» MEAN?

Discussions on 'theatricality' are mainly referred to critic Michael Fried's 1967 article «Art and Objecthood». In this context Fried was able to trace a new category, the Minimalist art (which he called «literalist art»), studying artists like Tony Smith, Donald Judd, Robert Morris. He points out that minimalist sculptures give way to «a kind of stage presence» similar to «the silent presence of another person«» (Fried [1998]: 155). Fried introduces the term 'theatricality' as a characteristic that emerges from the setups of Minimalist sculptors. The question arises in these terms:

> *What is it about objecthood as projected and hypostatized by the literalists that makes it […] antithetical to art? The answer I want to propose is this: the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre, and theatre is now the negation of art. Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literal-*

[1] The term was famously introduced in 1947 by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer, Adorno [1947]: 94 f.).

ist work. Morris makes it explicit. Whereas in previous art "what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]" the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation. One that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder. (Fried [1998]: 153)

It appears evident that this approach to theatricality regards not so much the strategy of the setting up, but rather the generation of an effect on the visitors. Claire Bishop correctly notes that for Fried «theatricality does not refer to the scenographic aspect of installation, but rather to the way in which we selfconsciously "perform" around it» (Bishop [2005]: 136).

In his 1980 essay on *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* Fried introduces the term "absorption" as opposed to theatricality. He considers the pictorial portrayal of "absorbed" actions as the outcome of an anti-theatrical concern, as a truthful alternative to theatricality, which obviously equals falsehood, insincerity (Fried [1980]). The study is concerned with French painting and art criticism from the early 1750s to the emergence of Jacques-Louis David with his *Bélisaire* in the Salon of 1781. His argument is that during this period narrative paintings, genre scenes and portraits showed figures completely absorbed in what they were doing to the exclusion of the spectator – an absorption offered frequently, in Fried's descriptions, as tied to a 'state of sleep' or to blindness – reflecting a deliberate choice by the artist, who unlike the baroque painter did not want to appeal directly to the beholder and involve him in the action (Scott [1981]: 135-136). Referring for instance to Delaroche Salon paintings of the 1830s, he describes them as «manifestly stage orientated», with too obvious an appeal to the beholder. Interestingly, Fried's analysis points out also the new problematic affinity of theatricality to the increasingly performing nature of modern society: «If one asks why beholding or spectatordom emerged as problematic and specifically as theatrical in France around the middle of the eighteenth century, one cannot expect an answer in terms of painting alone […]. The ultimate sources of theatricalization of beholding must be sought in the social, political and economic reality of the age in all what bears on the history of the self» (Fried [1990]). There is no doubt that «the central challenge» of what Fried calls «the French antitheatrical tradition» was first theorized by Diderot (Grudin [2016]: 38). In 1762, relating to Van Dick's gravure *Belisarius Receiving Alms*, Diderot argued: «Si quand on fait un tableau, on suppose des spectateurs, tout est perdu. Le peintre sort de sa toile, comme l'acteur qui parle au parterre sort de la scene. En supposant qu'il n'y a personne au monde que les personnages du tableau, celui de Vandick est sublime» (Diderot [1958]: 57)[2]. To him however, the statement «if, when one makes a painting one supposes beholders, everything is lost» entails a focus on a variety of strategies for facing this problem. Fried, on the contrary, synthetizes the antitheatrical strategy as «absorptive closure, the walling out or curtaining off of the beholder standing before the picture» (Fried [1996]: 262).

Bodily pantomime, the rhetorical acting style, with measured movements and a set of emotions embodied by the performer, was in any case fashionable in eighteenth-century France and Diderot resolutely criticized it as a false embodiment of sensations and emotions and for its tendency to result empty and opaque. Fried points out the importance of this critique. However, in his reading of Diderot's position, Fried goes on looking for absorbed gestures, considered as expression of a "natural" language of the portrayed characters (Smyth [2014]), even if something different, and more interesting for our focus on installation art, could be grasped from Diderot's art criticism and theory of spectatorship.

Fried does not conceal the ambiguity of Diderot's position: «The fiction of physically entering a painting or group of paintings plays a much larger role in the Salon de 1767 than in the two previous ones» and «it is in the long and famous section on Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), unanimously regarded by French critics of the 1750s

[2] Quoted in Fried [1980]: 148.

and 1760s as the greatest landscape and marine painter of the age, that the fiction of physically entering a group of paintings receives its fullest, most intensive development» (Fried [1988]: 122).

Diderot writes actually in the same salon both that «une scene representé sur la toile, ou sur les planches, ne suppose pas des témoins» (Salon 1767, *Promenade Vernet*)[3], maintaining the fiction that the beholder does not exist, and that landscape and ruin painters should by their truth to nature «force» the spectator to enter the canvas. Fried registers, so to say, the anti-theatricality of the double behavior prescribed by Diderot to the beholder: absence from the scene *as* a witness, presence in the scene *as* part of it, "absorbed" in it, but does not seem to be willing to grasp the new meaning of the term absorption in Diderot's fiction. Now the scene has freed itself from canvas and salon and is presented in its full *liveness* as an environmental situation asking for perceptive and emotional responses. In his commentaries to Diderot, Fried does not seem to be perfectly aware of how Diderot's idea of theatricality is brought to come to terms with the performance of the beholder, through a sort of aesthetic assimilation of the beholder him/herself in an absorbed attitude. Surprisingly, he also describes as moments of absorption the affective and aesthetic results of the imaginative projections of the beholder *into* the depicted scene. When for instance Diderot urges his companion (the abbot who, in the fiction of the storytelling, takes a walk with him inside the picture) to mimically lie down next to some animals in the middle of an arcadian environment – with a shepherd, a peasant woman, in the midst of «the rustic sounds of the cowherd» (Diderot [1975])[4] – what strikes us is first of all *the movement* of the viewer changing his condition of viewer with the condition of an actor: a character sharing the same scene of the depicted characters.

Fried ignores the cause (the artificial means of the painting inducing immersion into it) and insists just on the effect (the absorption of the viewer) demonstrating no interest in the technical and artistic device from which arises the *sensorial alarm* perceived by Diderot during his "immersions" in Vernet's landscapes and seascapes.

Can we obtain from this some useful clue in order to focus attention on theatricality as specifically related to installation art? Of course we should be rather cautious in outlining the terrain and the surroundings of our question. A sort of about turn here may appear to be a not particularly new strategy, even perhaps obsolete given the object under analysis (distinguishing a territory from that which remains at its edges) with regard to the generally accepted and irreversible tendency towards a collapse of the barriers between the various forms of art, which is evidenced uninterruptedly not only from the beginning of the 1960s, but which has more recently been insistently attributed to a performative turn. It seems difficult to put forward any doubts regarding this turn and at the most it is possible to re-evaluate its nature as an epochal turn, considered as such even in Fried's above-mentioned notes in respect of the "performative nature of modern society", with which however, according to Fried, individual arts have to engage in hostilities, if they want to preserve «quality and value», against the «illusion» that the barriers between the arts are «in a process of crumbling» (Fried [1998]: 164).

Let us therefore seek to focus, drawing freely on some issues from the authors taken into consideration up to now, on the possible character of *mise en scène* of the artistic installation and its eventual anti-theatricality.

Fried's attempt remains unsatisfactory because his antagonism proves itself unable to come to terms with modern artistic phenomena (like minimalism) *not* showing what he calls "modernist sensibility". His main claim is that modernist art (including Brecht's and Artaud's theatre) can «defeat» theatricality such as the *stage presence* of minimalist artworks, «by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness» (Fried [1998]: 167). Whereas "presentness" is supposed to reveal the absolute presence and autonomy of the artwork, "instantaneousness" has to convey the idea of

[3] Quoted in Scott [1981]: 136.
[4] Quoted in Fried [1980]: 120.

immediate grasp, intuition of a symbolic meaning. Summarizing, Fried's antagonism «is directed against an art that is offered to the viewer not in the mode of aesthetic representation, but, on the contrary, by virtue of its literalness or mere objecthood» (Rebentisch [2003]: 69). With Artaud and Brecht in mind he contends «Theater and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such and – to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist – with modernist sensibility as such» (Fried [1998]: 163). Evidently all the reiterated attempts by modern theatre to rethink and reactivate the relationship with the audience in a different and performative way find an echo in what Fried calls «inclusion of the beholder» in minimal art, an outcome that he rejects because he considers it to be linked to the grammar of the work as object, as something «existing in order to be looked at». (Rebentisch [2003]: 40-41) In Fried's view therefore all modern theatre's efforts to find ways either to reduce the «distance» of the beholder or to integrate him/her in the stage situation, cannot avoid introducing a type of theatrical relationship. The very antidote to and weapon of choice against this destination of the work that keeps it in a condition of theatricality, of «structural existence for an audience» (Fried [1998]: 140) and in a relationship of dependency on the 'perspectives' assumed by the observer, is what Fried defines as «continuous and entire *presentness*» (Fried [1998]: 167, italics mine).

For Fried, theatricality is associated not with representation, but with the literal use of the objects and with a "literalist sensibility" which proves reluctant to convey meaning: «like the shape of the object, the materials do not represent, signify, or allude to anything; they are what they are and nothing more» (Fried [1998]: 165). To some extent Fried's descriptions demonstrate that his critique of the literalness of Minimal art «is based on the uncritical adoption» of a quasi positivist «self-misunderstanding on the part of certain Minimal artists» (Rebentisch [2012]: 69). But first of all they demonstrate his attempt to oppose to a presumed "literalist sensibility" (Fried [1998]: 166) a modernist sensibility, «concerned with the conventions that constitute individual arts' respective essences» (Fried [1998]: 164) and able to offer artworks as wholly meaningful in their quality, value and symbolism. Unlike literalist artworks, modernist artworks do not happen to be *double legible* (as thing and as sign) or to be experienced in their «endlessness or inexhaustibility», caused either by the indeterminacy of their own meaning or by the «complicity» extorted from the beholder, accepting the «uncanny presence» (Fried [1998]: 155) and enigmatic nature of the artistic object, its ambiguity, «the look of nonart» (Greenberg [1993]: 256).

Paradoxically enough, however, *presentness*, for Fried «the depth and fullness» of artwork's presentation, considered as antagonist with regard to the "theatricality" of those works which are fundamentally rooted in their «*double presence* as things and signs» (Fried [1998]: 143), has constituted for many years through the 1900s the guiding thread of the New Theatre's search for a theatricality that often by concentrating on *presence* and *presentation* as values opposed to interpretation and representation has played an anti-theatrical game.

My claim is that Fried's wish for a «future survival» of modernist arts – depending on the ability of individual works «to overcome the theatrical […], to suspend or defeat their own objecthood» (Fried [1998]: 196) – should more usefully have been addressed to individual artworks and to anti-work positions as such, insofar as they can establish their specificity (instead of their «identity» as painting, poetry etc.) – eventually, not necessarily however, even suspending their objecthood, their theatricality, or also their identity or formalized meaningfulness.

We can say that much of anti-theatrical research in Modern theatre, which takes as its point of departure the theatralization of any site (Craig [1911]) and comes to the theorization of the theatrical space as *environment* (Schechner [2006]) has to be understood as an intense inquiry into spectatorship, creative writing and designing of a space, migrated or flowed towards the whole questioning engaged by installation art, whose

experimental nature, in both "objective" and "subjective" aesthetic discourse, aims at the construction of a "site" whose final form remains that of a steadily boundary-crossing spaced-situation.

This sort of genealogy can be traced, it seems to me, not only and not principally for that genre of installation that envisages a happening, as in the case of Marina Abramovic's *The Artist Is Present*. Indeed, also in site-specific and transmedial installations a theatricality is readable both in the sense of the setup, in the overall and dynamic "placement" of objects and devices, able to present its own specific environmental or atmospheric quality, and in the sense of «the inclusion of the beholder», of the "contract" arranged with the visitors, in terms of mutual supply of performance inside the exibition venue of the installation. In synthesis, we can say that a theatricality referable to installation art will regard prevalently the aspect of the setup/*mise en scène* and the aspect of the execution. It is quite evident indeed that while in happenings and in all cases of temporal arts «there is a need for an executant» or mediating artist supposed to be his/her own interpreter in performance (Urmson [2018]: 351-2), in installation artworks the need for "execution" passes to the audience who become, so to say, executant-visiting audience. But the passage cannot rely on a «recipe or set of instructions for performing or executant» audience, because of the twofold classification of installation artwork: a nontemporal art containing suggestions for temporal-spatial execution. The single visitors occupy physically the installation's delimited space standing or moving across the space available: they interpret and witness the installation and in both these activities the beholder-participants *mediate* between the proposal of the artist and its realization exhibited as a sort of «instructed situation». I cannot discuss here the question of whether participants are co-producer of the installation as situation[5]. I think I can say, however, as an initial approximation, that the performance of visitors in an artistic installation is more culturally revealing than enabling: though we cannot refer to it as a «restored behaviour» (Schechner [1985]), as in real theatrical or ritual circumstances, actions and reactions of the beholder in the installation environment can to some extent be referred to as *an execution* (of the program of the device) which is not just behaviour, but also a performance as a series of *performative deeds* – in the wake of the linguistic performative acts described by John Austin, which make things happen (Austin [1962]). In any case the debate focused around performative and performance studies is still open and I refer to it here in a much abbreviated manner[6].

Thus wishing to circumscribe the question in these pages to *the* theatricality referable specifically to the art of installation, the fundamental question becomes: does the artistic installation owe its value and power of presence principally to the exhibition setup in the sense of the *mise en scène*? But again, wishing to reduce to a minimum the obscurity of the terms used, it will be necessary to indicate what can *mise en scène* mean in the environmental space of the installation.

In a piece dedicated to opera, Theodor Adorno has remarked that the stage coincides with the dramatic form: «According to its own logic, dramatic form implies the audience. It would be absurd to conceive of a stage in itself the same way in which one can conceive of poetry in itself, or of music in itself» (Adorno [1955]: 20). Here he is eager above all to bring out the distinction between the musical work, clearly "theatrical", and its components taken in isolation and not yet *dealt with* in light of a theatrical setup, the text of the libretto and the music. For us this is only one note among many to try to understand if each *mise en scène* proves ultimately to be oriented to the dramatic form (according to the etymon *drán*

[5] This is, according to Claire Bishop, a consequence of the artistic orientation towards the social in the 1990s, whose "hallmark" has been «a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience» (Bishop [2012]: 2).

[6] For an overview on this subject see Schechner [2013], Davies [2018], Deriu [2013], Mersch [2002], Summa [2018].

= action) and to theatricality intended in this sense, extendable to the eventual participation or co-authorality of the spectators, or whether it can manifest on a different plane, more linked to its character as *constructed situation*, a term that clearly is borrowed from the lexis of the Situationists. In other words, not dealing with a setup of a scenographic type, useful in delimiting and qualifying a scene variously, the installation planning of an art installation needs, it would seem, to be read trying to investigate from more nearby *what* is actually installed and thus what comes out of its exposition and its exhibition. A stage "in itself" is nonsense, Adorno claims. From this starting point we can begin to understand the installation as a setting arranging itself in the form of a self-placement and virtually framing and foreseeing a set of interobjective and intersubjective engagements to be produced in the time of the exhibition by virtue of the presence of the audience.

3. INSTALLATION AS PERFORMING VENUE

Artist Ilya Kabakov observed that although there is no «comprehensive answer to the question of what an installation is», it would nevertheless be possible «to explain that type of installation that we can call "total" as that installation that is made in such a way that the observer (together with various components that accompany the observer) who arrives within it is taken by it» (Kabakov [1995]: 13).

A characteristic of Kabakov's installations is that of not proposing any «formal reduction to simple base elements dealt with in a minimalist form» (Hinkes [2017]: 277). On the contrary the artist works with quasi-realistic means, integrating everyday objects within the installations, so as to render them "interieurs" – whether they are single rooms or apartments or buildings. Juliane Rebentisch has called «dramatization» the way Kabakov's work, particularly his multi-room installations, direct the viewer, «explicitly incorporating the viewer's *trajectory* into the artistic calculation» (Rebentisch [2012]: 159). Yet, there is another theatrical horizon characterizing the productive moment of Kabakov's work. Kabakov has defined the total installation «site of an interrupted action. A place in which an event has taken place, is taking place or can take place» (Kabakov [1995]: 16). This mention of the event is not a chance one: it is a precise reference to a «dramaturgy of the total installation» that intends to bring the installation work closer to the area of film and above all the theatre. It is indeed possible «to present all the objects in the installation as theatre actors, according to a typology of roles well known to anyone at the theatre: the soloist, the chorus, the extras» all of these roles that evidently can be filled also by ordinary everyday objects (Kabakov [1995]: 61). This involves a meticulous attention for the presence of objects in an installation also described in terms of stage. A stage without actors. I believe there is a certain relevance to our theme in understanding the meaning of this absence. Kabakov provides a key (it is an «action in a state of peacefulness») that however presents many margins of ambiguity. Nevertheless, and perhaps precisely due to the ambiguity of the formula proposed by the artist, «an action in a state of peacefulness», other interpretations have been given, which however do not seem to acknowledge the real point of the question, which regards the setting up and the functions (the roles) with which each object introduced must be able to be charged with in light of the reciprocal relationships that come to operate within the setup. For example, Juliane Rebentisch provides an interpretation, doubtless plausible, in which Kabakov's installations recall theatre stages that the observer inspects during the interval, stage sets that are momentarily deserted. On the one hand then they are "inszenierte Räume", spaces belonging to a *mise en scène* within the museum space, which due to a precise desire of the artist must not dissimulate their artificial character; on the other hand they are scenic spaces abandoned by the actors and because of this at the mercy of the visitors (Rebentisch [2012]: 156). While the first type of theatricality is doubtless to be attributed to the artist's installations, it is only by forcing the matter somewhat that we can

talk of an absent action *because of* the absence of actors, also for the reason that in this case the first point would be refused, i.e. the artificiality of the entire installation operation: the scene, the stage, is not a scene in the literal sense and that is why we must not imagine it as abandoned by flesh and blood actors, as the effect of an illusion. It is a fact, however, that it is the very artist who encourages this type of reading. This happens when Kabakov posits that in the environment of the installation the viewer should have the feeling that «the place where he finds himself has been inhabited for a long time already, that people lived and live in it, furthermore, that they have just left and will return any minute now» (Kabakov [1995]: 276-277). A fundamental character of the setup is its having already been *inhabited* and its remaining inhabitable in future; this confers an atmospheric density to the site that «overcomes» the viewer, who nevertheless must be able to feel him-/herself within the total installation, completely free to examine and judge the environment and the single objects present (Kabakov [1995]: 245). For this same reason Kabakov considers the «social recognisability» of the spaces and their arrangement (rooms, corridors, etc.) to be of extreme importance for the "total installation". These must operate in such a way as to present themselves as «social milieu», linked to life and to all its fundamental problems.

The agency therefore that is to be attributed to the installations cannot but be the reciprocal reference to the elements and the assumption of roles within the installation, bearing in mind the hierarchy (between main and minor roles) inscribed in the score that structures the presence of the objects. This is, in other terms, an agency that consists of the activation of a dynamic of the elements that is however already fundamentally inscribed in the device of their presentation and only in part can be activated by the visitors and give rise to an event, be it past, present or future. In this sense, I believe, and therefore not on the basis of a literal reference to the theatre as temporal art, the installation presents «the character of a time-based art» (Kabakov [1995]: 311). In other words, the reference to the agency is not literally referred to the actions carried out by other subjects that are no longer present, but still to the setup in its revealing a lived character, as place and environment set up so as to testify to previous passages.

Kabakov seems to put forward a field of action of the installation that keeps itself in balance between tradition and innovation; on the one hand the idea of total installation seems rooted in the conviction of a "totalizing" capacity of technique (which for the artist is translated into a construction that envisages an almost total "government" of the visitors' reactions) and on the other elicits a perception of the space-time of the installation in the direction of «plastic sensations» linked to the forms of the objects, to the roles that they play in the entirety of the installation and to what we might call their character as ruins, their capacity for storing history. How does late installation art relate to (over the last fifty years) the growing intertwining of artforms and the growing surpassing of the distinction between art and non-art? And how does its inter-mediality relate with the idea of the «total work» as famously proposed by Wagner? Wagner maintained that the individual arts, in particular dance, music, poetry, should meet in their respective capacities for directing themselves to «Leibesmensch», to «Gefühlsmensch» and to «Verstandesmensch», leading to the expression of the fundamental aspects of being human, so as to restore body, feeling and intellect to the entire man (see Fischer-Lichte [2010]: 20).

According to Fischer-Lichte it is possible to read the theory of *Gesamtkunswerk* as an "inter-art" aesthetic, but only if we do not accept the organicistic solution provided by Wagner and we return rather to the questions he set out from and which he asked himself, leaving them open. That is the possibilities opened up for aesthetic experience on the one hand by the meeting of various arts; and on the other the way in which the arts involved in this meeting are also transformed – as Wagner maintained was what happened in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Fischer-Lichte [2010]: 22). So it will be useful to note a "performativization" of

the individual arts (and here the model would be *Untitled Event* by John Cage) and also the circumstance that the effect of «hybridization» and of *Hybridbildung* cannot but find itself in opposition to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it not being a formation of a hierarchical or hegemonic character (Fischer-Lichte [2010]: 26, 28). The author notably emphasizes the trasformative power of theatre and performances and reads theatricality according to this main feature. While I believe that her account fits well within theatrical and performative studies, I have some concern regarding the possibility of applying such remarks to the field of installation art in order to grasp its peculiar theatricality.

In her essay on *Installation Art* Claire Bishop considers "dream" as an appropriate analogy for Kabakov's «total installation» in a phenomenological respect. She recalls that Sigmund Freud in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) had described the experience of a dream stressing a few main features: its being primarily visual («dreams think essentially in images»), its liveness («dreams construct a situation» that «we appear not to think but to experience»), its composite structure, that is meant to be not exactly decoded, but just analysed through free-association, through individual affective and verbal connections. These three features, Bishop maintains – «the sensory immediacy of conscious perception, a composite structure, and the elucidation of meaning through free-association, precisely correspond to a model of viewing experience found in the "total installation" as described by Kabakov» (Bishop [2005]: 7). This suggestion comes actually from Kabakov's own description of how the total installation operates on the viewer: «the main motor of the total installation, what it lives by, [is] the cranking up of the wheel of associations, cultural or everyday analogies, personal memories» (Kabakov [1995]). Naturally nothing forbids our following, in the analysis of a work, the artist's suggestions, which although being in any case significant, evidently cannot be bound to a reading of a critical nature. In this regard I would like above all to note that the reference to the ability of each dream element to be replaced by an associative word or syllable as the dream's third (Freudian) main feature, if applied *tout court* to the aesthetic experience of an installation risks centring the reading exclusively on the imaginative projection of the visitors and on their capacity for symbolic–rational reconstruction of the event, leaving the matter of the *setup* of the work, its constructional aspect, completely to one side. This aspect specifically concerns the construction of a *position* and a *presence* that is *sui generis* within the exhibition space and is not only the creation of a situation and an atmosphere. What we are dealing with, if we wish, are two antithetical forms of theatricality, one «absorbed» in its own exhibitional configuration and structure in the specific act of taking up position or being installed in the available space, the other perceived and experienced by the visitors in a prevalently emotive and projective form, based on the specific experience of each one. For this reason I do not consider the categorization criterion proposed by Bishop to be sufficient – as installation art requires its audience to physically enter the artwork in order to experience it, installation pieces can be categorized by the type of experience they provide for the viewing subject. Indeed, although there is reference to the necessity that the visitors enter into the installation physically, the «psychomotorial» aspect of this experience is ignored in the cognitive motives that it shares with the «symbolic–reconstructive» aspect (Antinucci [2004]) (which in any case receives more emphasis) and ends up by being observed *e parte subjecti* only as behaviour (it is the visitors' performance) while *e parte objecti*, i.e. from the installation's perspective, is made to coincide with the device of the "inclusion of the viewer" envisaged by its own setup. In both cases, however, it is not easy for the analysis to put itself forward as immanent to the installation piece in its particularity and it tends rather to be the result of a gaze that sits outside of the phenomenon analysed – a gaze from above. Furthermore, focussing above all on the symbolic and conceptual result of the experience, which is what we do in the immersive *scene* of the installation artwork, insofar as it «requires creative free-association in order to articulate its meaning; in order

to do this, the installation's assemblaged elements are taken one by one and read "symbolically" – as metonymic parts of a narrative» (*ibid*) the specific cognitive contribution referable to the psychomotorial character of the experience is diluted, sacrificed to the objective of grasping its presumptively conceptual and functional meaning as in a storytelling.

In sum, one last objection to Bishop's proposed reading applied to Kabakov's installation practice, is that in the case examined, there is a risk of neglecting precisely any reference to the "total" character of the installation, which must in any case have some expression in the experience we have of it in terms of a "situation". We need to have a grasp of the overall form and structure of the whole installation's architecture, in order to acquire familiarity and to not lose our orientation, despite the various disorienting "uncanny" details spread along the pathway.

4. INSTALLATION AS RE-PRESENTATION.

Let us now summarize some of the points we have been collecting up to this point: the installation threshold does not work as a stage curtain, and what stands out is not the idea of a representation in the sense of a rehearsal, but the setting of the work as circumscribed and as "in motion" at the same time[7]. Also because a "theatricality" of installation artwork comes to the fore as effect of a suspension of time: the temporal logic of installation diverges necessarily from any «external historical narrative» (Hartoonian [2018]: 40 f.)

Here theatricality does not emerge mainly from the self-staging of installation as *hortus conclusus* – however open it might appear – but instead from what we could call the installation strategies of *metastaging*, overcoming theatricality as "placement": its way of emerging as a performing venue inside an "installed environment".

Not only in Kabakov, but in many installation pieces the "situation" as being-*posited* plays on an ambiguity that presents some particular traits of theatricality. On the one hand its site-specificity, which allows visitors to have an aesthetic experience – considered such prevalently in the perceptive and emotional–affective sphere – that is particularly intense due to the environmental immersivity that characterizes installation art, but also due to its liveness. The single visitors occupy physically the installation's delimited space standing or moving across the space available: they interpret and witness at the same time the installation. In both these activities spectators-participants mediate between the proposal of the artist and its realization as an "instructed situation" with its need to be indefinitely executed, accepting to be part of, so to say, an executant-visiting audience of the installation piece.

On the other hand is the installation's presentation as a picking up on and a repetition of everyday mundane elements, as a mediation towards *reflection on* those elements, though often undertaken by the installation domain proposing a studied omission of all écarts which would possibly enact «instituting processes» (Merleau-Ponty [2010]: 8, f.), based on the installation's divergences from mundane situational norms.

Also in order to avoid understanding its particular "theatricality" in a too literal theatrical direction, this is a type of repetition that I think can be usefully read as a "presentification" in the sense suggested by Husserl in *Ideen 1*. I refer to the possibility, which Husserl calls "neutrality modification", conceived of according to a distinction between neutrality and positionality (Husserl [1983]: § 111, 115), of counterpositing to an attitude of passivity – linked to the 'posit' on the part of the conscious something existing or having been in memory – an activity of re-presentation, equipped too with material content, that tendentially neutralizes and suspends the being avail-

[7] Andrew Benjamin correctly maintains that the artwork's presence has to be "sustained" by its audience and by the work's own agency: is not so much the object in itself «but the continual questioning of the object […] the sustained presence of the work, part of whose work is to raise and maintain the question of the [work]» (Benjamin [1994]: 17)

able (*Vorhandensein*) of the natural world (§ 31), opening up to a free imagination and reflection. We can think of the installation as a particular type of "positing", re-presentation that presents the object-image made up of the installation as existing-so-to-speak. Evidently the installation, as a re-presentation of situations, has leverage on the appearance of a relation of contiguity and continuity with regard to situations *posited* as normative, miming them in a paradoxical *counter-position* that while it neutralizes them does not renounce playing on a multiform and changeable dynamic of the positing and being-posited of the "difference" it aims to produce.

5. THE THEATRE OF OPERATIONS

I want to address here another aspect of the problem, namely, the property of theatricality to transform a *space* in a *place*. In his *Theatricality as Medium* Samuel Weber discusses this issue, looking for the meaning of theatricality in relation to theatre, film and electronic media. He first refers to theatricality in baroque theatre, characterized by «ostentation» (Weber [2004]: 270); then to theatricality and psychoanalysis: the use of verbs with the same root *stellen* (to place) by Freud to indicate distortions and suppressions of events according to Weber indicates the importance that the placement of memories assumes, a fact that «underscores the theatrical nature of the masquerade» (Weber [2004]: 282). In particular Weber's study of the concept of theatricality concentrates attention, whether the medium of theatre or film is introduced into the field, on the question of the *locality* that defines an operational space and therefore also on the need to find a collocation or an appropriate position for the carrying out of precise operations. In this sense the theatricalization consists in circumscribing a field of action and in cutting out from a space a specific site. Highlighting, for example, the role that the category of detachment plays in Genet's theatre, Weber observes how in this case «the fixity of theatrical space is the condition of an act of recognition»: what has to be recognised is the *responsibility of theatre* itself «as parodic detachment». (Weber [2004]: 310-311) In fact for Genet «theatre is the repetition of detachment, of division and of multiplication, by which the singular becomes many and the many singular» (Weber [2004]: 312).

A further issue Weber investigates in his book concerns what is meant by expressions such as «the theatre of operation», which allows him to deal with the non-aesthetic, military, use of theatre

> *as a medium in which conflicting forces strive to secure the perimeter of a place in dispute. "Theater" signifies the imposition of borders rather than a representational-aesthetic genre. The former focuses upon the manner in which a place is secured, whereas the latter regards the place as already taken or given, and therefore as a means or instrument of that which is to be represented. In respect to its mediality, then, theatricality is defined as a problematic process of placing, framing, situating rather than as a process of representation. (Weber [2004]: 315. Weber's italics)*

Weber exemplifies this statement with an analysis of the way the Spike Jonze film *Being John Malkovich (*1999) «doubles and thereby divides the convergence of image and person that otherwise functions as the condition of Hollywood stardom», and thus deconstructs the idea of individuality as a self-contained subject (Weber [2004]: 316-317). The body is not a barrier against that which is external to the subject, guarding its organic life: rather, Malkovich's body becomes a kind of apartment house or, better, a dwelling for transients. The body emerges both as a temporary container and as an observation post, something like a loge in a theater. After a period of observation, however, the observation post takes on a more military character – it becomes a forward command post that does not merely observe, but increasingly controls the body it is "in" (Weber [2004]: 317). The body becomes the arena of «a struggle for possession» in which expropriation and reappropriation alternate.

6. SITE-SPECIFICITY

The idea of linking the categories proposed by Heidegger in *On Origin of the Work of Art* (1935) and in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1953) to that type of artistic operation that is called 'installation' is certainly not new, also because in many ways it is induced by some translational solutions from the term *Gestell* that have emphasized the meaning of "installation"[8]. In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger maintains that «technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing» (QT, 12); and explains: «Technology comes to presence (west) in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alêtheia*, truth, happens» (QT, 13). What is at stake in modern technology is the revealing of a challenge: nature is asked «to supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such» (QT, 14). *Gestell*, enframing, is according to Heidegger the word which means this challenging and «reveals the real in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve» (QT, 20), and yet «the word *stellen* (to set upon) in the name *Ge-stell* not only means challenging. At the same time it should preserve the suggestion of another *Stellen* from which it stems, namely, that of producing and presenting (*Her- und Dar-stellen*) which, in the sense of poiesis, lets what is-present come forth into unconcealment» (QT, 21, transl. modified).

The structure of a self-revealing and latency of the meaning of the real had been described by Heidegger almost twenty years before in terms of a tension between "world" and "earth" inside the *work of art:*

> *World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself anf keep it there. The opposition of world and earth is striving […]. In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the world is an instigating of this striving. This does not happen so that the work should at the same time settle and put an end to the conflict in an insipid agreement, but so that the strife may remain a strife. (OWA, 48-49)*

In fact *Ge-Stell*, if taken literally, would then be the collective name for all sorts of placing, putting, setting, arranging, ordering, or in general, putting in place. And *Gestalt* suggests that the tensions of the work of art can be *framed* and can find a setting up in a figure.

Various interpreters have grasped this point and even in the limited context of this path of ours we can record two cases (Rebentisch and Weber) of a reconsideration, more or less critical, of the questions raised by Heidegger in the texts quoted. In dealing with these readings we will see, however, as we will seek to argue, that the reconsideration conceals some traps, although some of the aspects discussed can, under certain conditions, contribute towards a definition of a *specific position* of the work – and therefore also of the installation work's site-specificity – that is more circumstantial from the theoretical point of view.

In *On Origin of the Work of Art* one of the points of greatest difficulty is the counterposition of «earth» and «world». The world enters into a «striving» with the earth and «the work-being of the work» exists in this striving which emerges as a striving between self opening and sheltering-concealing of a historical truth content. Samuel Weber concentrates his reading exactly on «the disputant, clearing and concealing» the truth. He correctly points out how Heidegger's use of words stemming from "stellen" is functional to draw attention to the necessary specificity of the "opening" of truth: the truth «installs itself» in the opening of «a space of strife and play» (Weber [2004]: 53).

In a later *addendum* (1960) to the text *On Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger remarks that an «essential ambiguity» is noted in regard to

[8] From now on, respectively, OWA and QT. For instance, the French translation for "Gestell" by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe is "installation". Quote Rebentisch [2003]: 232.

the definition of art as «the setting-into-work of truth». In this ambiguity, truth is subject on the one hand and object on the other: «it remains undecided (but decidable) who does the setting or in what way it occurs» (*addendum* OWA, 85-6). With regard to the *setting* Heidegger argues that «we must think of to "place" in the sense of *thesis*» and not in the sense of fixing something in place. (OWA, 81) *Thesis* for ancient Greeks «means a setting up in the unconcealed». For instance, «letting a statue be set up» means «bringing (it) *here* into the unconcealed, bringing (it) *forth* into what is present» (OWA, 81). In other words the Greek sense of thesis is «to let lie forth in its radiance and presence». (OWA, 82)

Juliane Rebentisch dwells on the ambiguity of the setting up of a work, seeing there however not so much (as occurs in the detail provided by Heidegger) the question of the truth event as such, but the question of the aesthetic experience, given that if we talk of the manifestation of a truth we understand it in substance «as an indefinite event that essentially plays out between receiving subject and aesthetic object» (Rebentisch [2003]: 238). This is a guiding thread that runs through the author's entire study: the same problem of the relationship variously understood as subject and object is met for example as a dissimulated problem but still for all this internal to the criticism of the theatricality of art, in terms of stage presence or inclusion of the viewer (Rebentisch [2003]: 70–71), or even of an absorption or dehumanization of the viewer, as in the idea of the "objecthood" of Minimalist art theorized by Fried.

And also with regard to the Heideggerian idea of "Gestell" Rebentisch looks to its internally antagonistic structure as that which can render this idea «aesthetic» and not instead connected, as occurs in Heidegger, with the historicity of being. This antagonism would lead, according to a consciously divergent reading compared to the direction proposed by Heidegger, towards «a specifically aesthetic opening of asymmetrical subject–object relationships» (Rebentisch [2003]: 237). On the other hand, «the double trait» referred by Heidegger to sculpture's "making room" for the region «as granting and arranging» according to Rebentisch «can also be read […] as aesthetic antagonism […] to the internal antagonism of the – aesthetically conceived – Gestell on the basis of which, we recall, Heidegger believed the concept of form/shape/figure (Gestalt) would need to be rethought as well» (Rebentisch [2003]: 242-243).

In contrast to what is underlined by Rebentisch in her reading, I believe it is necessary to highlight how, within the structure of the becoming-event in the truth of the work, the ambiguity does not remain circumscribed to the *who* positis, but regards also *the way* of appearing, in the conviction that it is precisely in this direction that there is greater need to dwell, both to understand a certain aspect of undecidability that impacts on the dynamic of opening–closing conceived of as a struggle, and to grasp the significance of the end result. Heidegger claims that «the work-being of the work» exists in the «striving between world and earth» (OWA, 49-50). Heidegger adds that «the strife may remain a strife» (OWA, 48-49) if the world does not settle down, and the earth does not react to it, if both do not renounce to continuously and technically re-set materials and already obtained "figures" of historical truth. This dynamic, it seems to me, provides for the central theme of the "setting" or *thesis* of the work an essential link between the state of appearance and the revelatory calibre of that which appears. To understand this dynamic, however, it is not enough to refer to the fact that what appears reveals itself both in its opening (its character as "world") and in its closing (or its character as "earth"). It is also necessary to enquire to what extent the unconcealing effect of the work of art regards not only the world as an opening of sense, but the earth in its double function as delimiting *site* of the opening and of «specific and material production» of the disclosure. According to Heidegger, «the work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and *keeps it there*» (OWA, 45; italics mine). It is this, we recall, that distinguishes the work from the means, with which it shares the being-done. When we read «in the creation of a work, the conflict, as rift, must be set back into the earth, and

the earth itself must be set forth and used as the self-closing factor. This use, however, does not use up or misuse the earth as matter, but rather sets it free to be nothing but itself. […] it is at all times a use of the earth in the fixing in place of truth in the figure», (OWA, 62) the accent is put not only on the material consistency of the opening, but on the fact that in the production the material itself is placed and revealed as such and can contribute in an essential way to determining concretely a historical truth that remains lacking in sense if it is not rendered able to 'install itself' in concrete ways. The setting-here of the work thus regards the rooting of the display in a determinacy and specificity, the sense of *terrain*, so to speak, of the opening, the determinacy that a sense acquires finding a "here", a place from which to allow the sparking, the placing of presence, but also a condition of opacity, insofar something known (and ordinary) is reproposed and represented artistically.

It is not by chance that the essence of the work of art must ultimately be «fixed» in a figure (*Gestalt*), i.e., Heidegger underlines, it must be led «back to earth», to a material and circumscribed concreteness. «What is here called figure, Gestalt, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (*Stellen*) and framing or framework (*Ge-stell*) as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth» (OWA, 62). This is a decisive point in the author's argumentation. The earth's self-concealing equals the setup of a particular figure, allows the figure to be a specific opening of truth and not just an indeterminate or general opening. «The openness of this Open, that is, truth», Heidegger goes on «can be what it is, namely, *this* openness, only if and as long as it establishes itself within its Open […] In taking possession thus of the Open, the openness holds open the Open and sustains it. Setting and taking possession are here everywhere drawn from the Greek sense of *thesis*, which means a setting up in the unconcealed» (OWA, 59).

In short, the earth decides "the there" of that which is placed and appears, it renders that which reveals itself *specific* in its material and contextual rooting. The setting up of the truth entrusted by Heidegger to the work of art in other words cannot but envisage, beyond the «setting up a world and setting forth the earth», a more explicit «keeping there», as a positioning that gives rise to a specific material–formal configuration (the temple yesterday, the art installation today) that participates, as a situated presence, in the operation of punctual unconcealing of the truth of an epoch.

If the hypothesis set out here is correct, the "terrestrial" agency of art just described, as too the accent placed on its "operational" character, can contribute considerably to defining a possible concept of theatricality referred to the art installation: not a *mise en scène*, but a setting-here that repeats the gesture of occupying and delimiting, but also of qualifying and specifying truthfully sites and the art installation's very presence, albeit variously oriented and with varying potentials linked to its *modus operandi*. This to the point of remaining valid also for those more recent installations that posit their own specificity under the title of a provocative but also very usable «theanyspacewhatever» (Pierre Huyghe): the setting up of a theatre of operation, a battleground, not a *mise en scène*.

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La ri-creazione della quotidianità: medium, sguardo e costruzione finzionale nella fotografia di Jeff Wall

Michele Bertolini

Abstract. The essay focuses on Jeff Wall's theoretical writings and artistic productions. The inquiry on the photograph's medium has been re-enacted in the late 1970s and 1980s by the use of the large scale and the "tableau-form"; in Wall's work the large scale of the images, coupled with the light box, stimulates at the same time a new relationship with the beholder's gaze and the possibility of a historical dialogue with other media, like painting and cinema. By the analysis of photographs like Mimic (1982) and A view from an Apartment (2004-2005) the interplay between document and fiction, capture of everyday and mise en scène appears at the core of Wall's research and a main subject in contemporary photography.

Keywords. Photography, Jeff Wall; Medium, Everyday, Fiction.

L'attività artistica del fotografo canadese Jeff Wall è stata accompagnata a partire dagli anni Settanta da un'intensa produzione critica e teorica che ha sviluppato sul piano discorsivo alcune istanze e implicazioni presenti nel suo lavoro creativo. In particolare, la sua riflessione critica e la stessa letteratura artistica su Jeff Wall hanno interrogato l'identità della fotografia, riattualizzando la questione del *medium* che, come è noto, si pone, pur da posizioni contrapposte, al centro della riflessione di storici dell'arte contemporanea come Michael Fried o Rosalind Krauss. Proprio l'opera del fotografo canadese è divenuta oggetto di opposte valutazioni estetiche da parte di chi, come Krauss, riduce il lavoro artistico di Wall a partire dagli anni Ottanta a *pastiche*, a mera «restaurazione *revanchiste* dei media tradizionali» (Krauss [1999]: 59], in particolare della pittura di storia ottocentesca, e di chi viceversa, come Fried, riconosce nella produzione di Wall, così come di una generazione di altri fotografi attivi a partire dalla fine degli anni Settanta (Thomas Struth, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Thomas Ruff per citare solo alcuni nomi), un momento decisivo di rilancio del problema del medium e della specificità mediale della fotografia nel contesto "allargato" dell'arte contemporanea (cfr.

Fried [2008]). Se quindi Krauss vede in alcuni dei più celebri *light box* di grande formato di Wall l'incapacità di reinventare il medium, in favore di un'operazione di semplice citazione colta del linguaggio della pittura figurativa, l'esclusiva volontà di "rifare" i capolavori della pittura del XIX secolo, Fried coglie nella scelta del grande formato e della retroproiezione luminosa l'intenzione esplicita di collocare il rapporto fra l'immagine e lo spettatore al centro dei problemi della fotografia contemporanea, in stretta connessione con i diversi linguaggi e media espressivi delle arti (cfr. Fried [2008]: 2). Un'analisi al tempo stesso della produzione critica e dell'opera artistica di Wall ci consentirà di approfondire alcune delle feconde ambiguità della fotografia contemporanea.

1. SPECIFICITÀ MEDIALE E INTERMEDIALITÀ

L'interesse della riflessione critica di Wall coinvolge quindi prima di tutto l'identità contemporanea del mezzo fotografico, rilanciando sul piano teorico la questione della specificità mediale della fotografia. Le dichiarazioni dell'artista, raccolte durante gli ultimi trent'anni, oscillano al riguardo tra affermazioni apparentemente contraddittorie che testimoniano piuttosto la consapevolezza a posteriori di una contraddizione storica che ha attraversato la storia della fotografia e la storia dell'arte contemporanea a partire dagli anni Sessanta e Settanta, ovvero gli anni della formazione e maturazione artistica del fotografo canadese.

Rifiutando gli stretti confini imposti alla fotografia d'arte o gli standard della fotografia documentaria, il giovane Wall si confronta con l'uso generale, non specifico, del mezzo fotografico praticato dagli artisti emergenti negli anni Sessanta (Andy Warhol, Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha) i quali si servono della fotografia come mezzo espressivo (e non come *medium* specifico) da includere nel processo artistico, senza considerarsi per questo fotografi in senso stretto. Wall ha più volte ricordato, in diverse interviste, la sua insoddisfazione giovanile e il suo rifiuto nei confronti della "fotografia artistica", incapace di definire il proprio *medium*, e al tempo stesso l'interesse per quelle pratiche artistiche (il cinema, i media popolari, la storia della pittura) in cui erano racchiuse delle possibilità mediali da reinventare all'interno del lavoro fotografico. La sua formazione artistica e critica si colloca quindi in quel "campo allargato" che ha investito l'arte degli anni Sessanta e Settanta nelle sue diverse declinazioni espressive e che è stata ampiamente sottolineata dalla critica d'arte americana postmodernista (da Rosalind Krauss a Benjamin Buchloh). Rovesciando la tesi diffusa intorno alla derivazione del cinema dalla sua base fotografica, Wall può quindi affermare che «tutti i problemi della fotografia sono presenti nel cinematografo» (Wall [2001]: 174).

Secondo Wall l'arte concettuale ha rappresentato il momento dell'autocritica "modernista" della fotografia, caratterizzato da un'attenzione riflessiva rivolta alle proprietà interne del mezzo (il fuoco, il particolare, la composizione, la prospettiva, l'esposizione, la tonalità) e alla propria funzione sociale e documentaria. Il modernismo fotografico peraltro è strutturalmente impuro, in virtù della sua vocazione descrittiva e documentaria di apertura sociale al mondo, non potendosi risolvere in una sorta di puro formalismo (anche in ragione dell'origine indicale, di traccia del reale del fotografico)[1]. Tuttavia, se l'arte concettuale aveva marginalizzato la questione del medium e della sua specificità, in polemica con i teorici del modernismo artistico come Greenberg e Fried, e aveva individuato nella fotografia un mezzo generale, anonimo, privo di autonomia, spostando l'attenzione teorica sulla definizione dell'arte, la fotografia postconcettuale di Wall riattualizza il problema del medium fotografico collocandolo tuttavia in una prospettiva intermediale, al confine cioè fra diverse pratiche (il cinema, il video, le arti visive) che utilizzano costantemente il mezzo fotografico[2].

[1] Come suggerisce David Campany, «il modernismo della fotografia si volge *verso* la rappresentazione, è una riflessione impura sulla propria mancanza di purezza» (Campany [2003]: 18).

[2] Il ritorno all'*immagine* nella fotografia postconcettuale viene viceversa interpretato in una prospettiva critica

Un breve testo del 2003, *Frames of Reference*, è significativo proprio per la sua capacità di restituire il dibattito interno alle contraddizioni storiche della fotografia concettuale e postconcettuale. Rievocando la sua formazione artistica e i suoi autori di riferimento, da una parte Wall rivendica la specificità del mezzo fotografico, contro le derive postmoderne e postmediali dell'ibridazione:

> *La fotografia – si potrebbe sostenere – ha una natura molto specifica, come forma d'arte e come medium, sicché la sua combinazione con altro non poteva portare a nulla di nuovo sul piano fotografico, ma solo a una riduzione delle fotografie ad elementi di un collage che non poteva essere soggetto a un giudizio in termini fotografici, e probabilmente nemmeno in termini estetici. (Wall [2003]: 59)*

Dall'altra parte il fotografo intende ricollocare, ereditando il superamento della questione della specificità del medium artistico prodotto dall'arte concettuale e più in generale dall'arte degli anni Sessanta, la fotografia in un "sistema allargato", al di là dei ristretti limiti di riferimento della fotografia artistica o della fotografia documentaria, per scoprire dei criteri estetici comuni ai diversi media, in particolare a pittura, fotografia e cinema, sfuggendo al tempo stesso all'eclettismo delle caratteristiche installazioni multimediali postmoderne.

> *Credo sia abbastanza evidente come cineasti, registi e pittori tradizionali contribuiscano all'estetica della fotografia, e quindi non è necessario soffermarsi su questo punto. […] Fotografia, cinema e pittura sono stati correlati fin dall'apparire delle arti più recenti: i criteri estetici di ciascuna delle tre arti sono fondati negli altri due media e influiscono sugli altri due linguaggi al punto che si potrebbe sostenere vi sia un unico sistema di criteri per le tre forme d'arte. Il solo elemento addizionale o nuovo è il movimento nel cinema. (Wall [2003]: 60)*

Secondo questa prospettiva intermediale, il criterio estetico e antropologico comune alla pittura, alla fotografia e al cinema è individuato nel senso della "scala naturale", della "scala del corpo", unito a una percezione di "presenza" e "immediatezza fisica", comune a un quadro espressionista di Pollock, a un'opera minimalista di Frank Stella o di Carl Andre, a un film neorealista o della Nouvelle Vague come a una fotografia di grande formato. Il compito della fotografia contemporanea si specifica quindi per l'artista nell'intenzione di lavorare sui passaggi di soglia fra diversi media, piuttosto che ridursi a una semplice pratica di citazionismo colto della pittura figurativa del passato.

Wall stesso ha richiamato quindi l'attenzione sulla dimensione filosofica del gesto del cambio di scala, che permette alla fotografia di assumere lo statuto di una forma-quadro (*forme-tableau*), per la prima volta nella storia del mezzo fotografico costitutivamente destinata a essere appesa alla parete (cfr. Chevrier [1989]: 47-81). Dalla tradizione della pittura occidentale come dal cinema la fotografia ha ricevuto in dono «l'idea di dimensione e di scala», una scala che richiama in modo diretto la «scala del corpo, il produrre immagini nelle quali oggetti e figure siano dipinti in modo da apparire delle stesse dimensioni delle persone che guardano l'immagine» (Wall [2003]: 61). Grazie a questo elemento dimensionale, in grado di interagire in modo immediato, diretto e fisico con il corpo e lo sguardo dell'osservatore, come scrive Wall

> *una scultura di Andre poté sembrarmi affine a Las Meninas di Velázquez, poiché entrambe le opere erano nella medesima scala: […] i due artisti, così differenti sotto tanti aspetti, erano in sintonia quanto alla relazione dei loro oggetti con il corpo dello spettatore che li avrebbe visti, così come, naturalmente, con il loro stesso corpo, nel momento in cui stavano creando l'opera. (Wall [2003]: 61)*

Per quanto lontani possano essere i soggetti, lo stile, le tecniche e i linguaggi utilizzati, un'opera pittorica del passato può entrare in un rapporto di affinità, di sintonia, di corrispondenza, di mutua risonanza con un'opera d'arte o con una fotografia contemporanea.

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postmediale e non come un ritorno alla specificità del medium da Douglas Crimp (cfr. Crimp [1984]: 175-187). La necessità di reinventare il medium, al di fuori di qualsiasi restaurazione del modernismo, è posta al centro dei recenti interessi teorici da Rosalind Krauss (cfr. Krauss [1999]: 48-69).

Tale attenzione per la dimensione fenomenologica ed esperienziale, estetica ed etica generata dall'incontro fra l'immagine artistica e lo spettatore, permette a Wall di ricollegare idealmente la sua riflessione critica a una serie di esperienze artistiche del tardo modernismo (i quadri monumentali e al tempo stesso intimi di Mark Rothko, l'immediatezza fisica e il senso della dimensione di Jackson Pollock) e dell'arte minimalista (la relazione fra scultura, monumento e pubblico discussa nelle *Notes of Sculpture* di Robert Morris), attente agli effetti prodotti dal rapporto di scala fra le opere di grande formato, lo spazio espositivo e il fruitore, allo scopo di produrre un sentimento di saturazione e intensificazione della loro presenza (cfr. Rothko [2005]: 137-138; Morris [1969]: 222-235)[3].

2. LA COSCIENZA STORICA DEL MEDIUM

L'allargamento del problema della specificità del medium fotografico si realizza non solo attraverso il confronto orizzontale con le altre arti, ma anche grazie al rapporto con il tempo, con la storia dei media. Wall riconosce alla fotografia contemporanea, sulla scorta della fotografia concettuale degli anni Settanta, una dimensione di riflessività e di autocoscienza: il medium fotografico porta dentro di sé la coscienza storica degli altri mezzi, in quanto medium che rimedia gli altri media, configurandosi come «una forma del ricordo» (Belting [2002]: 264)[4].

Questa «coscienza storica del medium» (Wall [1989]: 12) percorre il rapporto consapevole della fotografia con la storia della pittura e con la storia e preistoria tecnica del mezzo fotografico. Il dispositivo fotografico, in virtù della sua dimensione tecnica, costituisce secondo Wall una sintesi che raccoglie dentro di sé diverse stratificazioni temporali, faglie arcaiche, preistoriche ed elementi tecnologici contemporanei. Per utilizzare i termini di Wall, la fotografia instaura una relazione logica tra l'intelligenza liquida della natura, esemplificata dal fenomeno dell'acqua, e il carattere vitreo, secco del mezzo fotografico, tra l'elemento chimico arcaico e l'aspetto ottico e meccanico (le lenti, i diaframmi, gli otturatori) dell'apparato fotografico. La polarità del mezzo tecnico si manifesta anche nell'opposizione tra l'immersione nell'incalcolabile, tipico dell'intelligenza liquida delle forme naturali e delle loro metamorfosi, e la specifica intelligenza tecnologica della costruzione delle immagini, la calcolabilità programmata della visione fotografica. La polarità e l'intreccio fra la programmazione calcolante e la contingenza incalcolabile attraversano l'opera di Wall (cfr. Fried [2008]: 74).

Una ricreazione artistica del medium dovrebbe, nelle intenzioni di Wall, rivelare, non necessariamente in maniera esplicita o didascalica, ma piuttosto in modo automatico, attraverso strade sottili e misteriose, questo rapporto fondamentale con il passato, con il tempo del mezzo fotografico, una «traccia memoriale di processi di produzione molto antichi – di lavaggio, fissaggio, soluzione e così via, pratiche connesse all'origine della *techne* – quali, per esempio, la separazione dei minerali nelle estrazioni primitive», suggerendo all'intelligenza "secca" dell'ottica e della meccanica «un'autoriflessione storica, una memoria della via che ha percorso fino alla sua separazione – presente e futura – dai fragili fenomeni che essa così generosamente riproduce» (Wall [1989]: 12-13).

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[3] Mark Rothko si è espresso in diverse occasioni riguardo alle specifiche modalità espositive dei suoi quadri e alla scelta dimensionale delle sue opere, in particolare in: *Come combinare architettura, pittura e scultura* (1951), *Lettera a Katharine Kuh* (25 settembre 1954), *Lettera alla Whitechapel Gallery* (1961), *Intervento al Pratt Institute* (1958), in cui afferma: «La scala è di cruciale importanza per me – la scala umana» (Rothko [2005]: 180). Affermazioni che possono essere poste in relazione con l'attenzione di Wall per il senso della scala corporea (cfr. Wall [2003]: 60-62). Al di là dell'opposizione manifesta fra l'enfasi tragica della scuola pittorica di New York e la freddezza analitica del minimalismo, entrambe le esperienze artistiche coinvolgono un'esperienza estetica totale e sinestetica, posta in situazione, che impegna la scala corporea del fruitore (cfr. Carboni [1999]: 176-187).

[4] Sulla fotografia come forma del ricordo in grado di trasmettere lo sguardo sul mondo e sugli altri uomini dei diversi mezzi storici, cfr. Belting (2002): 255-285.

In questo modo, riflettendo su stesso, il mezzo può rendere trasparente l'origine della sua tecnica, evocando quell'insieme di pratiche quotidiane immemoriali (il lavare, l'attendere ai compiti di tutti i giorni) che rivelano «la complessità delle esperienze che dobbiamo possedere ogni giorno nello sviluppo di relazioni con il passato» (Fried [2008]: 72). Aspetti – la riflessività e la quotidianità – che è possibile ritrovare in alcune delle più celebri opere di Wall come *Morning Cleaning, After "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue* o *A View from an Apartment*. In queste intense pagine è possibile ritrovare l'articolazione brillante di una visione del *medium* fotografico che agisce e condiziona la produzione dell'immagine finale così come la scelta dei soggetti delle fotografie di Wall, le quali spesso si concentrano su gesti e operazioni quotidiani e al tempo stesso simbolicamente pregnanti.

3. LA FOTOGRAFIA FRA DOCUMENTO E FINZIONE: GESTO ED ESPRESSIONE IN MIMIC

L'opera fotografica di Jeff Wall, caratterizzata dall'uso del grande formato espositivo e dei pannelli di retroilluminazione (*light box*), cifra e firma dell'artista, appare attraversata da una costitutiva ambiguità che forse la nozione polisemica di soglia è capace di riassumere in maniera efficace. Alcune delle più note fotografie di Wall raffigurano delle scene con figure umane che oscillano fra quotidianità e artificio, tra la semplice cattura di un evento anche casuale e la messa in scena di una finzione consapevole che si apre a possibili sviluppi narrativi (cfr. Cotton [2004]: 53-54).

La polarità tra fatto e finzione è riconosciuta da Wall come una dialettica interna alla storia della fotografia e come un operatore dinamico della sua stessa attività artistica: l'oscillazione tra la vocazione documentaria e la legittimazione artistica percorre infatti la storia del linguaggio fotografico fin dalle sue origini. La prima corrente è manifesta soprattutto nella feconda tradizione del *reportage* fotografico tipico degli anni Sessanta e prima ancora nella *street photography*. Wall nella sua stessa produzione artistica, ad esempio in *Mimic* del 1982 [Fig. 1], ha intrecciato rapporti fecondi e significativi con la tradizione della *street photography* (Walker Evans, Garry Winogrand, Henri Cartier-Bresson), impegnata, almeno nella sua forma tipica, a rappresentare personaggi e figure urbane inconsapevoli di essere riprese, cieche rispetto allo sguardo dell'obiettivo fotografico e alla presenza di fronte a loro del fotografo. L'intenzione della *street phtography* di catturare il "momento decisivo" all'improvviso, con un gesto atletico, brillante, istantaneo, grazie al peso leggero della Leica e alla rapidità di esecuzione, immergendosi nel tessuto sociale delle metropoli urbane come un "occhio di gatto" nervoso e scattante, corrispondeva all'impegno anti-teatrale di molti fotografi, la volontà cioè di mantenere l'inconsapevolezza di essere ripresi da parte dei soggetti fotografati. Questa indifferenza nei confronti degli altri si faceva specchio peraltro dell'esperienza sociale vissuta nelle grandi città, di un certo modo di abitare e attraversare la città da parte dei suoi abitanti.

La crisi di questa tradizione documentaria emerge a partire dagli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, non solo nella misura in cui la consapevolezza dell'essere guardati sembra difficilmente evitabile da parte dei soggetti fotografati, ma in quanto la teatralità investe lo stesso processo di costruzione

Figure 1.

della fotografia. L'implicita presenza del fotografo, il carattere non convenzionale e peculiare degli angoli di ripresa, la dimensione straordinaria della scena ripresa, la predilezione per un'inclinazione fortemente accentuata della macchina, la stessa attrazione o simpatia provata dai fotografi per i loro soggetti, fanno sentire e percepire la presenza dello stile, dell'artisticità, del gesto del fotografo in molte immagini di Winogrand e William Klein. Il momento decisivo, proprio per la sua fugacità momentanea, viene enfatizzato dal gesto del fotografo, risultando teatrale.

Wall si pone come erede critico della crisi della tradizione della *street photography*, così come della fotografia di *reportage*, riconosciute come le correnti più vive e vitali dell'arte fotografica degli anni Sessanta (cfr. Wall [1995]). Wall tuttavia complica e reinterpreta in maniera analitica, concettuale e riflessiva questa tradizione legata alla spontaneità della cattura, alla rapidità del gesto fotografico e alla velocità dell'otturatore.

In particolare, *Mimic* del 1982 costituisce a un tempo una ripresa del genere della fotografia di strada e una diretta affermazione del carattere di costruzione artistica dell'immagine e del suo uso, in quanto si tratta di un'immagine di grande formato che deve essere appesa su un muro e osservata dagli spettatori in una relazione di diretta frontalità. Per quel che riguarda la relazione fra l'immagine e il suo spettatore, Wall accentua il carattere decisivo del gioco degli sguardi tra le tre figure rappresentate: l'apparente inconsapevolezza della compagna dell'uomo (sia nei confronti della presenza dell'uomo asiatico sia nei confronti del gesto aggressivo del suo compagno), il volto difficilmente decodificabile dell'asiatico, consapevole probabilmente della presenza delle altre due persone, ma in apparenza indifferente nei confronti del gesto dell'uomo al centro, la cui violenta presenza ed espressione del viso attirano ripetutamente l'attenzione dell'osservatore. Poste di fronte alla macchina fotografica, le tre figure sembrano inconsapevoli e indifferenti alla presenza del fotografo.

Se la presenza del corpo, del gesto e del suo movimento, fondamento espressivo della pratica fotografica, richiama al tempo stesso un orizzonte naturale e una dimensione convenzionale e culturale che appartiene anche alla grande tradizione pittorica (cfr. Wall [1984]), il grande formato e l'utilizzo del *light box* generano una serie di interferenze e di ibridazioni all'interno del vocabolario e della sintassi del documentario diretto. La fotografia, ingrandita e pensata in funzione della parete, spinge l'osservatore a interrogarsi intorno alla sua problematica autenticità, interferendo con altre tradizioni artistiche, come il genere dalla pittura storica. Ci troviamo consapevolmente posti di fronte a un'immagine che mostra in maniera evidente il suo carattere costruito, preparato, predisposto, la sua natura tecnica, mentre al tempo stesso rinvia e richiama la tradizione spontanea, immediata, diretta della fotografia di strada.

L'ingrandimento del formato non rappresenta soltanto un intervento tecnico sul medium e sull'immagine, una scelta compositiva ed estetica: esso definisce una certa modalità di sguardo sulle cose e sulle immagini, individuando e tracciando una misura, una linea di confine, una distanza da cui guardare la realtà. È all'opera qualcosa di più di una semplice scelta di poetica: agli occhi di Wall la posta in gioco coinvolge la dimensione veritativa ed etica dell'immagine fotografica. La dimensione finzionale dell'immagine è sottolineata dalla scala, dalla presenza delle retroilluminazioni, dalla distanza che l'immagine deve richiedere allo spettatore per poter essere guardata e compresa. L'uso del *light box* evidenzia su diversi livelli la sua natura anfibia; senza essere né una fotografia e «nemmeno un quadro, evoca entrambe le esperienze» introducendo «un altro riferimento all'interno dell'opera di Wall: quello della pubblicità sui cartelloni retroilluminati» (Cotton [2004]: 55). Inoltre, da una parte il *light box* si presenta come un elemento riflessivo e concettuale, in grado di rivelare il processo di produzione dell'opera nell'esperienza della fruizione, dall'altra parte sottolinea la letteralità ed entra in relazione con l'oggettività, la fisicità, il carattere di presenza tipico delle opere del minimalismo artistico.

Nel caso di *Mimic*, il grande formato fa emergere il gesto minimo, meccanico, compulsivo, anonimo dell'uomo contemporaneo, del corpo con-

temporaneo: un corpo che non risponde più alle leggi e alle regole dell'estetica del gesto classico, del teatro e dell'arte barocca, che esprimeva l'interiorità attraverso la grandezza e l'evidenza di un gesto esteriore che corrispondeva all'interiorità del personaggio. Il corpo contemporaneo che abita le città meccanizzate è un corpo segnato dall'incontro con la tecnologia, che ha ridotto la sua gestualità a una serie di «movimenti meccanici, di reazioni automatiche, di risposte involontarie o compulsive» (Wall [1984]: 9). A questa micrologica attenzione per il gesto automatico, involontariamente espressivo, violento, sotterraneo, risponde la capacità di visualizzazione e di ingrandimento della macchina fotografica, che può proiettare in primo piano e in piena luce il suo significato di segno (in questo caso un segno sociale di aggressività, violenza e razzismo), rendendolo visibile e potente. Il gesto minimo catturato ed enfatizzato dal dispositivo fotografico trova la sua verità dialettica nell'offrirsi allo sguardo dell'altro, nel suo essere-per-un-altro, nel suo essere un'immagine-per-un-occhio (cfr. Wall [1984]: 10).

Mimic descrive l'emergenza, l'apparizione sulla superficie visibile della stampa fotografica di un gesto minimo drammatizzato in quanto espressione non della volontà, dall'intenzione o dell'inconscio di un individuo, ma della totalità sociale del tardo-capitalismo, un'eruzione violenta per nulla accidentale, ma così rapida, automatica e momentanea che nessuno nell'immagine sembra consapevole di quel gesto, né la donna, né l'uomo di origine asiatica che lo subisce, né la persona che lo compie.

La fotografia si rivela in questo caso lo strumento privilegiato per catturare e cogliere un ordine sociale della realtà, che è disponibile a essere visto dall'occhio fotografico perché è già stato ampiamente plasmato e rimodellato dalla tecnica: l'automaticità del gesto corrisponde in questo caso all'automaticità del dispositivo fotografico. La grandezza del formato e la misurazione della distanza da cui riprendere una scena costituiscono secondo Wall dei fenomeni di soglia, dei momenti decisivi di esperienza e di visione, dei criteri a partire dai quali è possibile cristallizzare uno sguardo che sia capace di far emergere il carattere collettivo della vita dell'individuo, la complessità delle relazioni sociali, la libertà e insieme l'assenza di libertà dell'uomo contemporaneo, il dominio della tecnica e forse la possibilità di una liberazione, la distanza anti-teatrale e l'inevitabile consapevolezza dell'essere guardati, l'orizzonte di documento e la dimensione teatrale e performativa della messa in scena.

Alla luce di queste considerazioni (Wall stesso afferma che il grande formato della pittura storica traduceva un atteggiamento etico nei confronti del soggetto), è possibile probabilmente comprendere meglio la singolare e a prima vista provocatoria affermazione di Susan Sontag che chiude il suo libro *Davanti al dolore degli altri* proprio con il significativo riferimento a una fotografia monumentale di Wall. Correggendo e modificando alcune delle affermazioni contenute in *Sulla fotografia*, Sontag riconosce in *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision after an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)* di Wall [Fig. 2], fotografia del 1992, un'immagine «esemplare per forza e profondità», un'immagine «contro la guerra» (Sontag [2003]: 118). Un'immagine tuttavia che è l'antitesi di un documento, palesemente ricostruita nello studio dell'artista: Wall infatti non è mai stato in Afghanistan. La fotografia, un cibachrome alto due metri e mezzo e largo più di quattro, elaborata digitalmente, rappresenta l'orrore della guerra attraverso l'evocazione di un evento immaginario di una guerra reale, richiamando addirittura forme ottocentesche di rappresentazione spet-

Figure 2.

tacolare della guerra, dai *tableaux vivants* ai diorami e panorami. Scrive Susan Sontag: «I personaggi della visionaria opera fotografica di Wall sono 'realistici', ma naturalmente l'immagine non lo è. I soldati morti non parlano. In questo caso sì» (Sontag [2003]: 119). L'ammirazione dell'autrice americana per quest'opera monumentale dipende dal sottile gioco che produce il cortocircuito fra la grandiosità retorica e aggressiva dell'immagine, al limite della pittura *pompier* come osserva Rosalind Krauss (cfr. Krauss [1997]: 98-99), e l'assorbimento estremo dei soldati morti che parlano, giocano o scherzano fra loro senza cercare il nostro sguardo, senza urlare la loro protesta contro l'abominio della guerra, mostrando «un supremo disinteresse per i vivi: per quelli che hanno tolto loro la vita, per i testimoni – e per noi» (Sontag [2003]: 120).

4. LA QUOTIDIANITÀ COME MEDIUM: MORNING CLEANING E A VIEW FROM AN APARTMENT

La presenza ineludibile dello sguardo dello spettatore di fronte all'immagine emerge quindi, per Wall e per un'intera generazione di fotografi contemporanei come Struth, Ruff, Bustamante, «come un *punto strutturale*, non semplicemente personale o psicologico», «un impegno esplicito e consapevole» (Fried [2008]: 338-339). All'interno di una produzione in buona misura coerente, nell'opera di Wall è possibile tuttavia individuare un cambio di prospettiva fra le prime fotografie (*The Destroyed Room*, *Picture for Women*, *Double Self-Portrait*, prodotte fra il 1977 e il 1979), su cui si è concentrata l'attenzione di buona parte della critica (Campany [2003]; Belting [2009]; Riedmatten [2011]), e l'emergenza della ri-creazione della quotidianità al tempo stesso come *soggetto* e come *medium*, ovvero come regola che guida il processo di produzione dell'immagine e che ne indirizza il contenuto.

L'equivocità e l'ambiguità caratterizzano secondo diversi commentatori il tratto distintivo della produzione artistica di Wall, la sua "difficile bellezza" che interroga e investe la nostra capacità di riconoscimento mediale dell'immagine[5]. Questa ambiguità si concentra, in particolare nei primi lavori, sulla riflessività del medium fotografico, esplicitandosi nella volontà di un'autorappresentazione riflessiva al tempo stesso del fotografo e del dispositivo fotografico[6]. La «natura deliberatamente equivoca» (Riedmatten [2011]: 202) della sua opera si manifesta già in *The Destroyed Room* (1978), attraverso un processo di disvelamento e smascheramento progressivo della dimensione costruita, artificiale, "*staged*" dell'immagine, un'esibizione dei processi di "messa in scena" dell'immagine. La fotografia di Wall innesca nello sguardo del fruitore un processo simile al rovesciamento operato dallo smascheramento di un *trompe-l'œil*. Dapprima giocando sulla pulsione voyeuristica dell'osservatore (accentuata dall'uso decontestualizzato di un dispositivo tecnologico commerciale come il *light box*), essa rivela a uno sguardo più attento alcune «tracce indiziali dello spazio – lo studio fotografico – da cui risulta» (Riedmatten [2011]: 199), mostrando in maniera esplicita le condizioni della propria realizzazione e creazione, ad esempio la scatola scenografica che avvolge la scena della rappresentazione in *The Destroyed Room*. L'ambiguità investe infine anche il *display* espositivo del *light box*, dispositivo al tempo stesso letterale e materiale esibito nella sua artificialità programmatica e strumento industriale per ricreare le condizioni di una luce naturale, secondo le intenzioni dell'autore (cfr. Wall [1979]: 437-438).

Alla riflessività manifesta, polemica ed esplicita dei primi lavori, che comprendono anche gli unici autoritratti dell'artista, si sostituisce negli

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[5] Tale ambiguità attraversa anche le differenti valutazioni critiche delle sue fotografie, fra coloro che leggono l'opera di Wall come «una descrizione sociale del quotidiano» (Campany [2003]: 29) e chi viceversa sottolinea la sua dimensione teatrale e narrativa di «totale messa in scena» (Marra [2012]: 293).

[6] Sull'intreccio fra autorappresentazione dell'artista nell'immagine e autoriflessività del medium nell'opera di Wall insiste Henri de Riedmatten, che analizza in particolare *Double Self-Portrait* (1979) e *Picture for Women* (1979): cfr. Riedmatten (2011): 189-206.

anni successivi una modalità sotterranea, implicita, automatica di evocazione della riflessività del medium, che intercetta la categoria della quotidianità, tematizzata dall'autore stesso, il quale intende presentarsi, sulla scia di Baudelaire, come nuovo "pittore della vita moderna" (cfr. Wall [2001]). In questa seconda fase, su cui vorrei concentrare la mia attenzione, Wall non rinuncia alla dimensione costruita e artificiale dell'immagine, ma la innesta e la innerva in quella vocazione "quasi documentaria" che Wall riconosce nello stesso processo automatico di creazione e genesi dell'immagine fotografica. L'immagine della quotidianità nasce in questo caso dalla sovrapposizione fra reportage e immaginario, in grado di generare una forma ambigua e automatica di riflessività mediale.

Wall ha distinto la sua produzione secondo due grandi categorie: la fotografia documentaria e la fotografia cinematografica; soltanto la seconda prevede un controllo totale dell'immagine, in tutti i momenti del processo di produzione, da parte dell'artista. Se al documento appartengono in realtà poche opere dell'artista (quasi tutte senza figura umana), nella fotografia cinematografica si riconoscono anche produzioni definite da Wall come "neorealiste", cioè prossime a un'intenzione di reportage per l'uso di attori non professionisti in ruoli molto vicini alla loro vita reale, per la scelta di fotografare eventi come se stesse facendo un reportage e per il riconoscimento di buoni soggetti nella quotidianità.

Alcune delle più famose fotografie "cinematografiche" (interamente controllate dall'autore) sono peraltro definite dallo stesso Wall come "quasi documentarie" (*near documentary*), un ideale estetico che viene così sintetizzato:

> *Si tratta di immagini suggerite dalla mia diretta esperienza, in cui ho cercato di ricordare, ricostruire e rappresentare quell'esperienza in maniera precisa e accurata. Anche se le immagini con figure sono state fatte con la collaborazione delle persone che vi appaiono, […] esse pretendono di essere un plausibile resoconto o reportage degli avvenimenti così come essi sarebbero avvenuti, o potrebbero essere accaduti, senza essere stati fotografati. (Wall [2002]: n. p.)*

Figure 3.

Nell'intenzione dell'artista qui è all'opera un ideale estetico anti-teatrale mescolato con elementi di teatralità consapevole, secondo la polarità tematizzata da Michael Fried a partire da *Absorption and Theatricality* e in seguito riconosciuta come un dualismo immanente alla natura e alle funzioni dell'immagine artistica contemporanea (cfr. Fried [1980]; Fried [2008]): una sintesi di performance e reportage, di spontaneità espressiva e consapevolezza del "dover essere guardati" che appartiene ad ogni immagine in quanto tale. "Quasi documentarie" sono ad esempio la fotografia di *Adrian Walker* del 1992 e la monumentale *Morning Cleaning (Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona)* del 1999 [Fig. 3]. La poetica del "*near documentary*" si avvicina alla ricerca di una quotidianità anti-teatrale, nella misura in cui «l'immagine nella sua totalità combina un motivo "d'azione" manifestamente anti-teatrale con il riconoscimento più completo possibile dell'artificio fotografico, cioè della consapevolezza dell'essere-visto» (Fried [2008]: 91), attraverso il dispositivo del *light box*, l'uso del montaggio di più immagini digitali, l'illuminazione fortemente contrastata. Questa tensione dialettica attraversa l'immagine fotografica in quanto tale, come un contrasto interno fra il desiderio di fuggire dallo sguardo dell'osservatore e l'esporsi a tale visione, tra l'opacità del medium e la sua trasparenza, interrogando in un certo senso quella che Fried fin dagli anni Sessanta ha definito come la convenzione primordiale per cui le immagini sono fatte per essere guardate. La polarità anti-teatralità/teatralità si traduce all'interno del medium fotografico nell'intreccio fra controllo

consapevole del mezzo, dello sguardo, del soggetto, e indeterminatezza casuale, automatismo, apertura alla contingenza, a ciò che si pone al di là delle intenzioni del fotografo o dell'operatore.

La ri-creazione della quotidianità[7] messa in scena da Wall procede dal riconoscimento storico e teorico dell'ascesa di questa esperienza come forma dominante della modernità a partire da Charles Baudelaire, che vi riconobbe non solo un deposito latente di senso, ma il luogo, o per meglio dire, il *medium* vivente «capace di assorbire e reinventare tutte le precedenti forme in cui l'arte significativa era stata immaginata – religiosa, mitica, razionalistica, e così via» (Wall [2001]: 176). La quotidianità incontra il proprio luogo privilegiato di espressione nella vita anonima delle metropoli contemporanee, di cui Wall accentua consapevolmente il tratto comune, anodino, aspecifico, spogliando la sua città natale, Vancouver, set di molte sue opere, di ogni familiarità riconoscibile (cfr. Wall [2001]: 168-169). La dimensione riflessiva del lavoro di Wall è in questo caso interna e implicata dallo stesso soggetto scelto: il fotografo lavora infatti sull'affinità e l'intima complicità fra l'automatismo insuperabile della macchina fotografica e la vita quotidiana come prodotto di un'esperienza ripetuta di atti meccanici, automatici, spesso inconsapevoli.

La rappresentazione fotografica della quotidianità, non limitandosi alla sua semplice riproduzione meccanica, sollecita infine un'esperienza estetica che è possibile definire come esperienza di soglia o di passaggio: Wall, come è noto, si concentra sulla cattura di un intervallo fra due spazi, sulla sospensione fra due istanti di tempo o su azioni sospese, accennate, abbozzo di possibili narrazioni incompiute, rivelando la natura spettrale della quotidianità (cfr. Chevrier [2005]: 27). L'esperienza del passaggio di soglia, oltre che soggetto dell'immagine, incarna qui anche il lavoro del dispositivo fotografico che è sospensione, pausa della vita, tempo riflesso.

Opere come *Morning Cleaning* o *A view from an Apartment* del 2004-2005 [Fig. 4] evocano quindi la soglia fra la cattura della spontaneità quotidiana e l'artificio consapevole e reso esplicito per lo spettatore, come il passaggio sospeso fra un gesto e quello successivo. La luce, naturale nella prima immagine, artificiale nella seconda fotografia, che cade sulle superfici e crea l'immagine, così come l'oscurità delle zone d'ombra in *Morning Cleaning* o la presenza di schermi di visione (le finestre, i vetri trasparenti, la televisione) in *A view from an Apartment* richiamano gli elementi generativi del dispositivo fotografico. Al di là quindi di qualsiasi formalismo, in questo caso è il contenuto stesso, il soggetto delle immagini a diventa-

Figure 4.

[7] La chiave interpretativa qui proposta per descrivere il passaggio di soglia fra realtà quotidiana e rappresentazione artistica nelle fotografie di Wall segue un percorso teorico ben distinto da quello del filosofo dell'arte statunitense Arthur Danto, che ha individuato nella "trasfigurazione del banale" (*Transfiguration of the commonplace*) una delle chiavi teoriche per comprendere i processi di artializzazione. Quelle funzioni estetiche, corporee e sensibili originate dall'incontro fra il soggetto e l'opera nello spazio dell'esposizione, che sono escluse da Danto dal processo di definizione dell'arte, risultano determinanti nella nostra lettura delle opere di Wall. Peraltro lo stesso Danto riconosce la natura di traccia della fotografia, per cui essa è «per la natura stessa della fotochimica, un segno che regista le sue cause, che sono anche il suo contenuto». Essa è dunque innanzitutto un documento fotografico che assume in circostanze particolari, come mostra l'elaborazione artistica di Wall, la qualità di «un'espressione simbolica della vita quotidiana» (Danto [1992]: 68-69), oscillando fra lo statuto di segno indicale e quello di simbolo che incarna il proprio significato.

re un medium espressivo: la quotidianità rappresentata attraverso azioni ripetute, banali, comuni, che impegnano e assorbono i protagonisti della fotografia. La ripetizione consapevole di azioni quotidiane da parte delle due studentesse, che interpretano se stesse all'interno della stanza di *A view from an Apartment* nel corso di lunghe prove riprese dal fotografo, genera un'ipertrofia della finzione, della messa in scena che dovrebbe produrre nell'osservatore un effetto finale a un tempo di spontaneità e di artificio.

La quotidianità, che Fried interpreta alla luce del pensiero del secondo Wittgenstein e di Stanley Cavell, diventa un medium artistico, in quanto investe e organizza l'intero processo di produzione e di creazione dell'immagine fotografica (cfr. Fried [2008]: 63-93). Le immagini di Wall, infatti, sono quanto di più lontano rispetto a una poetica dello scatto istantaneo o di una "candid camera". Esse sono il prodotto di lunghe prove e ripetizioni regolari e quotidiane compiute con attori non professionisti scelti dal fotografo: la ripetizione prolungata di gesti e operazioni caratterizza quindi tutto il lavoro di produzione dell'immagine, che si protrae per settimane e a volte per mesi, investendo anche la ripetitività degli scatti (cfr. Fried [2007]: 203-211). La dimensione calcolante e progettuale del lavoro di Wall incontra gli aspetti incalcolabili che emergono solo nel processo di produzione degli scatti (come la luce del sole in *Morning Cleaning* che originariamente non era prevista come parte della concezione dell'opera)[8].

Questa sintesi ambigua fra calcolo progettuale e apertura alla contingenza produce nel caso di *A view from an Apartment* una monumentalizzazione del gesto quotidiano della ragazza che cammina nella stanza, il cui procedere appare incerto, ancipite: un gesto che non può essere del tutto risolto in una dimensione narrativa e che si risolve piuttosto nell'accenno a una storia possibile, non esplicitata, aperta. La fotografia si apre a un'immaginazione narrativa potenziale, che entra in relazione con il formato *tableau* e con il linguaggio figurativo della pittura (cfr. Cotton [2004]: 53), e che nello stesso tempo permette a Wall di esaltare la singola immagine bloccata, irrisolta. "Vedere la vita stessa", secondo l'intenzione di Wall, significa molto di più di un semplice vedere, nella misura in cui implica quel cambio di prospettiva, quel passaggio di soglia, «inquietante e mirabile al tempo stesso», che permette all'artista di farci osservare un pezzo di natura, «la cosa singola, in modo tale che essa ci appaia come un'opera d'arte», secondo il celebre esperimento mentale evocato da Wittgenstein nei *Pensieri diversi*, relativo a un uomo, inconsapevole di essere visto e intento in comuni attività quotidiane su un palcoscenico teatrale (Wittgenstein [1977]: 23-24)[9]. Il medium fotografico permette il passaggio fra due diverse prospettive di sguardo, fra due modi di considerare lo stesso mondo: in questo senso esso svolge una funzione decisiva di soglia che è compito dello sguardo dello spettatore riconoscere.

[8] Per una lettura di segno opposto di *Morning Cleaning* rispetto a quella proposta da Michael Fried, giocata in questo caso sul confronto con "*Le Grand Vitre*" di Duchamp, cfr. Conley (2009): 997-1015.

[9] Per un'analisi puntuale di questa celebre annotazione di Wittgenstein del 22 agosto del 1930, che anticipa l'elaborazione del concetto di "rappresentazione perspicua" delle *Ricerche filosofiche*, cfr. Fried (2008): 76-82 (in particolare sull'anti-teatralità come chiave di accesso alla quotidianità).

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The Sublime in Lutoslawski's *Three Poems of Henri Michaux* (1961-63)

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Abstract. The sublime in classical aesthetics arrived at a famous formulation with Kant (*CPJ*, Part I, Section 1, Book 2, §23–29) as a subjective quality more elevated than beauty, linked to commotion and respect followed by reaffirmation. However, a new interpretation of the Schopenhauerian sublime is necessary in its transforming appreciation of the importance of this feeling as a psychological state, which is not yet metaphysical as usually understood, when dealing with struggling situations without resolution (Vandenabeele [2015]: 128). Here the focus will be on a variety of the sonorous sublime in contemporary music, which finds resonances with Schopenhauer's sublime: Witold Lutoslawski's *Three Poems of Henri Michaux* (1961–63) for mixed chorus and orchestra focuses on unpredictability and form-contrariness, "picturing" surrealist texts of uncertainty in *Pensées*, violence in *Le Grand Combat*, and resignation in *Repos dans Malheur* (Michaux [1928], [1938]).

Keywords. Philosophical sublime, musical sublime, modern sublime, unpredictability, a-synchronicity.

Sublime is all that exceeds us and also that which is the source of obscurity, which both surpasses a threshold and the subliminal. The study of the sublime feeling dates back to Greek origins from the development of a *paideia* seeking for elevated values up to the sublime as a transcending force in discourse, deepening its roots in the Attic tragedy (Saint Girons [2006]: 27). A survey of the sublime in contemporary philosophical studies has links with modern visions of the concept placing emphasize on natural excessive scenarios and it has been specially revisited by environmental aesthetics (Brady [2013]: 200). Recently, it has also been reassessed in cognitive aesthetics as an epistemic feeling involving a special kind of knowledge by suspension of judgement (Dokic [2016]: 57). Approaches in experimental aesthetics insist on the old rhetorical aspect of *movere* or *being moved* as central to experiences of the sublime (Hanich [2014]: 2). We also find psychoanalytical readings of the Kantian «mathematical» and «dynamical» sublimes, interpreted as incommensurability of the different and the irresolvability of trauma

(Brillenburg [2009]: 139). Specifically speaking, the current work in empirical psychology applied to music focuses in its relationship with the expectation-resolution game in tonal music and musical synchronicity at various levels (Thompson and Quinto [2011]: 365-366).

Lutoslawski rehearsed a "tragic, performative, immanent" deflated version of the philosophical sublime through the work *Three Poems of Henri Michaux*. The key elements in this version are: an unresolved sense of tragedy, the absence of a feeling of arrival in the sense of restoring balance, as well as the main focus on aleatoric result of the matter of the performance itself, against the point of reference beyond the work i. e., any metaphysical point of disclosure.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE IDEA OF THE SUBLIME IN PHILOSOPHY

The idea of the sublime, its primary history and its current legitimacy, as an aesthetic category until today is found in the origin of the Greek *hupsos*, which jointly with his Latin relative *sublimis*, refer to something superior, high. 'Sub', on the top of, 'limen', threshold, border. As applied to objects, it means they are noble, and support the highest ideals. It is also used to refer to the subjective reaction that these objects impress, which is qualified as elevated. A distinctive aspect of the modern sublime is the sensation of being totally overwhelmed by it, surpassed by its power, and feel tiny as a consequence. Also there are modalities of the sublime: a quieter and a more violent, a sedate sublime and one mixed with pathos: the vast and the threatening, the ungraspable and the uncontrolled.

A study of the sublime feeling sends us back to Greek origins, also from the development of a *paideia*, up to the sublime as great eloquence, in the writings of Longinus, *On the Sublime* (s. I a.D) (Saint Girons [2006]: 27–51). This primary notion of the sublime can be labelled as a *discursive sublime*.

In the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke associated the sublime with psychological and somatic experiences characterised by a sort of delightful terror, a new notion that can be understood as a *physical sublime of preservation*:

> *Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling […]. When pain or danger press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful. (Burke [1757]: I, sect. VII, 58)*

Immanuel Kant developed a sense of the sublime in accordance with his major critical project: «The very inadequacy of our faculty (imagination) for estimating the magnitude of the things of the sensible world awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty (reason provide the idea of infinite) in us» (Kant [1790]: §26, 150). The contemplation of sublime objects prepares us, invigorates us for the moral act. This new sense of the sublime became a famous interpretation and it has been understood as a *moral sublime of liberation*:

> *Therefore the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own destination, which by a certain subreption we attribute to an Object of nature (conversion of respect for the idea of humanity in our own subject into respect for the Object). This makes intuitively evident the superiority of the rational determination of our cognitive faculties to the greatest faculty of Sensibility. (Kant [1790]: §27, 154)*

In the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer also referred to the sublime as an aesthetic feeling with more profound resonances than beauty: «He may comprehend only their Idea that is foreign to all relation, gladly linger over its contemplation, and consequently be elevated precisely in this way above himself, his person, his willing, and all willing. In that case, he is then filled with the feeling of the sublime» (Schopenhauer [1859]: III, §39, 359). His version of the sublime hanged

on the domination of uneasy feelings, as a *sublime of elevation by frustration:* «For just as at the sight of the sublime in nature we turn away from the interest of the will (disinterestedness), in order to behave in a purely perceptive way, so in the tragic catastrophe we turn away from the will-to-live itself» (§51, 439). However, this sense of the tragic does not necessarily coincides with a pessimistic understanding; instead, frustration derives in an uplifting experience, but different from Kant, in a more universal one, transcending even the moral and the individual self. Schopenhauer also insists on the perceptive-charge of the sublime experience in comparison with the Kantian cognitive proposal.

In the last century, Jean-François Lyotard, when writing about pictorial avant-gardes gave a notion of the postmodern sublime: «(T)hey do not try to find the unpresentable at a great distance, as a lost origin or end, to be represented in the subject of the picture, but in what is closest, in the very matter of the artistic work» (Lyotard [1991]: 126). Lyotard proposed what can be called a *performative sublime of inspiration*.

The gathering of the main notions of the sublime invites us to exercises of comparison. Beauty, for Kant involved the free play of the imagination and understanding. Whereas the sublime surpasses these limits requiring the intervention of the power of reason:

> *Thus the Beautiful seems to be regarded as the presentation of an indefinite concept of Understanding; the Sublime as that of a like concept of Reason. Therefore the satisfaction in the one case is bound up with the representation of quality, in the other with that of quantity. And the latter satisfaction is quite different in kind from the former, for this [the Beautiful] directly brings with it a feeling of the furtherance of life, and thus is compatible with charms and with the play of the Imagination. But the other [the feeling of the Sublime] is a pleasure that arises only indirectly; viz. it is produced by the feeling of a momentary checking of the vital powers and a consequent stronger outflow of them, so that it seems to be regarded as emotion,— not play, but earnest in the exercise of the Imagination. (Kant [1790]: II, §23, 138)*

For Schopenhauer, there are also two-stages that can be deduced from the experience of the sublime: the disinterestedness (which is shared with the contemplation of beauty), and also the recognition of final helplessness, opening a more universal sense of the sublime transcending self and morality:

> *If we loose ourselves in contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe in space and time, meditate on the past millennia and on those to come; or if the heavens at night actually bring innumerable worlds before our eyes, and so impress on our consciousness the immensity of the universe, we feel ourselves reduced to nothing. (Schopenhauer [1859] III, §39, 366).*

It becomes clear and apparent that a comparison between a Kantian and a Schopenhauerian notion of the sublime emphasises different aspects: that of narrativity in the first one, an arrival version of the sublime; and a version of the sublime hanging on uneasy feelings, embracing contradiction and frustration in the second one.

Another way of contrasting them is that of transcendent and immanent interpretations of the sublime. The first, transcendent interpretation implies a narrative movement, as mentioned in Kant. It requires depression to effectuate transcendence. The second, the immanent interpretation, involving the sphere of sensitivity instead of reason, has firstly been noticed by Schopenhauer and it is characterised instead by an experience of intermittent access and withdrawal leading to indeterminacy.

Lately, Lyotard keeps on the narrative movement although in the performative realm, the unpredictable and uncontrollable occurrence: the wonder of the here happening in actual performances.

As a conclusion, different versions of the sublime are obtained: Moral-transcendent (Kant), Tragic-immanent (Schopenhauer), and Performative-transcendent (Lyotard). Can we think on a *Tragic-immanent and performative sublime,* as a feeling of equally encountered tendencies of pain and delight, in a Burkean fashion, with a non-

narrative end, i.e. avoiding any transcendent fulfilment, and keeping at the level of the sensitivity and materiality of the work of art? This complex version of the sublime is the most adequate when interpreting Lutoslawski's singular treatment of the musical sublime in *Three Poems*.

VARIETIES OF THE MUSICAL SUBLIME

Before entering into the topic of the musical sublime, a genuine place for the artistic sublime or the power of art to convey sublime experiences in relation to that provided by nature needs to be cleared. Emily Brady, from environmental aesthetics, is against the understanding of arts and nature as equally important to elicit those experiences in the audience. Sublime natural scenarios are characterised by important dimensions not comparable to art experiences:

> *[V]astness (the starry sky, the great deserts, the ocean), massiveness (towering mountains and cliffs), immense magnitude and great force (massive waterfalls, raging seas, torrents, lightning, thunder, exploding volcanoes, hurricanes, earthquakes), threatening qualities (deep ravines, deep oceans, stormy skies, 'deeply shadowed wastelands'). (Brady [2013]: 80)*

In this sense, she is of the idea that comparable experiences cannot be found when facing with the artistic sublime:

> *Paradigm cases of the sublime involve qualities related to overwhelming vastness or power coupled with a strong emotional reaction of excitement and delight tinged with anxiety. Most works of art lack the combination of these qualities and accompanying responses, and therefore they cannot be sublime in the paradigmatic sense. (Brady [2013]:119)*

Specifically, she gave an opinion about the musical sublime, which is discussed below in the light of the repertoire proposed here: «Thus, while we may be able to bracket much of the artefactuality of music while we listen, it will always lack the *unpredictability* and *indeterminate* character of the natural sublime» (Brady [2013]: 134, italics mine).

The differences between the artistic and natural sublime obey to the distinctions in magnitude, in terms of contrasting levels of commotion, but also in relation to the different levels of unexpectancy. In comparison to a seaquake, the musical piece is perceived in a lesser degree as sublime. Notwithstanding, its power or final impression could be argued as equally devastating in psychological terms. On the other hand, the unexpectancy created by forceful energies of nature can be seen in a similar way for the case of music. In Lutoslawski's work, high levels of instability and irresolvability are guaranteed, from the a-synchronic and dodecaphonic techniques respectively, which are both reinforced by the resigned and intense content of the poems.

Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, from the aesthetics of music, proposes instead that from the mid-eighteenth century onward, sublime feeling is in interaction with musicality. She analyses the sublime *of*, rather than *in*, music. This double perspective is sustained here: the musically sublime and the sublime in music. For the first, she elaborates on resonant concepts such as musicality in terms of empty signs and indeterminacy. About the second perspective, the sublime in music is obtained by special tricks and effects. There is a long tradition of the sublime in music: Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The musical sublime is obtained by massiveness, force and volume; the chaotic, the amorphous and the tuning into harmony, stability; dynamic contrasts, majesty by grand sounds; tonal disruptions, carefully staged climax; cognitive exhaustion, overload of fragments listening at once; shock, surprise, adventurousness, modulations and digressions. Brillenburg reads the sublime in Romanticism and experimental music from a psychoanalytic point of view: experiences with chromaticism in terms of «dynamical sublime», i.e. irresolvable breakings and the traumatic, and in earlier repetitive music in terms of «mathematical sublime», i.e. infiniteness and repetition compulsion.

The varieties of the musical sublime are in principle, roughly three: the classical, the modern and the postmodern one. Witold Lutoslawski's (1913–1994) *Poems* go over the extremes, either

tonal narrative works or pervasive experimental ones, which will be excluded in the present treatment. He searched for a sublime through indeterminacy, vastness, and also violence and struggle, formally by limited aleatorism and at the content level by surrealist texts. A good example of a tragic-immanent sublime in music is found, since it replies to the scheme of contradictory feelings, in terms of content and in musical treatment.

Henri Michaux (1889-1984) places emphasize on his poetical (but also pictorial) work as a whole on uncertainty via travel experiencing: geographically, by drugs and imaginary travels. His aesthetic endeavor follows thoughts dissolved, the «I» dissolved; also his style, his efforts to rush from style as a model to conform. Topics such as the instantaneous, and also distraction as method with its seemingly opposite but parallel of obsessive dedication, elaborate on the characteristic indeterminacy of the sublime feeling.

In order to understand the contrast, there is a discussion of a result from experimental psychology that serves as support for a classical sublime in music:

> *The unfolding patterns of violations and fulfillments of expectations that occur while listening to music can account for powerful and complex emotional responses, especially when multiple levels of expectancy are considered simultaneously. As an example, the experience of 'awe' may be evoked when low-level violations of expectancy, which generate arousal responses, combine with high-level fulfillments of expectancy, which generate feelings of reassurance. (Thompson & Quinto [2011]: 372)*

Three Poems is an example of a modern account of the sublime in music. Expectancy, synchronicity and dramatic tendencies are peculiarly treated; expectancy obtained by other means than the conventional tonal system, i.e. by series, the play with de-synchronicity is obtained by arithmetical procedures, and the dramatic tendency is not pursuing a final rest.

Philosophical accounts of the sublime such as those developed by Burke and Schopenhauer help within this context.

In the II Part of the *Enquiry,* Burke introduces particularly the topic of sound and the sublime. Typically sublime experiences with sounds involve massiveness, as when hearing the shouts of a multitude, strident sudden sounds, and subtle intermissions, such as the rumor of the clocks at night. In addition, noises coming from animals such as roars or groans, comparable to human shouts, murmurings and whispers are of an unrecognizable nature making them sublime. Lutoslawski has specially mastered those precise resources: shouts, sudden strident sounds, speaking, whisperings voices.

The mediation between this philosophical conception about the sublime in Burke and Lutoslawski's music also found a further refinement in the philosophy of Schopenhauer. When Schopenhauer defines the sublime as continuation of the experience of beauty, he observes, that whereas in beauty we pleasantly free ourselves from the conditions of representation, obtaining a pure knowledge and contemplation above the necessities of the will, in the sublime, this implies a second movement: an elevation above the hostilities presented in the object of contemplation.

Schopenhauer includes allusions to sounds in a famous passage from his third book in *The World as Will and Representation*. There he exemplifies his theory of the sublime based on degrees. He mentions five degrees total, but we will limit just to those cases where sounds intervene. In the third example, he alludes to the sounds of a desert. Threatening winds and clouds agitate our will in such a way that we do not contemplate more than Ideas. In the fourth of the examples, louder noises, the tempest and hurricanes block us the possibility of hearing our own voices. In these moments, he concludes that we feel our double nature: at the same time of having facing annihilation we are, but momentarily, uplifted.

The conjugation of these two philosophical accounts allows for a tragic-immanent interpretation of the sublime pursued here and can be resumed again as a combination of a sublime of terror and delight by preservation, and a sublime which emphasizes uneasy feelings and a state of

elevation, all obtained in the formal (and content) indeterminacy of the work itself.

Carlo Serra's study on the rhythmic dissonance or play with intermittences in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), as exemplary of the category of the modern sublime, serves as a leading example for introducing an analysis of the musical sublime in the work of Lutoslawski. According to the aesthetic filiation of the Polish composer with the Russian one, Stravinsky worked on the rhythmic dissonance, breaking the temporal continuity, while Lutoslawski developed a new technique called aleatoric counterpoint[1]. Stravinsky selected Latin as a dead language, while Lutoslawski found in Michaux a violent one (mov. II) or a minimal, quasi ascetic language, by dispersal syllables or silent events (movs. I y III). The participation of the public in Stravinsky's *Oedipus* is also present in Lutoslawski's work in the feminine voices commenting, as a Greek chorus, the brutal fight between two men (mov. II). However, differences can be also signaled. Stravinsky worked on contrasts, while in Lutoslawski there is no opposition between a continuum and a parallel level breaking it. Finally, Stravinsky places emphasize on the syllabic sound, on the phonetic treatment; instead, Lutoslawski preferred musical painting: to paint the message, the sense hidden in words, employing shouts or murmurings (Serra [2016]: 474-475).

THE SUBLIME IN LUTOSLAWSKI

Three Poems of Henri Michaux for mixed chorus and orchestra of winds and percussion, consists of three movements: I *Thoughts*, II *The Great Fight*, and III *Rest in Misfortune*. Each poem work on uneasy feelings and experiences charged with ambivalence without resolution: vastness of thoughts vs. concentration (I); violent beating vs. festive atmosphere (II); misfortune vs. pleasant rest (III). From the classical division of a sublime by vastness and a sublime by power, the mathematical and dynamical versions, this whole work explores the mathematical one in Movs. I and III, while a dynamical sublime is mastered in mov. II. The composer works on «text-painting» as mentioned, he prefers sound-images technique instead of careful phonetic reproduction of literary text. The specific musical techniques of «text-painting» reinforcing this are: indistinction-precision by specific harmonic-colouristic treatment (I); density-pointillism by the polychronic technique of limited aleatorism (II); a play with unresolvable pair of tension-relaxation, in the design of a dramatic curve at a macrostructural level (III).

The first movement of the work, I *Thoughts*, is characterised by opening textures and harmonies. The indistinct texture is based on twelve-note chords. The treatment of uninteresting micro rhythms is also significant. In the middle section of the poem, when thoughts «wonderfully swimming», is painted by *staccatos* creating a busy texture. At the end, disperse syllables coincide with the resignation atmosphere of the poem as a whole.

To think, to live, sea less clear;
I –the id- trembles
ceaseless infinite that shudders.
Shadows of worlds minute
shadows of shadows,
ashes of wings.
Thoughts wonderfully swimming,
who glide in us, between us, far from us,
far from enlightening us, far from understanding;
Strangers in our houses,
always peddling
dust to distract us and to disperse life.

(Michaux H., *Plume*, 1938, transl. by Anderson K., in Lutoslawski [1996])

The second movement, II *The Great Fight*, consists of four moments:

1. Speaking and shouting chorus and orchestra dominated by battery, painting a gathering crowd, all its excitement and strident exhortations. The women recite different lines simultaneously, while men read it in order. There is a ferocious battle of percussion.

[1] Aleatoric counterpoint as a special system of notation created by Lutoslawski is referred below.

2. A second moment in the piece is characterised by coarse brasses depicting agitation and unexpectedness. They bring the "ending" climate for the victim of the poem.

3. A third moment, inspired in the macabre, is worked by arithmetic process and arrives at the climax of the movement, when dynamic reaches its peak. This is an uncontrolled *ad libitum* section without director.

4. At the end, a simultaneous reading of the first 16 lines of the poem, based on vocal techniques of whispering, murmuring, working with unrecognisable sounds, creating an atmosphere of morbid curiosity, and final dispersal.

He embowerates and enbacks him on the ground,
He raggs him and rumpets him up to his drale;
He praggles him and libucks him and berifles his testeries;
He tricards him and morones him,
He grobels him rasp by rip and risp by rap.
Finally he enscorchorizes him.
The other hesitates, espudates himself, unbrines himself, twisses
and ruins himself.
He'll soon be done for.
He mends and immarginates himself…but in vain
The hoop which has rolled so far falls.
Abrah! Abrah! Abrah!
The foot's collapsed!
The arm's broken!
The blood's run out!
Dig, dig, dig,
In the pot of his belly there's a big secret
You neighborhood schrews who cry into your handkerchiefs;
We're amazed, we're amazed, we're amazed
And we watch you
We others, we're looking for the Big Secret too.

(Michaux H., *Qui je fuis*, 1928, transl. by Ellman R., in Stucky [1981]: 144-145)

A special mention deserves the polychronic techniques in the third stage of *The Great Fight*. Arithmetic process for creating micro rhythmic complexity. For example after m. 48, the following rhythmic patterns, and its shortening or lengthening schemes are:

Piccolo 1	15, 12, 9, 6	(-3)
Piccolo 2	6, 8, 10, 12	(+2)
Flute	9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4	(-1)
Clarinet 1	6, 9, 12, 15	(+3)
Clarinet 2	12, 10, 8, 6	(-2)
Clarinet 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	(+1)
Glockenspiel	4, 8, 12, 16	(+4)
Xylophone	16, 12, 8, 4	(-4)
Piano 1	7, 14, 21	(+7)
Piano 2	21, 14, 7	(-7)

The last movement of the work, III *Rest in Misfortune*, concludes in a (complete) relaxation of tension, although with one crucial exception. The structural pitch line is: D-flat, E-flat, F, F-sharp, elaborated in retrogressions. Each pitch generates one section of the form, as pivot notes, announced at the beginning by the harp. But the exception is found in m. 26: the arrival to F-sharp in the harp coinciding with «into your horror». After this, the final detail: Hexachord G, G-sharp, A, B-flat, B, C, arriving to a profound calm. This end-accented form is however in counterbalance with the content of the text.

Misfortune, my great toiler,
Misfortune, sit down,
Rest,
Let us rest a little, you and I,
Rest
You find me, you try me, you prove me it.
I am your downfall.
My great theatre, my book, my hearth
My cave of gold,
My future, my true mother, my horizon,
Into your light, into your fullness, into your horror,
I abandon myself.

(Michaux H., *Plume*, 1938, transl. by Anderson K., in Lutoslawski [1996])

Lutoslawski's notation contributes in a practical way to obtaining the result of this a-synchronic music. Aleatory notation alleviates from having to notate with metric precision the frenzy sensation and sonorous exacerbation wanted. For these cases Lutoslawski recommended *ad libitum*. His special

type of notation exhibits undulate lines indicating the instruments entrance in a staggered way. The effect pursued is that all instruments reach their final at different moments. In the *ad libitum* section all the rhythmic values are approximate. In consequence, the placing of notes one above the other in the score does not necessarily mean that they are played simultaneously. The idea behind of a collective *ad libitum* is the search for a sonorous result without sacrificing individualities. At the same time, a more creative position against extremely complicated (fixed) scores for instrumentists, although a more controlled one, compared to a total free one.

CONCLUSIONS

The special power displayed by Lutoslawski's work could reside in its rich assemblage and integration of diverse sublimes: a sublime of preservation, and a tragic-immanent sublime. It is performative in a lyotardian sense, from the perspective of the unpredictable inspiration of the interpreters. Regarding the work – content itself, Michaux's poems are telling of a Schopenahuerian conception. But here it is necessary to attend to the final appreciation that the aesthetic contemplation in Schopenhauer becomes mainly a way of dealing with struggling situations, a recent perspective developed by Vandenabeele (2015). It also contributes to the sonorous sublime as an intermediate case between tonal and pervasive experimental repertories. Lutoslawski takes romantic procedures to an extreme, but his informality is moderate in comparison to postmodern experiments: a-synchronicity by arithmetical procedures, indeterminacy by controlled aleatoric techniques, and a notion of color through noises, whispers, and shouts (Stucky [1981]: 141-147).

At the philosophical level, the aim of this paper is to argument both on the *sublime in music*, interpreted now under the «text painting» technique, drawing on the content level of the poems, and the *musically sublime*, by indeterminate harmonic-colouristic, polychronic and dramatic tendencies. This double situation clarifies the objection whether the text alone would elicit sublime feelings without taking into consideration the music.

In the context of a major project on the sublime within an extended theory of reason, this is one among other cases for future research. This example arrived at the topic of uneasy feelings; other examples contribute to the argument of the cognitive-perceptual relevance of music, for example, by widening our perception of infinite spatial dimension, by mimicking profound existential questions, by increasing comprehension through minimal ascetic gestures, or via «de-composing».

The remaining tasks and ideas contained in these reflections are: to restate the idea of the sublime present in philosophies from XVIII century according to which the experience of the sublime becomes an exercise in mental self-expansion (Baillie [1747]: I, 4), i.e. to emphasize primarily not the obtaining of a final pleasure, neither moral edification, nor cathartic goal, but «thought-stimulation». In this sense, it is compatible with the latest results in experimental psychology (Hanich *et. al.* [2014]: 3). Last, in the line of a pragmatic understanding of aesthetic behaviour, this is an exemplary case of the role by which master works help in resuming our everyday lives (Ibarlucía [2014]: 62, 72).

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Culture and Affect in Aesthetic Experience of Pictorial Realism: An Eighteenth-Century Korean Literatus' Reception of Western Religious Painting in Beijing[1]

Ju-Yeon Hwang

Abstract. Cultural factors are operating in the aesthetic experience of pictorial realism, occurring in a transcultural manner, and their effects are salient in beholder's affective reaction correlated with perceptual-cognitive operation. This paper aims to demonstrate this hypothesis, by developing two analytical tools that might explain the anti-hedonic valence of Hong Taeyong, an eighteenth-century Korean literatus' aesthetic experience of a Western religious fresco depicting the Lamentation of Christ in a Jesuit Catholic church in Beijing. First, a complex multifold conflict between «actual affect» and culturally modeled «ideal affect», operating simultaneously in his visual experience, might be translated into a highly negative valence of his global affective state. Second, the variance of processing fluencies at different levels would have made his global processing operation less fluid, and it might play a role in his negative affective valence, since the affect is inherent in processing fluency signal.

Keywords. Aesthetic experience of pictorial realism, «ideal affect» and «actual affect», «perceptual fluency» and «conceptual fluency», Hong Taeyong.

Pictorial realism is usually understood in terms of picture's visual quality or subject matter, but it can also be conceived of as a perceiver's aesthetic experience of the feeling of seeing the real in the picture. Still life paintings by the famous seventeenth-century Dutch artist Cornelis de Heem, for instance, are «realistic» mainly by virtue of their detailed description and three-dimensional rendering of flowers, fruits, foods, etc., though the depicted objects might inadvertently suggest symbolic meanings or contents. Courbet's monumental painting *A Burial at Ornans* is «realistic», as it represents an ordinary, but actual scene, gathering together the clergy, a mayor, and people from all works of life, without any idealization or «evident rhetoric of classical or romantic beauty» (Schapiro [1941-1942]:

[1] I am very grateful for the comments by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Bence Nanay, and Daeyeol Kim.

181). The realism of each painting is explained, in the European art tradition, as two different types of matter. But this does not necessarily imply that it is experienced as two distinctive affairs in our mind. A beholder, European or not, may have the impression of seeing *real* beautiful and vivid flowers in de Heem's paintings, and *real* men and women attending a burial ceremony in Courbet's painting, even without fully realizing the visual quality of the Flemish still life paintings, nor having any information about the nineteenth-century French Realism. These two paintings would be *commonly* realistic for *this* beholder, whatever the philosophical foundations of their visual languages are, or whatever the cultural and social contexts of their originations and developments are. This cognitive feeling of seeing the real is not an automatic consequence of picture's visual quality or subject matter, nor a delusion about picture's status as representations. It might be rather a token of the easiness or fluency of perceptual-cognitive operations whose dynamics can also be affected by variables irrelevant to the picture's quality or subject, such as presentation duration. This paper does not concern pictorial realism as a matter of picture's properties or symbolic systems, but as a subjective visual experience.

However, the term «aesthetic» may blur what is meant by this psychological conception of realism, as it carries in our ordinary language some connotations rooted in the European philosophical tradition, such as «objective beauty», «passive reception of sense impression». The reader will then be invited to bear in mind that aesthetic experience, in this paper, does not refer to any passive sensory experience of beauty objectified in the picture qualified as realist or naturalist by art historians or artists themselves, but to the subjective experience characterized by a particular type of cognitive conduct differentiated from other non-aesthetic cognitive conducts in its functional self-sufficiency (Schaeffer [1996]). In other words, a beholder's perceptual experience of pictorial realism will be *aesthetic* when his cognitive conduct is regulated by affective or hedonic valence resulting from his perceptual-cognitive operation (Winkielman, *et al.* [2003], and Reber, *et al.* [2004]).

Based on these ideas, I will bring forward two main arguments. Firstly, the subjective experience of pictorial realism has a *transcultural* dimension, as perceptual-cognitive processing fluency underpins beholder's feeling of seeing the real, consciously or not consciously experienced. Secondly, cultural factors are operating in this transcultural experience, and it seems to be salient in perceiver's affective reaction, rather than in his perceptual or cognitive abilities alone. These arguments will be supported by the analytical observation of the eighteenth-century Korean literati's reception of Western paintings created by European Jesuit painters working in China. The case of Hong Taeyong will constitute a particular field to study, in order to conceive a possible function of cultural factors in affective reaction.

1. KOREAN ENVOYS TO BEIJING AND WESTERN «ILLUSIONISTIC» PAINTINGS

Many of eighteenth-century Korean envoys to the capital of Qing dynasty visited Catholic churches, called «Hall of Heavenly Lord(天主堂)». The most frequented ones are the *Nantang*(南堂), South Church, and the *Dontang*(東堂), East Church. Almost all of those who looked in on these curious places, according to their travelogues, are reported to have been surprised, to varying degrees, by their visual experiences of Western paintings, especially pictorial images of Christ, marked by their feelings of seeing a *real* person or place, or *living* creatures (Shin, Ik-Cheol [2006]: 23-24). It raises two preliminary questions: one about the characteristics of the Western paintings perceived by them, and one about the eighteenth-century social and historical settings that permitted them these exotic experiences.

First, what kind of Western paintings did Korean envoys in Beijing perceive? Unfortunately, these paintings don't exist any longer. But we can conjecture them, relying upon their literary descriptions. Kim Ch'angŏp(金昌業, 1658-

1721), a Korean literatus who visited the *Nantang* in 1713 briefly recorded in his travelogue *Nogajae yŏnhaeng ilgi*(老稼齋燕行日記, *Nogajae's Diary of Travel to Beijing*) that he saw in the church «a little image hanging on the north wall», depicting a person «holding a fire-pearl with their hair down and naked shoulder», and that the «face» of this person «looked alive».[2] Another Korean literatus Yi Kiji(李器之, 1690 – 1722), according to his travelogue *Iram yŏngi*(一庵燕記, *Iram's Records of Travel to Beijing*), visited the same Catholic church about seven years later, and also saw a painting of Christ on the north wall. He wrote that one person «wearing in red», «surrounded by six persons popping in and out», «standing in the middle of clouds» with which «the niche was filled» (Yi, Kiji [2016]: 247). These two records suggest that the picture of Christ decorating the north wall of the South Church had changed. The image perceived by Kim Ch'angŏp would be painted on canvas or wood, and the one by Yi Kiji would be *quadratura* of mimetic fresco. This change does not simply mean the modification of materiality, but the introduction of a new, more «illusionistic» or theatrical style. The illusionistic painting described by Yi Kiji can be supposed to have been painted by G. Castiglione(1688-1766, known as «Lang Shining(郎世寧)» in China, and as «Nang Senyŏng» in Korea), as this famous Milanese painter would have decorated all four walls of the *Nantang* with *quadratura* after his arrival in Beijing in 1715 on (Kleutghen [2015]: 81, and Musillo [2016]: 98). Trained in the tradition of Milanese Baroque developed during the seventeenth century, Castiglione had «a sensitivity to texture, color, and light», an exceptional skill to «mimic the appearance of a wide range of textures», and a sufficient ability to use perspective. These technical qualities permitted him to «realistically render any type of object», or to realize *quadratura* (Musillo [2016]: 78-79). The Western paintings perceived by Korean literati in Catholic churches after Castiglione's arrival in Beijing, therefore, would be more «illusionistic», yet slightly adapted to the Chinese pictorial tradition[3], and their visual experiences of these paintings were marked by the cognitive feeling of seeing the real.

Second, what was the social or historical factors of the eighteen century that fostered Korean literati's visual experiences of the Western paintings in Beijing's Catholic churches? In fact, throughout the Chosŏn dynasty(1392-1897) in Korea traveling abroad was a privilege granted only to a small number of men by government (Lim, Jongtae [2009]: 381). It relied largely upon the Sino-Korean political and diplomatic relations that shaped two countries' tributary practice functioning also as the main medium for the reception of Western civilization in the Chosŏn society. Korean intellectuals in tributary missions traveled to Beijing where European Jesuit missionaries had established their foothold from the very beginning of the seventeenth century. They could seldomly meet and discuss with these westerners, but often see and get books on European sciences and Christianity, and exotic Western cultural objects such as scientific instruments, Catholic iconography, European-style world map.

However, the Sino-Korean relations underwent an antagonistic period in the seventeenth century, following the transition from the Ming dynasty(1368-1644) of the Han Chinese to the Qing dynasty(1636-1912) of the Manchu. On the one hand, an anti-Qing sentiment prevailed in the late Chosŏn society that suffered from the Qing's invasion of 1637, and that considered itself as the only legitimate successor of the Ming dynasty or its «noble legacy». On the other hand, suffering from political instability mainly caused by various rebellions, the Qing dynasty doubted the loyalty of Chosŏn court, and thus «imposed strict regulations on the behavior of the Korean envoys in Beijing» until the late seventeenth century (Lim, Jongtae [2013]: 94). With little freedom to move

[2] 北壁掛一像。其人散髮袒臂。持火珠。面如生。(Kim, Ch'angŏp [1712])

[3] It is well known that Castiglione did not use a strong chiaroscuro in painting the imperial couple, for instance, because it «represented in Chinese eyes an unfortunate omen». (Musillo [2008]: 46)

about the city, they could not make a significant contact with Jesuit missionaries, nor visit freely Catholic churches. These mutual antagonisms and skepticisms had gradually weakened, as the Qing's political situation had been stabilized in the early eighteenth century. «More freedom to tour the city» was then allowed to Chosŏn envoys in Beijing, especially to a special group of young literati, called *chaje kun'gwan*(子弟軍官, younger relatives as military officer). Taken by three top officials of diplomatic mission(三使) as private attendants free from formal duties, *chaje kun'gwan* were in fact literary scholars having an opportunity of a lifetime to visit China. They had an intellectual curiosity in Western learning, and a literary talent to record their experiences (Shin, Ik-Cheol [2006]: 14-18). The relaxed climate during the eighteenth century could foster their more active contact with the Western civilization, and the enrichment of their travel report in number and in style. Korean intellectuals visiting Beijing on their tributary missions used to write a travelogue as a documented report, focusing on official affairs such as itineraries and assigned duties. But from the early eighteenth century, they, notably *chaje kun'gwan* began to narrate their personal experiences during the travel, and to describe social and cultural features observed in Beijing. This kind of literary works is generically called *Yŏnhaeng rok*(燕行錄, *Record of Travel to Beijing*) (Lim, Jongtae [2016]: 186).

Given these preliminary overviews, this paper will only focus on the case of Hong Taeyong(洪大容, 1731–1783), an eighteenth-century Korean scholar, as described in his travelogue *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaeng rok*(*Records of Travel to Beijing between 1765 and 1766*), for two reasons. Firstly, the paintings perceived by Hong Taeyong in Beijing in 1766 were located in *Nantang* and *Dontang* that had been commonly decorated by Castiglione. Furthermore, Korean envoys' visits to Catholic churches in Beijing, according to their travel writings, occurred chiefly during the second half of the eighteenth century, and were practically limited to these two places that were located nearest their official residence, *Ok'agwan*(玉河館, *Yuheguan* in Chinese). The aesthetic experiences of Hong Taeyong, triggered by his visual perception of Western paintings in Beijing, may thus well exemplify to a certain extent Korean visitors' reception of these European «illusionistic» paintings. Secondly, his travelogue *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaeng rok*, one of the most popular travel literatures during the late Chosŏn period, contains relatively detailed description of his personal experiences, including some sensory and emotional episodes. He wrote two books on his travel to Beijing. One is *Tamhŏn yŏn'gi*(*Tamhŏn's Records of Travel to Beijing*, 湛軒燕記) written in classical Chinese for Korean literati. It describes his journey as well as Chinese cultures by topics in an objective manner. The other is *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaeng rok* written in Korean for his mother who never visited Beijing like the majority of Koreans during the Chosŏn period. It is a personal diary. The latter may therefore provide us with a more subjective dimension of his visual experiences of Western paintings.

When he accompanied his uncle Hong Ŏk(1722-1809) as *chaje kun'gwan* in a tribute mission to the Qing court between 1765 and 1766, Hong Taeyong visited the South Church three times and the East Church one time, and saw European paintings decorating the interior of these sacred places. His visual experiences are marked by spectacular feelings of seeing the real, like those of many other Korean envoys to Beijing. On his first visit to the South Church on the lunar January 9, 1766, he saw an illusionistic mural painting. According to his description:

> *Entering (the Hall) by a big door, (I saw that) there existed another door in the West. In the East, there existed a beautiful brick wall in which a half-open door was, while houses appeared indistinctly through the door. I asked a question to (my coachman) Sepal. He laughed and answered that it was not an actual door, but a mural painting realized in order to show (Western painters') skills off. Marveled, I approached the wall and found that it was not a real door, but a mural painting. It sufficed me to imagine Western painter's dexterity. (Hong, Taeyong [1997]: 281)*

What he saw was a «scenic illusion painting(通景畫, *tongjinghua*)» by Castiglione. This mural

painting evoked the strong experience of seeing a three-dimensional scene in the perceiver's mind, to such an extent that Hong Taeyong did not recognize at first glance the conventional identity of the perceived object. This unawareness lasted only for an extremely short lapse of time. He could identify the three-dimensional scene perceived as a mural painting, immediately after Sepal's simple remark. Then what seems important in this anecdote is that he could experience the feeling of pictorial realism in perceiving a painting whose basic visual languages were emerged and developed in European culture totally unfamiliar to this Korean literatus of the late eighteenth century. This belongs to the global transcultural phenomena that D. Lopes (1995) called «revelatory realism» for the novelty or unfamiliarity of the system of representation used. Lopes accounts it in terms of «appropriate informativeness». Pictures from an «unfamiliar system of representation», according to him, may deliver «unexpected» but «required» information, so it can «sometimes be more realistic than pictures belonging to the habitual systems».(Lopes[1995]: 279-280) But this theory does not seem to explain why unfamiliarity may sometimes cause the cognitive experience of realism. Do the appropriate information of an «unfamiliar» system operate in viewer's perceptual processing fluency? In fact, the cultural unfamiliarity of Hong Taeyong did not prevent the occurrence of this experience. It was rather easy for him to recognize what is represented in the picture surface, a three dimensional construction of architectural scene. Actually, he was not unaware of the fact that the «law of proportion based on the mathematical calculation» is underpinning this «illusionistic» painting[4]. But the possession of this vague knowledge may not disprove that the Western cultures apparently or implicitly embodied in this picture were foreign to him.

However, one may wonder about this transcultural dimension, in supposing that the architectural scene perceived in the mural painting may be less biased by cultural factors. Wouldn't he had lived the perceptual experience of pictorial realism, if the perceived object had more symbolic content culturally specified? But, as we have already seen in the visual experiences of Kim Ch'angŏp and of Yi Kiji, the higher degree of cultural specificity of the Western religious paintings had actually not prevent Chosŏn literati from experiencing this subjective feeling of pictorial realism in their mind. It was also the case for Hong Taeyong. When he visited the South Church on the lunar January 19, 1766, almost half a century after Yi Kiji's visit, he saw:

> *In the middle of the north wall, there was a picture of a person wearing women's clothes and their hair down. With the half-closed eyes, looking far away, this person appeared worried. They is who we call the Heavenly Lord. Their form and clothes gave the impression that they stood in the air, and it seemed that they was in a deep niche. Then, at first glance, I took them as a statue, but after getting closer to it, I realized that they was a painting. The pupils of their eyes however gave the feeling of seeing a living person. That was a bizarre art of painting. (Hong, Taeyong [1997]: 285)*

On perceiving this religious painting probably also painted by Castiglione, Hong Taeyong had easily and quickly recognized its three-dimensional description. He perceived a person «wearing women's clothes and their hair down», «standing in the air», «in a deep niche». His visual awareness was not limited to its physical identification. It also reached the identification of this person's emotional state embodied in their corporeal form, and the recognition of the cultural identity of the portrayed. A «strange» human figure looking like a woman, gazing into the air «with the half-closed eyes», gave him the impression of being «worried» about something, and this person is the «Heavenly Lord».

Hong Taeyong had some detailed knowledges of Beijing's Catholic churches, previously acquainted through Yi Kiji's travelogue, and would have looked forward to see the famous image of the «Heavenly Lord» painted on the north wall in

[4] 盖聞洋畫之妙。不惟巧思過人。有裁割比例之法。專出於算術也。(Hong, Taeyong [1939])

the South Church(Lim, Jongtae [2009]: 383). This from-the-book knowledge would help him to recognize easily the cultural identity of the portrayed, but it did not suffice to make him more familiar to the European cultures incorporated in the picture perceived. He found this picture «bizarre». This cultural «strangeness» did not however prevent him from perceiving immediately the corporal and facial expression of the portrayed human figure. The emotional state of Christ, a compassion or a grief, visualized in the «symbolic form» of this Western painting, might be transmitted to this young Korean Confucian literatus, without any linguistic mediation. He could have «the feeling of seeing a living person», and perceive this person's emotional state, in spite of his lacking knowledge about Christian religion or Catholic iconography, or of the strong cultural heterogeneity underlying the feeling of «bizarreness» or «strangeness».

2. ANTI-HEDONIC EXPERIENCE OF THE LAMENTATION PAINTING

Saying that the experience of pictorial realism occurs in a transcultural manner does certainly not imply that this experience is acultural, nor deny that culture affects it. It simply supposes that the perceiver's cultural specificity could function as a differentiating factor of his transcultural experience, and that this differentiation would be more salient in the affective or emotional dimension than in the perceptual or cognitive dimension, without any opposition nor impermeability between these two dimensions. When a beholder experiences a pictorial realism in a transcultural manner, his affective or emotional state triggered by this experience may vary according to the interrelation between his cultural background and the «symbolic forms» embodied in the picture perceived. In other words, culturally heterogenous perceivers might undergo different emotional states, with varying degrees, in their perceptual experiences of pictorial realism.

Another story written down by Hong Taeyong on his visual experience of the Lamentation painting seems to show well that the affective dimension inherent to this transcultural experience could be differentiated by cultural factors. When he visited the *Dongtang* on the lunar January 24, 1766, he saw some frescoes of religious subjects on the north, east, and west walls. On the north wall was painted an image of Christ, and on the east wall a picture representing a «princely» scene composed of a «multi-floor building», «a crowd of people sitting down», «flags», and other decorations. The visual experience of these two paintings seems to have been pleasing for him to a certain extent, although he evaluated them as «bizarre» or «strange» probably owing to his unfamiliarity with the Western culture operating in them. His brief description revealed slightly his admiration or positive appreciation of their visual quality to realistically render figures, buildings, objects: «Looking at them from a distance», he could not have realized that the perceived scene was a picture. But the picture on the west wall was highly «disgusting» for him. He wrote that:

> *On the west wall was painted the corpse of a man laid on a coffin of which dolefully crying men and women were standing or throwing themselves down (on the ground) by the side. I was so much disgusted that I could not look at this picture squarely. I asked Wang the reason (for their mourning), and he answered me «This is a picture depicting the corpse of Heavenly Lord». (Hong, Taeyong [1997]: 403)*

The perception of this picture representing the Lamentation of Christ stimulated in his mind a highly negative affect, so that he lost the desire to continue to pay his visual attention to it, and turned his eyes away from it. This experience was anti-hedonic for him. But it was not in conflict with his experience of pictorial realism. He would have the vivid feeling of seeing a mournful scene with his own eyes, in which people «cried» pathetically around «the corpse of a man laid on a coffin». In other words, all of the three religious frescoes perceived in the East Church seem to have commonly triggered in his mind the conscious or non-conscious experience of pictorial realism, but

only the one painted on the west wall stirred up an extremely negative affect.

The painting described above apparently representing the Lamentation, one of the major moments of the Passion of Christ, is not extant any longer. It is therefore impossible to examine or analyse its visual characteristics that would be operative in his affective reaction correlated with his psychological process. We can, however, conjecture them to a certain extent by supposing its author and social context of production. The East Church where Hong Taeyong saw these religious paintings underwent an important modification of architecture and decoration in the 1720s. Originally founded in 1655, it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1720, and then the Jesuit order commissioned its renovation to Castiglione who had already been working on the mural paintings of this Portuguese church from 1715 on. This Italian painter did not work alone. He collaborated with a Florentine architecture Ferdinando Bonaventura Moggi(1684-1761, known as «Li Boming (利博明)» in China), and certainly received the help of Chinese artisans in preparing the decoration, such as making «a smooth foundation» on which he painted pictures as well as faux marbles and bronzes (Musillo [2015]: 313, and Musillo [2016]: 98). The East Church was reopened in 1728, and seems to have had no major architectural change until it was damaged by fire in 1807, and finally demolished in 1811 by imperial decree. Hence, the mural paintings perceived by Hong Taeyong in the East Church in 1766, it could be surmised, were painted by Castiglione during this period of renovation from 1720 to 1728 for the Jesuit commission, and they were different in their style from the previous Western religious paintings produced in accordance with Ricci's policy of accommodation, and still probably from his other surviving paintings produced for the commissions of the Qing emperors. They would be painted rather in the seventeenth-century Italian Baroque style, where paintings, architectures, and sculptures were integrated into decorative ensembles.

Having «received the artistic training outside the Order» in his native city Milan before his departure for China, Castiglione was a professional painter as well as a member of the Jesuit order (Musillo [2008]: 48-49). He would be able to work for various commissions offered by different clients, religious or not, and the quality of his paintings relied in part upon what these clients or patrons demanded and afforded. In other words, accepting the Jesuit commission, he did not create religious paintings merely for decorative purpose. They should meet the institutional ends of Catholic church constructed in a foreign land, i.e., the proselytization of the Chinese and eventually the other East Asians. Furthermore, this Italian Jesuit missionary-painter executed the decoration of the East Church during the period in which the Qing government began to take hostile actions against Catholicism. In spite of some Jesuit missionaries' presence at court thanks to their scientific knowledge or artistic skill and to their policy of accommodation, this Western religion had to confront the anti-Catholic measures taken by the Qing government from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, resulting in restriction on the Jesuit missionaries from preaching in public places (Loewe [1988]). It might have then exerted influence on the religious paintings decorating the interior of the Catholic churches in Beijing, so that their visual forms should be as much eloquent as verbal means for the East Asian visitors ignoring the principles of Christianity (Jeong, Eun-joo [2014]: 219-220). In short, the Western pictures perceived by Hong Taeyong in the East Church would be in the Baroque style not or less accommodated to the Chinese cultures and pictorial conventions, and they would be very *expressive* in order to deeply move the local beholder's ignorant mind, with visual quality characterized by realistic rendering of objects, materials, buildings, human figures.

However, these three mural paintings did not arouse the same affective value in his mind. He experienced a strong feeling of revulsion in perceiving the picture representing the scene of Lamentation over the dead Christ, whereas he enjoyed perceiving two other «strange» Western religious paintings, yet probably painted in the same style.

What did generate this difference of affective reaction? One possible and attractive answer is that he shared the negative emotions of the mourners, and this empathic experience is quite unpleasant for him. This account does not seem to be effective in understanding the highly anti-hedonic nature of his visual experience of the Lamentation painting. The event of Lamentation itself is certainly sad or doleful, whether it is fictitious or not. An empathic onlooker would eventually feel deep sorrow or grief, and dislike this negative emotional experience. But once this event is painted in the religious or proselytical context, its affective content may be altered. In other words, it is not necessarily identified with the painting's affective content that would be intended to be transmitted to beholder's mind, and this purposed affective content may be enjoyed by beholders aware or not of this intentionality. Furthermore, it has been well known that a beholder's affective reaction is directed toward «what represents» (i.e., the picture of the Lamentation), rather than toward «what is represented» (i.e., the event of Lamentation itself), since Aristotle indicates in his *Poetics* that we get pleasure from perceiving visual representations of things unpleasant to see such as «the most repulsive animals» or «corpses» (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b). The anti-hedonic valence of Hong Taeyong's affective reaction was thus not due to the negative affective content of the mournful event itself, but it was triggered by his visual experience of the painting that anyway deals with highly negative emotion. However, «empathic experience of negatively emotional art» is generally «valued» or «desired», as we can easily see in appreciation of tragedy (Levinson [2006]: 51). This eighteenth-century Korean literatus, on the contrary, eagerly wanted to avoid it. Thus, at first sight, there seems to be no puzzling «paradox» to resolve or explain in his anti-hedonic experience occurred in a cross-cultural context. But this case suggests that cultural factors are operating in our emotional reaction, paradoxical or not. His anti-hedonic valence could be therefore explained to a significant degree only in conceiving the complex correlation operated by perception, affect, and culture.

3. CONFLICT BETWEEN «IDEAL AFFECT» AND «ACTUAL AFFECT»

Admitting the distinction between «ideal affect» and «actual affect» formulated by Affect Valuation Theory, this paper argues that a conflict between affective states might be translated into negative hedonic valence in beholder's visual experience. This recent psychological study differentiates two affective states, the «ideal» one and the «actual» one, that can be commonly estimated by a combination of two underlying dimensions, «valence(positive/negative)» and «arousal(high/low)». For example, enthusiastic is high-arousal positive affective state, whereas dull is low-arousal negative affective state. «Ideal affect» refers to «the affective state that people value and would ideally like to feel», whereas «actual affect» refers to «the affective state that people actually feel», measurable in physiological terms like heart rate, skin conductances. «Cultural factors» such as norms, beliefs, rituals, religions, artifacts, shape «ideal affect» more than «actual affect», whereas «temperamental factors» such as neuroticism, extraversion, sensation seeking, shape «actual affect» more than «ideal affect». These two affective states constitute two «distinct entities» that may «interact» (Tsai, *et al.* [2006], and Tsai [2007]). When one values serenity, low-arousal positive affective state, in visiting a Buddhist temple, for instance, he may actually feel serene, but also sleepy, low-arousal negative affective state, or excited, high-arousal positive affective state. The anticipated or desired «ideal» affective state relative to this place is shaped by cultural factors specific to a given social group historically derived. It may be shared within a same cultural group, and its variation can be explained in terms of cultural differences. But the «actual» affective state is not modeled by cultural factors. It can be similar or same despite cultural differences. The global affective state would be affected by the interaction of these two affective states that may be discordant to varying degrees, and the highly negative hedonic valence of Hong Taeyong's visual experience might be explained as underlying conflict between «ideal affects» and

«actual affects». This conflict is however multiple and complex. At least, three kinds are working in his experience of the Lamentation painting.

Firstly, his «actual affect» is conflict with the picture's «ideal affect» embodied through culturally specific visual forms such as gesticulations, facial configurations, postures, color. The picture perceived by Hong Taeyong is religious painting. It would represent, probably in the Baroque style, a scene of Lamentation of Christ, occupied by a group of mourning persons who are presumably making pathetic or dramatic gestures and patterns of body. Their corporeal forms might be perceived as an externalization of their deep and impassioned grief, a high-arousal negative affective state. But this is not the «ideal affect» that the author or the religious institution would like to make beholder feel. Religious painting displayed in the missionary context cannot be simply decorative or artistic. It is highly «intentional», with the pedagogic function of illustrating or teaching the Christianity, and also with the spiritual function of arousing in beholder's mind a kind of the devout sentiment, or a strong feeling of piety. Figures' actions or movements depicting the event charged with negative strong emotion would be intended to ideally evoke a positive affective state in beholder's mind. This discordance of two opposite affective states embodied in the same visual image would induce a kind of invisible affective tension in the picture. Hong Taeyong seems to have responded to this tension implicitly underpinning the picture, yet without being aware of its «ideal» affective dimension having a positive valence, and he «actually» felt «disgusted», high-arousal negative affective state that was in conflict with the positive «ideal» affect.

Secondly, his «ideal affect» in funerary rituals was in conflict with the «actual» affective state of the grieving figures represented in the painting, whether these figures were fictives or not. «Men and women», according to his description, were «dolefully crying» over a man's corpse probably naked and visibly wounded or having suffered. It suggests that they were actually feeling intense sorrow, and expressing it in a passionate way without seemingly any prescribed restriction on their behaviors or actions of mourning. Their «actual» affective state may be described as high-arousal negative, and *presentificated* in the mind of an eighteenth-century Korean perceiver totally unfamiliar to the Western Catholic culture.

Hong Taeyong lived and had grown up in the late Chosŏn society which had been firmly ordered by Confucian values such as filial piety(孝), humaneness(仁), rituals(禮). The Chosŏn dynasty was founded in the very late fourteenth century by the Neo-Confucians who had «a commitment to transforming their own society into a Confucian society» profoundly different from the Buddhist society of the previous Koryŏ dynasty(918-1392). These Chosŏn Confucian literati were willing to constitute «a model for perfect ritual behavior and a sound sociopolitical order», mainly depending on the ancient «Chinese» canonical works such as *Yegi*(禮記, *Book of Rites,* in Chinese *Liji*), *Ŭirye*(儀禮, *Book of Etiquette and Ceremony*, in Chinese *Yili*), already known in Korea for centuries, that depict in great detail an ideal Confucian society. They also particularly relied on the *Chuja karye*(朱子家禮, *Family Rituals of Master Zhu Xi*, in Chinese *Zhuzijiali*) written in the twelfth century as commentaries on these ancient canonical works on rituals, and as «guidebook» for normalization of major social rituals like wedding, funeral, ancestor worship (Deuchler [1992]: 25). But this transformation had been only gradually realized, as the rites deeply connected with people's daily life. The Confucian ideology about ritual behaviors or actions had thus established in the Chosŏn society only by the late seventeenth century. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the age of Hong Taeyong, Confucian ritual norms were performed and shared by all social classes from commoners to Kings. In other words, all funeral-related rituals of the Chosŏn society were organized by Confucian idealized ethical values. They were characterized by a long series of interconnected complex actions that should be progressively performed during twenty-seven months, although the actual mortuary process did not comprise every single action.

However, this long and complex funerary ritual based upon filial piety, one of the most important Confucian values, might be intended to properly control or regulate the mourning of the offspring who «lost(喪)» their parent. Surely, according to *Books of Rites*[5], «grieving over the dead is the most important in funerary rites», but it should be conducted in such a way that the mourners «retain their grief» and «accept the change», passing from one ritual action to another[6]. They were advised against passionate expression of their sorrow for the dead person[7], as this kind of action, according to the Confucian teaching of filial piety, is harmful to the health of the bodies received from their parents. It never implies that all Koreans of the late Chosŏn period did not actually feel deep and intense sorrow, nor express it in an impassioned manner, but that the Korean Confucian norms valued the properly restrained grief through complex funerary rituals organizing actions or bodies. Accordingly, the «ideal affect» of Hong Taeyong, relative to the funeral, may be qualified as negative with low-arousal, and collide with the «actual affect» of the mourners depicted in the picture perceived.

Thirdly, how he would ideally like to feel in appreciating picture was in conflict with his own actual affective state triggered by the perception of this Western religious painting. The art played a specific role for the Korean literati of the Chosŏn society, educated in the Confucian tradition that insists on the ethical effect of artistic activities and aesthetic experiences in developing, cultivating, and improving individual's human nature harmonious with the social order or life. They enjoyed playing a musical instrument, writing a poem, making brushstrokes in calligraphing or painting, and appreciating works of art, not just for their «inner pleasure», but as an important practical means of moral education that may improve both their personal character and the orderly society (Huang, Siu-Chi [1963]: 55-57, and Shusterman [2009]: 20). Appreciating a picture did not consist, for them, in evaluating the picture's purely formal quality, but in recognizing and savoring the moral quality or mental state of the author or of the portrayed, «transmitted» through the visible traces of brushstrokes in an allusive manner. It is conceived of as a pleasurable psychological journey that guides the beholder toward the ideal of sagehood. When a Confucian literatus sees a bamboo painting done by Ni Zan(倪瓚, 1301 – 1374), a Chinese literatus-painter during the Yuan, for instance, he is invited to live or presentificate in his mind the hermit-like spirit of the painter who withdrew to live a reclusive life, refusing to serve the Mongol dynasty (See Escande [2000]). Grown up as elite of the Chosŏn society, Hong Taeyong would be trained to enjoy a serene but pleasant state of mind in appreciating pictures. It does not, however, imply that he actually experienced this kind of mental state, whenever he perceived them. He might have a cultural habit of anticipating an idealized visual experience with low-arousal positive affective state, and his «ideal affect» and «actual affect» would thus be conflictual in his experience of the Lamentation painting.

Cultural factors are underpinning these multiple and complex conflictual affective states, by shaping «ideal affects» through education, circulation of «symbolic forms», rituals. This multifold conflict between «ideal affects» and «actual affects» would be simultaneously operating in the visual experience of Hong Taeyong perceiving the Lamentation of Christ. It might be translated into anti-hedonic valence of his global affective state that he verbalized in terms of «disgust». The anti-hedonic valence of his visual experience is not a supplemental value subsequently attributed by him. It is immediately elicited in his mind.

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[5] *Book of Rites*, one of the Five Classics of Confucian literature, is a collection of descriptions of ritual matters which are said to have been taught by the ancient sage Confucius(551-479 BC). During the first century BC, books on ritual matters were extensively reworked and arranged by the Confucian scholar Dai De(戴德), and also by his nephew Dai Sheng(戴聖). The compilation by Dai Sheng, according to historians, would become later the classic on rituals. (*Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*)

[6] 喪禮 哀戚之至也。節哀 順變也。(*Yegi*: 203)

[7] 哀毁 (*Yegi*: 247)

4. VARIANCE OF PROCESSING FLUENCIES

Admitting the distinction between «perceptual fluency» and «conceptual fluency» proposed by the hedonic marking theory, this paper argues that a highly negative hedonic valence of Hong Taeyong's visual experience may also be consciously or not consciously reinforced by the discordance between these two processing fluencies. According to this recent psychophysiological research on the fluency-affect-evaluation link, a hedonic valence is intrinsically associated to the processing fluency signal (Winkielman *et. al.* [2003], and Reber *et. al.* [2004]). The processing of any stimulus can generate a fluency signal available also to the affect system, via some internal feedback meta-cognitive mechanism. A processing fluency signal itself is so «hedonically marked» without being necessarily experienced in a conscious manner, and a high operational fluency can elicit a positive affect that contributes to a more positive evaluation of a given stimulus. In other words, the processing fluency itself can be a source of perceiver's affect or hedonic valence. It implies two significant points that seem to improve our understanding of the affective reaction of Hong Taeyong. Firstly, a perceiver's affective reaction can be triggered without an intellectual operation like analysis or inference, that consists in attributing a hedonic value to stimulus' certain features or to the experience of fluency itself. It can immediately result from his processing fluency, though it may be experienced as a result of an intentional action in our conscious mind. Second, as the dynamics of information processing are not specific to the stimulus, a perceiver's affective reaction is not determined by the stimulus, contrary to our ordinary linguistic habits that externalize it as being oriented to the perceived thing. In fact, the same stimulus can be processed with high or low fluency, following the changes of variables that affect just the processing manipulation, like presentation duration, figure-ground contrast, and a perceiver's affective reaction brought about by its perception can accordingly be positive or negative.

The proponents of this theory propose distinguishing «perceptual fluency» from «conceptual fluency», as processing fluency can «reflect processes and manipulations occurring at different levels». Perceptual fluency «reflects the ease of low-level, data-driven operations dealing primarily with» physical features of the stimulus, whereas conceptual fluency «reflects the ease of high-level operations concerned primarily with categorization and processing of a stimulus' relation to semantic variables». These two processes of low-level and of high-level «usually operate in concert, and support each other», but they can also be «dissociated» (Winkielman *et. al.* [2003]: 193-194). Their possible dissociation may involve a discordance between «perceptual fluency» and «conceptual fluency», that comes to reduce the global processing fluency, and as a result, the affective reaction would be less positive. It therefore seems to offer a useful conceptual device to explain the negative hedonic valence of certain visual experiences, in which the physical features and semantic structures of the perceived object are not processed with the same fluencies or easiness.

Perceiving the Lamentation painting, Hong Taeyong experienced a highly negative affective reaction. He said that he was «so much disgusted». This anti-hedonic value of his visual experience may be strengthened by the low processing fluency resulting from the discordance between the «perceptual fluency» of low-level operation and the «conceptual fluency» of high-level operation. A meaning of the picture perceived, simple or complex, physical or abstract, seems to be situated in or constructed by a web of multiple information that are not simply data-driven, but also knowledge-driven or experience-driven. All these information would not always be processed with the same easiness or operational fluency. Hong Taeyong was actually in the situation of processing fluency discordance. On the one hand, he easily and immediately identified the physical or formal configuration structured by lines, dots, colors, textures, etc., as «men and women», «standing or throwing themselves down», «crying dolefully over the corpse of a man laid on a coffin».

His perceptual recognition is however not a simple physical identification. It also implies a certain semantic categorization whose degree is yet relatively low. He successfully categorized the painting's visual configuration as a meaningful scene of funerary action, in which «men and women» were experiencing an intense feeling of grief for the dead «man». It can therefore be said that the data-driven information were processed with high fluency in the low-level operation, and that some conceptual information embodied in the figures' gestures and actions, the coffin, the corpse, were processed also with high fluency in the high-level operation. But on the other hand, it can also be said that he had a considerable difficulty to recognize the painting's whole semantic structure supported by the information visible on and in the picture, and also by the underlying information about cultural, historical, or conceptual factors working in it. The Lamentation painting is, foremost, religious one. Its most fundamental semantic values that the supposed author Castiglione and the commissioning Jesuit order would have intended to embody or foreground in the painting were surely spiritual or proselytical: In perceiving a picture depicting one of the central episodes of the Passion, beholders would have been stimulated to meditate on the life of Christ and the Bible, and to experience a feeling of zeal for Christ. This religious intention is not transparent to all beholders to the same degree. It is salient to those who have sufficient conceptual or symbolic access to this underlying semantic layer, whereas it is silent or opaque to those who don't have it, like Hong Taeyong. This eighteenth-century Korean literatus was not habituated to the European Catholic paintings, nor to the Christian doctrines or practices, though he was not totally ignorant of the Western cultures including paintings, sciences, and missionaries. (See Shin, Ik-Cheol [2006], and Baker [1982]) Neither did he possess any knowledge, highly symbolic or simply experience-driven, enough to properly and easily process the picture's intentional information. His semantic exploration of this painting was limited, and his high-level categorization remained incomplete. He was, however, on the spot, informed by a Chinese man named Wang, probably a simple doorkeeper of the church, that the dead man in the middle of the mournful scene was the «Heavenly Lord». But this simple knowledge did not improve his conceptual processing fluency, nor trigger in his mind a cognitive interest sufficient to reorient his visual attention to the picture. When he perceived it, the «conceptual processing» of high-level was much less fluid than his «perceptual processing» of low-level. This variance of processing fluencies at different levels seems to have made slow down or obstructed the *global* processing operation, and the low processing fluency thus generated would play a role in his anti-hedonic experience.

5. CONCLUSION

The perceptual experience of pictorial realism occurs in a transcultural manner, as illustrated in the eighteenth-century Korean literati's reception of the Western «illusionistic» paintings located in the Beijing's Catholic churches. But it does not imply at all that every beholder has the same experience regardless of cultural particularity. This experience may be differentiated by cultural factors historically derived, and this differentiation would be salient in beholder's affective or emotional reaction triggered by his perceptual-cognitive activities, more than in his perceptual or cognitive abilities themselves. It is demonstrated by conceiving two possible analytical tools that might explain the highly negative affective reaction of Hong Taeyong, elicited by his perception of a Western religious fresco depicting the Lamentation of Christ. The first tool is constructed in terms of conflictual affective states. A multiple and complex conflict between «ideal affects» and «actual affects», simultaneously operating in his visual experience, might immediately elicit an anti-hedonic reaction marking his global affective state. His cultural factors such as rituals, social values, artifacts, educations, are underpinning this affective reaction, by shaping his «ideal affects». It may then be derived that the hedonic valence of

aesthetic experience would be inversely proportional to the degree of conflictuality of these two affective states. When they are highly conflictual, the global hedonic or affective valence would be negative. When they are harmonious or well coordinated, it would be positive. The second tool is constructed in terms of discordant processing fluencies at different levels. Hong Taeyong processed very easily low-level information of the Lamentation painting. He recognized a mournful scene of funerary actions by human figures in intense grief. But he had not sufficient access to properly process its high-level information underpinning its semantic structure relative to the religious intention of its authors. The «conceptual fluency» is relatively low, whereas the «perceptual fluency» is very high. This variance of different processing fluencies would have slowed down his global processing operation. It would affect the global affective state of his visual experience, as the affect is inherent in processing fluency signal.

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Les frontières entre réel et imaginaire à l'épreuve des promenades sonores *in situ* (*Soundwalks*)[1]

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Abstract. This article examines the particular aesthetic experience brought about by soundwalks. In each case, the point of departure is the phenomenological analysis of two case study: Janet Cardiff's *Walks* and the audio-tours *Remote x* by *Rimini Protokoll*. Drawing upon Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, I will examine the conflicts of perception and the peculiar shift from one order of perception to another that punctuate the spectator's walking, as well as the intertwining of the real and the imaginary coming into being in such performances and experienced at the very level of his bodily inscription in space. More specifically, my aim is to address the challenge that the aesthetic experience here in question sets to Husserl's phenomenology of perception and to show how the extension of the notion of perception achieved by Merleau-Ponty makes it possible to overcome the paradox.

Keywords. Soundwalks, phenomenology of perception, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, *phantasia*.

Ce qui n'est pas remplaçable dans l'œuvre d'art, ce qui fait d'elle beaucoup plus qu'un moyen de plaisir: un organe de l'esprit dont l'analogue se retrouve en toute pensée philosophique ou politique si elle est productive, c'est qu'elle contient, mieux que des idées, des *matrices d'idées* ; qu'elle nous fournit d'emblèmes dont nous n'avons jamais fini de développer le sens, que, justement parce qu'elle s'installe et nous installe dans un monde dont nous n'avons pas la clef, elle nous apprend à voir et finalement nous donne à penser comme aucun ouvrage analytique ne peut le faire, parce que l'analyse ne peut trouver dans l'objet que ce que nous y avons mis[2].

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[2] Merleau-Ponty (1960): 125.

1. INTRODUCTION

Depuis quelques années, en France et en Allemagne, comme ailleurs, en Europe, des nombreux artistes s'attachent à mettre en scène des promenades sonores – solitaires ou collectives – où le(s) spectateur(s) se déplace(nt) de façon plus ou moins structurée dans l'espace urbain ou dans un site spécifique[3]. En quittant le lieu institutionnel où se déroule habituellement la représentation – soit le théâtre ou la salle de concert – ces pratiques déambulatoires investissent les lieux urbains pour construire un itinéraire transi d'imaginaire, dès que certains aspects de cette dite réalité révèlent quelque distinction ou accentuation que peuvent faire émerger les dispositifs artistiques.

Le procédé qu'elles privilégient s'inscrit plus précisément dans ce que Hans-Thies Lehmann, empruntant le terme aux arts plastiques, désigne comme le *Site Specific Theatre,* une pratique performative où «l'espace n'a pas pour finalité principale de fonctionner symboliquement pour un autre espace fictif, mais d'être accentué et occupé en tant que composante et comme *continuation* de l'espace réel» (Lehmann [2002]: 244). Sur un plan plus général, ces pratiques artistiques itinérantes appartiennent à une vague artistique, mieux connue, sous le nom de *Site Specific Art*.

« *Site-specific,* dit-on en anglais, *in situ* reprend-on en français, en empruntant à la terminologie latine. La notion renvoie à l'une des transformations esthétiques majeures de l'art contemporain et de son histoire, où l'œuvre n'est plus crée dans un espace donné – l'atelier – pour être déplacée vers un espace d'exposition – musée ou galerie – mais existe en corrélation étroite avec un lieu» (Morizot & Pouivet [2012]: 474-477) ou «site» réel, lui-même placé sous une lumière nouvelle, par l'inscription d'un acte performatif ou d'une errance qu'y ouvre des brèches imaginaires.

Trouver une manière appropriée pour décrire l'expérience esthétique que nous procurent ces pratiques artistiques est difficile, tant la frontière entre le réel et l'imaginaire s'y trouve, sinon évincée, du moins brouillée, par le développement d'une perception axée sur l'écoute (de l'environnement) et fortement incarnée dans la marche qui pour son propre compte engage un va-et-vient entre le réel sensoriel et une perception qui en démultiplie les horizons/esquisses, autant actuels que possibles. D'une part, l'imaginaire cesse d'être l'*autre* du réel et devient son prolongement. D'autre part et, corrélativement, le réel, loin d'être une réalité figée et immobile, apparaît lui-même transi d'imaginaire, vibrant de virtualités non encore réalisées et en latence, que la mobilisation du corps du spectateur peut faire émerger et prolonge donc son existence dans l'imaginaire artistique.

Lorsque, à ce point s'estompe la frontière entre l'expérience réelle et le vécu fictif, les conséquences sont lourdes pour l'expérience du spectateur qui s'y engage. En effondrant l'opposition réel-imaginaire, en laissant ces cadres se heurter, ces pratiques artistiques ont pour conséquence de transporter le spectateur dans un état liminaire d'entre-deux, et, parfois, de vertige, qui déstabilise non seulement l'ordre de la vision, mais aussi le fonctionnement même de son appareil perceptif

[3] En son sens strict et original, la « promenade sonore » est une pratique créative, ou plutôt performative, qui consiste à écouter tout en se déplaçant dans un endroit réel à un rythme de marche. Le terme a été utilisé pour la première fois par les membres du *World Soundscape Project* sous la direction du compositeur R. Murray Schafer à Vancouver dans les années 1970. Hildegard Westerkamp, membre de ce group d'artistes, définit la promenade sonore (*soundwalk*) comme «toute excursion dont le but principal est d'écouter l'environnement. C'est exposer nos oreilles à tous les bruits qui nous entourent, peu importe où nous sommes» (Westerkamp [1974]: 1) - traduction mienne. Le texte original en anglais est: «A soundwalk is any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment. It is exposing our ears to every sound around us no matter where we are», (Westerkamp [1974]: 1). Voir aussi, à ce sujet, Shafer (1977a) ; (1977b) ; (1977c). Mais, la promenade sonore a été utilisé aussi comme support artistique par des artistes visuels et des documentaristes, tels que Janet Cardiff et le collectif berlinois Rimini Protokoll et c'est à ce titre que je vais l'analyser ici. Un tel choix implique que je ne rentrerai pas dans le détail de l'analyse de la dimension sonore et acoustique et technologique, en tant que telle, puisque le focus de mon attention est centré sur les effets qu'elle produit sur la perception du spectateur.

tout entier (auditif, visuel, moteur, tactile)[4]. C'est pourquoi elles soulèvent une interrogation fondamentale sur la multistabilité perceptive si centrale dans toutes les formes d'art contemporain : à quel type de perception avons-nous affaire, lorsqu'il se joue une telle réversibilité entre l'œil et l'oreille[5] et quels rapports entre le réel et l'imaginaire, la perception et l'imagination sont à l'œuvre dans cette expérience ?

Le terme de perception semble ici trop large et vague, et de ce fait insuffisant à définir la complexité de ce qui se joue là pour le spectateur. C'est tout un jeu synesthésique d'impressions visuelles, auditives, et tactiles qui plonge le spectateur, dans le doute, incertain quant à sa propre place dans l'ensemble et renforce le paradoxe d'une expérience – conditionnée par un média (dans notre cas, un appareil d'enregistrement sonore particulièrement sophistiqué) – mais donnant toujours l'impression d'une présence immédiate.

Le présent travail se conçoit comme une contribution à ce champ de recherche et comme une réponse partielle à cette interrogation que nous lance l'art contemporain, lorsqu'il intègre la création sonore dans les espaces ou les sites réels et y répond par l'itinérance du spectateur[6] qui s'y laisse affecter[7] ou qui s'y expose.

Pour y parvenir, je vais m'engager dans une stratégie de recherche qui combine deux principes : d'une part, mener un travail de conceptualisation théorique sur la perception à partir d'Husserl et Merleau-Ponty; et d'autre part choisir une étude des cas particulièrement riches en possibles retombées. Les promenades [*Walks*] de Janet Cardiff, et les audio-tours *Remote x* réalisés, en plusieurs villes, par le collectif *Rimini Protokoll* nous

[4] Cette expérience, mieux connue sous le terme d'oscillation/ambiguïté et de multi stabilité perceptive, ne concerne pas exclusivement le phénomène artistique ici pris en considération. De nombreux domaines en sont affectés, en partant des performances théâtrales contemporaines jusqu'à l'expérience artistique enrichie par les installations interactives et les jeux vidéo dont l'expérience est intensifiée par les environnements immersifs. Dans le contexte des performances theatrales contemporaines, elle a été analysée avec une précision remarquable par Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008): 84-96. Dans le contexte des jeux vidéo, je renvoie à Elsa Boyer (2015).

[5] Sur la réversibilité qui joue non seulement à l'intérieur de chaque registre sensoriel, mais aussi entre l'œil et l'oreille, les réflexions développées par Mikel Dufrenne dans *L'œil et l'oreille* seraient sans aucun doute instructives. Toutefois, puisque mon propos est d'analyser ici la réversibilité qui se joue à l'intérieur même de la perception, – notamment entre perception originaire et perception en *phantasia* – je me tournerai plutôt vers les riches réflexions développées par Husserl et Merleau-Ponty. Mon intention est tout particulièrement d'aborder le défi posé à la phénoménologie husserlienne par l'expérience esthétique ici en question et de montrer comment l'élargissement de la notion de perception chez Merleau-Ponty permet de lever le paradoxe.

[6] Comme nous le rappelle l'anthropologue Tim Ingold ([2011]: 138), il s'agit de réaliser jusqu'à quel point nous sommes muables et jusqu'à quel point nous sommes toujours enchantés dans le monde, qui est aussi un monde de sonorités et d'espaces auditifs.

[7] La literature sur les promenades sonores est en train de se développer surtout en Canada, en France et en Allemagne. Pour mentionner les publications, les plus etroitement correlées aux examples considerés, je renvoie à : Larrue et Mervant-Roux, (2016) et, en particulier à l'article de Bourassa (2016): 369-381; Bourassa (2014) ; Fabuel. *et al.* (2014) ; Formis (2007). D'autre part et d'une manière plus generale, il semble que la théorie comme la pratique des arts accompagnent une certaine fortune du tournant acoustique/sonique (*acoustic turn*) ces dernières années. Le développement, depuis les années 2000, de groupes de recherche, de publications et de manifestations scientifiques autour des espaces sonores témoigne d'une attention croissante accordée à ce tournant acoustique étroitement lié ainsi à la croissance des études scénographiques. Un diagnostic de ce soi-disant *acoustic turn* a été offert, par exemple, par Curtin & Roesner (2015): 107-25. Voir également Voegelin (2010); Birringer (2013): 192-93; Home-Cook (2015). Des nombreux colloques et workshops, y sont consacrés, parmi lesquels, par exemple, le colloque *Milson. Pour une anthropologie des milieux sonores* 2011 et 2012 ; le Colloque EchoPolis *Days of sound* Athènes 2013. Parmi les revues, des numéros spéciaux ont été consacré à ce phenomène artistique : *Espaces et sociétés,* 2003 ; *Géocarrefour* 2003 ; *Ethnographiques.org* 2009 ; *Communications* 2012. R.M. Schafer, chercheur principal du projet intitulé *World Soundscape Project Soundsacpes studies* a récemment crée une revue consacré à cette tématique *Soundscape : The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*.

offrent deux objets idéaux pour une telle étude de cas. Leur originalité est exemplaire pour le champ de recherche et la problématique esquissée. En partant d'une analyse de ces dispositifs artistiques, et par le biais d'une réflexion portant sur les rapports entre perception originaire et perception en *phantasia*, mon analyse s'attachera à questionner la relation ambiguë au réel que développe le spectateur plongé dans un dispositif où des champs perceptifs concurrents peuvent se déployer simultanément. Je m'intéresserai en particulier aux conflits des perceptions – entre perception originaire et perception en *phantasia* – qui émaillent le parcours déambulatoire du spectateur et au brouillage entre le réel et l'imaginaire, qu'il éprouve au niveau même de son inscription corporelle dans l'espace. Il s'agira plus précisément d'interroger Merleau-Ponty à partir de ces phénomènes[8], de lui poser de questions qui étaient tout à fait hors de portée de ses pensées explicites parce qu'elles ont trait à quelque chose qui est survenu bien après le temps de sa vie, mais qui existaient cependant comme quelque chose que sa pensée annonçait et donnait virtuellement à penser, signifiant par là que « l'essentiel de cette pensée vient après elle et nous concerne intimement », selon la belle formule d'Etienne Bimbenet. (Bimbenet [2011]: p. 10).

2. ÉTUDE PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIQUE DES CAS : LES PROMENADES [WALKS] DE JANET CARDIFF ET LES AUDIO-TOURS REMOTE X DE RIMINI PROTOKOLL

Il s'agit ici, pour commencer, de questionner les rapports entre perception originaire et perception en *phantasia*, à partir d'un travail phénoménologique d'observation et description de deux exemples, convoqués à titre d'illustration.

Mon premier exemple est tiré des *Promenades* [*Walks*] de Janet Cardiff[9] qui, avec son partenaire George Bures Miller, a développé des parcours sonores fondés sur la marche *in situ* et l'écoute active, grâce à des techniques d'enregistrement sonore particulièrement sophistiquées (*in site biaural recording*)[10].

Dans le parcours itinérants de Cardiff, la situation est à peu près la suivante : le spectateur-promeneur reçoit des écouteurs branchés sur une bande sonore qui retransmet les sons de l'environnement enregistrés au préalable. Puisque les sons ont été enregistrés sur le lieu même du parcours, ils créent une doublure imaginaire de l'espace réel, tout en produisant de saisissants effets de réel, autrement dit, une sensibilité accrue aux détails de l'environnement et à la présence du corps en mouvement. À cette texture fictionnelle se mélange la narration: des histoires constituées de fragments hétérogènes, que ce soit des descriptions factuelles ou des amorces fictionnelles, s'intriquent dans la bande sonore. Elles y introduisent une narrativité fragmentée, opérant par bribes de voix où s'entremêlent les bruits de l'environnement. S'installe parfois une intrigue, une enquête, puisant dans le vaste répertoire de l'imaginaire cinématographique ou littéraire. Elle se greffe au flux de conscience porté par la voix de Cardiff, qui, par des instructions vocales, oriente le promeneur dans ses déplacements : « allez dans cette direction », « tournez ici », « prenez ce chemin ».

Voici, en bref, le dispositif de base de la pratique itinérante. Ce principe en apparence simple, est en réalité d'une complexité redoutable pour qui veut analyser l'expérience esthétique qu'il nous procure[11]. Dans une première tentative d'analyser

[8] En cela, je poursuis une démarche de recherche, initiée par R. Barbaras, dans le volume 5 de la revue *Chiasmi International. Merleau-Ponty le réel et l'imaginaire,* en lequel s'atteste « l'incroyable fécondité de la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty pour la pensée esthétique » (Barbaras [2004]: 9].

[9] L'artiste canadienne a récemment publié un livre intitulé *The Walk Book,* où le lecteur est souvent incité à marcher. La performance devient alors une pratique de réception. À ce propos, voir Shaub (2005).

[10] Voir à l'adresse suivante : http://cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html

[11] Certes, des nombreuses analyses ont déjà été consacrées aux *Promenades* de Janet Cardiff. Cependant, notre approche phénoménologique diffère de ces études. Tou-

– au sens de décomposer pour connaître – cette expérience, voici les éléments qui sont à relever.

1. D'abord, ce sont des promenades, qui engagent la mobilité du corps du spectateur dans un espace donné. Toutefois, la marche nous renvoie ici à deux expériences légèrement décalés, soit à l'expérience de la mobilité du corps dans l'espace physique doublée de la mobilité de l'imagination au sein d'un espace sonore. Un va-et-vient s'installe alors, au niveau spatial et moteur, entre l'ici, soit le site réel où se déroule la promenade et, un ailleurs, évoqué par la bande sonore.
2. À un deuxième niveau, le dispositif engage un va-et-vient perceptif très particulier. Notre appareil perceptif est obligé de faire des allées et des retours entre deux plans de réalité différents. Le premier plan provient d'une réalité donnée, c'est-à-dire ici de l'espace visible. Le deuxième plan correspond à une réalité qu'on peut qualifier d'imaginaire ou virtuelle, puisqu'elle est enregistrée sur une bande sonore et correspond à l'espace auditif. Ces deux champs perceptifs interpellent le spectateur-promeneur *simultanément* et, souvent, *de manière dissonante*, voire *contradictoire*. Deux niveaux de perception entrent alors *en concurrence* : celui du parcours réel dans la ville et celui du trajet fictif, qui se déroule par l'intermédiaire de ce que nous raconte la voix enregistrée dans le casque.
3. À un troisième niveau, le dispositif qui unit l'oreille du spectateur-marcheur à la voix de la guide nous fait également transiter entre une multitude de perspectives et, notamment, entre une perspective à la première personne qui est celle du spectateur-promeneur, une perspective à la deuxième personne qui est celle de la voix lui donnant des instructions et, dans certains cas, la coalescence de ces deux instances en un plurielle intersubjectivité qui les unit aux autres spectateurs-marcheurs.

En une formule, cet exemple met en évidence de façon saisissante que marcher dans un lieu renvoie toujours à deux plans de réalité – soit à un espace physique doublé d'un espace imaginaire – qui, loin d'appartenir à deux mondes rigoureusement distincts, nous renvoient au-delà de l'opposition tranchée entre réel perçu et imaginaire à une « zone hybride » qui est la zone d'ambiguïté » où règne « l'indistinction du réel et de l'imaginaire »[12].

Mon deuxième exemple – *Remote x* – est tiré des audio-tours ou promenades téléguidées réalisés dans différentes villes par le collectif berlinois Rimini Protokoll, fondé en 2000 par Stefan Kaegi, Helgard Haug et Daniel Wetzel[13].

Dans le titre *X* désigne la variable des villes où le spectacle peut avoir lieu et a effectivement eu lieu. Soit une infinité depuis la première à Berlin : *Remote Berlin, Remote Avignon, Remote Lausanne, Remote San Paolo, Remote New York, Remote Moscou, Remote Milan, Remote Paris... Remote* désigne à la lettre une télécommande, mais signifie aussi ce qui est lointain, absent, hors de portée. D'une ville à l'autre, d'un site à l'autre, d'un pays à l'autre, *Remote x*, nous donne à voir, en effet avant toutes choses, les relations dialectiques et réversibles qui se tissent entre le passé et le présent, les fantasmes et les êtres vivants, les espace réels et les espace du rêve et du possible.

Comment le dispositif mis en scène parvient-il à mêler si habilement fiction et réalité ?

Dans *Remote x* la situation est la suivante : une horde de spectateurs, équipés d'un casque audio, traverse la ville. Ils sont guidés par une voix féminine de synthèse – semblable à celle de nos navigateurs GPS – qui – comme une télécommande – les dirige dans l'espace urbain, les fait marcher au pas, courir ralentir, danser, lever la tête, se séparer en plusieurs groupes et réfléchir à leur positionnement parmi la foule. Elle ordonne leurs actions, mais il les pousse aussi à l'introspection, leur exi-

tefois, pour un approfondissement des questions que ces pratiques artistiques soulèvent, je renvoie à Feral et Perrot (2013): 91-129.

[12] Sur ces thèmes, je renvoie à Dufourcq (2011).

[13] Voir à l'adresse suivante : https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/remote-x

geant de sonder leurs désirs, leurs craintes, leurs croyances.

Au début de la promenade téléguidée, dont le point de départ est un cimetière, la voix demande à chaque spectateur de choisir un objet particulier sur lequel méditer. Le spectateur dirige alors son attention sur l'être phénoménal de cette chose donnée. Sa perception peut par là même prendre une qualité toute particulière. Au départ elle s'accomplit comme une sorte de plongée contemplative non intentionnelle dans cette chose réelle. En même temps, cette plongée contemplative prépare soudain les conditions pour une toute autre manière de percevoir.

Quand l'attention cesse de se focaliser sur la présence d'un être perçu et commence pour ainsi dire à vagabonder, s'y joignent les associations les plus diverses : souvenirs, sentiments, images, vécus passés, pensées…etc. De par son apparaître même, cette chose singulière renvoie implicitement à une diversité d'autres choses que j'ai perçu et pourrais percevoir.

Au-delà d'une perception née sur commande comme vision directe, et focalisée sur un phénomène en cours d'apparition, s'élève alors une toute autre manière de percevoir, une vision périphérique qui s'engage non seulement dans la diversité de ses esquisses perceptives, mais encore dans l'horizon inépuisable des réalités susceptibles d'apparaître selon le même sens.

Dès lors, la perception se dédouble, ou plutôt, oscille entre une perception focalisée sur le phénomène dans son auto-référentialité et une perception élargie aux associations et correspondances que ce phénomène peut déclencher. Le moment du saut d'un ordre à l'autre, est marqué par un écart. Il en résulte un état d'instabilité pour le spectateur qui s'y engage. Cet écart place en effet le percevant *entre* deux champs perceptifs qui le sollicitent *simultanément*.

De ce fait, chaque spectateur, est lui aussi placé dans un état-seuil, dans une situation d'*entre-deux*, par le développement d'une perception qui, par son propre compte, effectue le va-et-vient entre le réel sensoriel et ses horizons imaginaires.

3. LA DIMENSION PROBLÉMATIQUE : À QUEL TYPE DE PERCEPTION AVONS-NOUS AFFAIRE ?

Ce travail descriptif étant fait, encore faut-il se demander ce qui, philosophiquement, importe dans les dispositifs artistiques que nous venons d'analyser.

Je me contenterai ici de focaliser mon attention sur la question qui me paraît la plus intéressante du point de vue phénoménologique : la question de savoir de quelle façon le va-et-vient perceptif, que nous venons de décrire, est susceptible de se déployer. Concurrence entre champs perceptifs, dédoublement, illusion, que se passe-t-il exactement lorsque, en situation performative, s'estompe la frontière entre l'expérience réelle et le vécu fictif et nous sommes à la fois ici et ailleurs ?

Faut-il dire que ce va-et-vient perceptif (ce processus d'oscillation ou d'instabilité perceptive) est déterminé uniquement, ou du moins principalement, par des techniques de mise en scène et d'enregistrement sonore (*in site biaural recording*), qui visent à stimuler un changement de perception à un moment précis de la performance? Est-ce que ce phénomène dépend aussi – et, dans quelle mesure – de la disposition intentionnelle du sujet qui, consciemment ou non, accorde sa perception en conséquence ? Ou, bien, ne faudrait plutôt dire que le va-et-vient perceptif ici en question se produit indépendamment des techniques de mise en scène et de l'intention du sujet qui perçoit?

Abordée à ce dernier niveau de radicalité, le problème qui se dessine ici est plus précisément le suivant : à quel type de vision avons-nous affaire ?

Pour répondre à cette question, l'étude de ce qu'E. Husserl appelle la conscience d'image libre et la *phantasia* peut paraître la plus évidente. L'on dit alors que nous n'avons pas affaire à une perception « normale », mais bien à une perception «en *phantasia*»[14] qui fait intervenir des phan-

[14] Husserl, Edmund (2002). Je renvoie également sur ce thème à Richir (2011): 13-32, disponible à l'adresse suivante : http://www.revistadefilosofia.com; Richir (2004) et (2000) ; Claesen (1996): 123-159 ; Sallis (1989).

tasmes imaginatifs, des conjectures, des éléments mémorisés.

Or l'émergence au cours de la performance d'une vision élargie à des lisières brumeuses auxquelles se joignent les associations les plus diverses est un fait bien connu et d'ailleurs un effet recherché par le dispositif mis en scène, mais le cadre théorique husserlien, ici convoqué, mal s'applique à notre cas.

En effet, la *phantasia* ou imagination interne, selon Husserl, se déploie dans un champ visuel séparé du champ perceptif et peut constituer un champ d'apparition non originaire autonome par rapport à l'enchaînement normal des esquisses perceptives. Autrement dit, elle peut produire des apparitions qui, dans certains cas, n'ont plus aucun rapport avec le perçu. Elle possède une puissance de figuration propre qui peut être classée du côté des actes imaginatifs. Ce que j'aperçois dans la *phantasia* c'est une apparition imaginaire, une forme imaginaire pure, ou encore mon propre vécu que je retranscris dans le présent du flux perceptif (par exemple, ce visage que je me fait apparaître et qui « flotte » devant mes yeux), de sorte que, en toute rigueur, il n'y a pas d'image perçue comme réellement-là, pas non plus d'objet-image dans la *phantasia*. Telle est d'ores et déjà le caractère inquiétant de la *phantasia* que de nous rendre présent un non-présent (un pur *fictum* et non pas un *fictum* perceptif), que de nous projeter dans un *ailleurs*, et ce non par défaut, mais par essence. L'apparition de *phantasia* n'étant pas fondée dans des appréhensions directes de genre perceptif, n'est pas perçue, elle est purement vécue.

Ainsi, tel que ces quelques lignes le posent clairement:

> *Nous avons ici [par la conscience d'image] une apparition, une intuition, et une objectivation sensibles, mais en conflit avec un présent vécu; nous avons apparition d'un non-maintenant dans le maintenant. 'Dans le maintenant', en ce que l'objet image apparaît au milieu de la réalité effective de perception et élève quasiment la prétention d'avoir en plein milieu une réalité effective objective. 'Dans le maintenant' aussi, dans la mesure où l'appréhender d'image est un maintenant-temporel. Mais d'autre part, un 'non-maintenant' en ce que le conflit fait de l'objet-image un néant qui, certes apparaît, mais n'est rien et ne peut servir qu'à figurer un étant. Or ce figuré ne peut évidemment jamais figurer le maintenant avec lequel il est en conflit, il ne peut donc figurer qu'un autre, un non-présent. (Husserl [2002]: 86)*

On voit bien par là – et c'est un point essentiel pour Husserl – que perception et *phantasia* ne sont pas entrelacées l'une à l'autre, mais nettement distinctes et disjointes, «en conflit». Car « ce n'est pas seulement que la chose-de-*phantasia* n'apparaît pas dans le même champ visuel de la perception, mais qu'elle apparaît pour ainsi dire dans un tout autre monde qui est entièrement séparé du monde du présent actuel.» (Husserl [2002]: 95).

De ce fait, du seul fait qu'elle érige une séparation nette, voire un conflit, entre perception originaire et *phantasia* – la phénoménologie husserlienne semble difficilement applicable au va-et-vient perceptif qui caractérise nos deux exemples.

Tandis que pour Husserl, il y alternance et conflit, autrement dit, concurrence entre les champs respectifs de la perception originaire et de la *phantasia* (Husserl [2002]: § 37), nos exemples montrent que ces deux champs perceptifs concurrents peuvent se déployer simultanément.

Comment expliquer alors que le champ de la *phantasia* puisse empiéter sur le champ de la perception ? Comment expliquer que au cours des pratiques itinérantes *in situ* nous ayons des apparitions « quasi-perceptives » et une « quasi-expérience » ?

Une frontière qui unit plutôt qu'elle ne divise le réel et l'imaginaire, une *coexistence en décalage*, plutôt qu'un conflit au sein de la perception, entre le champ de la réalité sensible et le champ de ses variations possibles, voilà ce que la phénoménologie doit être en mesure de penser, pour nous faire comprendre la spécificité de la perception impliquée dans ces formes de l'art contemporain.

Si les analyses consacrées par Husserl à la perception théâtrale ouvrent la voie à un tel approfondissement, car elles nous invitent à « nous placer sur le sol de la perception, biffée par la conversion d'une simple *phantasia,* donc à initier une *phan-*

tasia purement perceptive » (Husserl [2002]: 517-518), elles ne sont pas suffisamment radicales. Plus précisément, il faudrait dire que si d'une part le cadre husserlien s'avère approprié pour décrire la structure de renvoi propre à la conscience d'image – qui n'est pas mise en rapport d'un image-objet avec son modèle, comme selon le paradigme de la « représentation » – mais double aperception, c'est-à-dire double appréhension perceptive au sein de laquelle plusieurs choses sont pensées comme semblables ou associées, d'autre part, il n'est pas assez radical pour penser leur unité-conflit a l'intérieur du champ perceptif qui leur est commun et qui fonde de deux côtés le rapport de conflit.

La situation décrite, et l'interrogation qu'elle suscite nous indiquent une autre piste possible.

Comme il apparaît de façon saisissante dans les exemples desquels je suis partie, c'est l'incarnation de l'acte perceptif, son inscription dans l'espace sonore et l'expérience kinesthésique du corps du spectateur-performeur qui ouvre des brèches imaginaires dans le tissu urbain et en modifie radicalement la perception, au cours de la promenade.

En d'autres termes, le non-présent ou le pur *fictum* qui se donne comme virtualité de *phantasia*, n'est saisissable (ou perceptible) – et c'est là la découverte majeure de Merleau-Ponty, son avancée par rapport à Husserl – qu'à partir du corps conçu comme « entrelacs de vision et de mouvement» (Merleau-Ponty [1964] : 16). C'est donc, plus précisément, un certain usage de la perception associé autant à la mobilité qu'à la sensibilité du corps qui intensifie l'épreuve que le sujet fait de la texture imaginaire du réel, laquelle à son tour va pouvoir être définie comme un nouveau mode de présence des objets et, de ce fait, comme une nouvelle dimension du réel, élargissant le noyau du réel perçu.

On peut dire en ce sens que, ces pratiques itinérantes (promenades sonores) non seulement posent un défi a la phénoménologie husserlienne de la perception, mais déjouent aussi le « centrisme oculaire de notre culture occidentale [15], le privilège qui a été traditionnellement accordé à la vision comme acte, isolé de l'interaction avec les autres sens, pour nous faire prendre conscience de la puissance suggestive de la marche, associée à celle, tout aussi suggestive, de l'écoute[16] et des sensations kinesthésiques, ayant la capacité de faire surgir des émotions, des images mentales, des souvenirs enfouis dans le corps, lui-même incarné de la chair du monde.

De ce constat découle la démarche que je vais suivre. Je ne vais pas entrer dans les analyses que Husserl consacre à la conscience d'image, mais bien plutôt dans celles que Merleau-Ponty consacre à la vision et à la *motricité* du corps, envisagé comme *soi charnel* (touchant-touché) qui se meut à l'intérieur d'un espace dont il fait partie.

L'hypothèse directrice qui me servira de fil conducteur est que l'espace réel (actuel) et l'espace imaginaire ne sont pas séparés l'un de l'autre, mais comme deux *arbres jumeaux* qui se tiennent et se confondent à une *même souche* : notre corporéité motrice, envisagée comme « un système d'actions possibles » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 289) qui peut à tout moment faire usage de ses champs sensoriels, pour se transporter dans d'autres sphères et même évoquer par ses montages « une pseudo-présence du milieu » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 392). Ainsi, pour comprendre tout à fait l'expérience esthétique singulière de l'espace que ces pratiques artistiques nous dévoilent et la modification de la logique de la vision qu'elles font émerger, il nous faut d'abord considérer de façon plus approfondie le rapport du corps à l'espace.

4. PREMIÈRE ÉBAUCHE DE RÉPONSE : LE CORPS ET L'ESPACE

Comme Merleau-Ponty lui-même le remarque de façon lumineuse dans la *Phénoménologie de*

[15] Selon une expression qui évoque les analyses développées par à Jay (1993).

[16] Sur ce thème les réflexions développées par Dufrenne dans *L'œil et l'oreille* seraient sans doute instructives, puisque son propos est celui d'une part, de rendre justice à l'oreille contre l'impérialisme de l'œil et, d'autre part, de ressaisir leur source commune à partir du contact ou du toucher au niveau même de la sensibilité tactile. Bien que différents, « la vue et l'ouïe sont encore des touchers, mais à distance ». Et « l 'oreille et l'œil sont tous deux à leur façon les organes d'un tact à distance » (Dufrenne [1987]: 21).

la perception, ce qui nous donne l'espace – aussi bien actuel que virtuel – ce n'est ni l'œil ni l'esprit, mais « une certaine *prise* de mon corps dans le monde » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 289): de ce corps qui est un système de puissances motrices et perceptives (comme système d'actions possibles), « qui enveloppent toute fixation particulière dans un projet général » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 294) ; « un corps virtuel dont le "lieu" est défini autant par sa tâche que par sa situation » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 294) ; un corps d'une « espèce » bien « particulière » dont il nous faudra tracer plus précisément l'image et les contours : *situé à la charnière* entre ce qui est (*où il est*) et ce qui n'est pas encore (*le vers où il s'achemine*), il peut à tout moment et selon la position qu'il occupe *se rapporter* et *intégrer* sa vie à des domaines *autres* que l'actuellement réel : au passé et à l'avenir […], aux mondes imaginaires, aux mondes de la lecture, aux connexions de la pensée » (Patočka [1995]: 61) et de la parole, mondes d'où il fait sans cesse retour à la réalité unique pour se retrouver activement là où il est en effet ; par sa faculté motrice il acquiert en outre la liberté pour les choses, la possibilité de voir au-travers et au-delà des limites de sa situation et de sa propre posture momentanée, de s'élever au-dessus de ce qui l'entoure (son environnement immédiat), pour se transporter dans d'autres sphères. Comme M. Merleau-Ponty l'exprime clairement, « le corps […] n'est pas seulement mobilisable par les situations réelles qui l'attirent à elles, il peut se détourner du monde, appliquer son activité aux stimuli qui s'inscrivent sur les surfaces sensorielles, se prêter à des expériences, et plus généralement se situer dans le virtuel » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 126).

C'est là que réside sa spécificité. Le *corps* que l'expérience esthétique présuppose et porte à ressentir, *n'est pas localisable*[17]. Il est *en présence*, *intouchable*, *insaisissable dans l'immanence*, selon l'expression de Paul Klee[18], que Merleau-Ponty incorpore à la trame de *L'œil et l'esprit*.

Sa particularité réside plus précisément en ceci qu'il sait vivre à *l'intérieur* des *possibles*, dans le *suspens tendu* entre un « d'où-vers-où », dans le *lieu inhabitable* d'une réalité *en passe de devenir*. Les *possibilités* (virtualités) ne sont pas pour lui de *fausses voies*, mais des *appuis* grâce auxquels il peut s'étirer jusqu'au point de *déséquilibre* qui construit un *nouvel équilibre* et l'*ouvre à* son tour à une nouvelle expérience de l'espace.

Cette merveille se produit lorsque

> *mon corps effectif vient coïncider avec le corps virtuel qui est exigé par le spectacle et le spectacle effectif avec le milieu que mon corps projette autour de lui. Il s'installe quand, entre mon corps comme puissance de certains gestes, et le spectacle perçu comme invitation à ces mêmes gestes et théâtre de ces mêmes actions, s'établit un pacte qui me donne jouissance de l'espace comme aux choses puissance directe sur mon corps.* (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 289)

Dès lors :

> *Mon corps virtuel déplace le corps réel à tel point que le sujet ne se sent plus dans le monde où il est effectivement, et qu'au lieu de ses jambes et de ses bras véritables, il se sent les jambes et les bras qu'il faudrait avoir pour marcher et pour agir dans la scène représentée, de sorte qu'il faudrait dire, en toute rigueur, qu'il habite le spectacle.* (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 289)

Nous comprenons mieux à partir de ces analyses ce qui avait été énoncé au départ, à savoir que la réussite du dispositif artistique et la théâtralisation du monde qu'il peut faire émerger, ne découle pas d'une *attitude mentale*, (ou *perception en phantasia*) qui fait intervenir des *phantasmes imaginatifs*, mais présuppose au contraire à titre plus fondamental une *projection* de notre corps effectif vers ce *lieu* (*là*) qui est exigé par le « spec-

[17] Sur ces différents aspects, notre étude entrecroise sans pourtant pouvoir y adhérer les intéressantes analyses consacrées par Cyssau à l'existence du corps négatif (Cyssau [1995]: 182).

[18] Paul Klee cité par Merleau-Ponty dans *L'Œil et l'Esprit,* écrivait ces mots que l'on a gravés sur sa tombe : « Je suis insaisissable dans l'immanence… », (Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 58). C'est dans le sens indiqué ci-dessus que je l'interprète.

tacle » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 289), un certain usage de notre corps phénoménal et de la motricité (ou intentionnalité motrice) qui lui est propre[19].

Le point, le plus important à retenir, est que lorsque le corps ne parvient plus à éprouver dans l'ici et maintenant de chacun de ses mouvements cette puissance de projection de soi dans d'autres milieux ou sur d'autres scènes ; lorsque le sujet n'est plus capable de « jouer » avec son corps[20], de l'éprouver capables d'une multitude de mouvements autant actuels que possibles, c'est la capacité de percevoir l'inépuisable richesse du réel qui est compromise, comme le montre bien le cas pathologique de Schneider[21], longuement analysé par Merleau-Ponty dans la *Phénoménologie de la perception*.

En sens inverse, cet imaginaire qui, pour Merleau-Ponty, est le cœur battant du « schéma corporel » et de l'intentionnalité motrice qui l'organise, permet au sujet de s'éprouver interpellé en profondeur, voire même mobilisé non seulement par la singularité de la situation effective qu'il est en train de percevoir, mais aussi par toute la latence imaginaire susceptible de l'investir. Encore faut-il remarquer que, dans une perspective strictement merleau-pontienne, le pouvoir que la vie perceptive a de se laisser habiter par l'imaginaire suppose une « chair du réel », c'est-à-dire un monde qui nourrit cet imaginaire, qui, dans sa texture sensible, en soutient la possibilité.

En d'autres termes, ce qui fait que les choses que nous percevons nous affectent charnellement et ne sont pas simplement des objets neutres que nous contemplerions, c'est l'épreuve que nous faisons de la multiplicité vibrante de leur façon d'apparaître, d'entrer en présence et par là même de séduire nos sens, de provoquer même, de notre part, des réactions favorables ou défavorables.

C'est dire que la perception d'une réalité donnée implique toujours, même au niveau le plus passif, un horizon inépuisable des esquisses autant perceptives qu'imaginaires, qui excède son mode d'apparition actuel, un halo des multiples facettes instables et imprévisibles, qui se déploient continument autour d'elle et qui parlent à notre corps et à nos sens avant que nous cherchions à nous ressaisir et à en jouer.

La mer est un exemple flagrant de cette capacité qu'une chose réelle possède d'évoquer une multitude des variantes, de manières de vibrer sous le regard, ainsi que de catalyser nos désirs : « …tantôt criblée de tourbillons, d'aigrettes et de rides, ou bien massive, épaisse et immobile en elle-même », la « mer » – dit Merleau-Ponty – « déploie un nombre illimité de figures de l'être. » (Merleau-Ponty [1969]: 88).

5. DEUXIÈME ÉBAUCHE DE RÉPONSE : LA TEXTURE IMAGINAIRE DU RÉEL ET SON ENVERS CHARNEL

C'est sur la base de ces premières réflexions que nous pouvons nous approprier ici de la thèse centrale avancée par Merleau-Ponty dans *L'œil et l'esprit,* selon laquelle il y a une « texture imaginaire du réel » qui est moins un tissu de fantasmes que le corrélat d'une vision à l'état naissant dans le corps, laquelle nous renvoie sans cesse au réel, au lieu de nous y séparer.

L'imaginaire, ici compris comme le diagramme du visible dans le corps, sa « pulpe ou son envers charnel » (Merleau-Ponty, M. [1964]: 24), renvoie à la genèse corporelle de la vision et, plus précisément à ce qui du visible, dépasse l'actuellement observable, en direction de ses esquisses. Il exprime ce qui comme tel ne peut être visible et, en ce sens, renvoie le voyant à l'insurmontable passivité de son

[19] Cette capacité renvoie d'une part à l'*organisation* propre au « schéma corporel » et d'autre part à *l'intentionnalité motrice* qui l'organise et lui insuffle sa vie, c'est-à-dire au corps compris globalement comme « *système synergique* dont toutes les fonctions sont reprises et liées dans le *mouvement* général de l'être au monde » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 270).

[20] *Cf.* les analyses phénoménologiques qu'y consacre Gély (2002): 109-113.

[21] Comme ces quelques lignes de Merleau-Ponty le posent clairement : « Il y a dans toute sa conduite quelque chose de méticuleux et de sérieux, qui vient de ce qu'il est incapable de jouer. Jouer, c'est se placer pour un moment dans une situation imaginaire, c'est se plaire à changer de "milieu" » (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 157).

corps vis-à-vis de l'inépuisable richesse du réel. Autrement dit, loin de déréaliser le rapport du sujet percevant à ce qu'il perçoit, l'imaginaire qui habite le corps du voyant est constitutif de l'épreuve que celui-ci fait de son appartenance à ce qu'il perçoit. Encore faut-il remarquer que la « texture imaginaire du réel », ne peut capturer véritablement, entrer dans mon acte perceptif, que lorsqu'il se trouve intérieurement réactivée l'épreuve de sa genèse fiévreuse dans le corps.

Telle est la première thèse que Merleau-Ponty nous permet de développer dans le cadre de l'interrogation déployée ici. Une des implications de cette thèse est qu'il importe, pour intensifier l'épreuve que le sujet percevant fait de la réalité de ce qu'il rencontre et de sa densité charnelle, de solliciter, voire éveiller cet imaginaire qui tapisse intérieurement la perception du corps vivant.

Or, un des enjeux de mon analyse est de montrer, à partir d'une reprise de certaines thèses développées dans la *Phénoménologie de la perception*[22], qu'il y a un imaginaire interne à la motricité qui est l'opérateur d'une telle intensification du lien affectif entre le sujet percevant et ce qui dans le monde l'affecte charnellement (depuis la chair du corps propre) et lui impose une certaine conduite. En une formule, le pouvoir que nous avons de faire entrer certains contenus imaginaires dans l'épreuve perceptive que nous faisons d'une situation donnée est lié au pouvoir que notre corps a d'éprouver cette vie imaginaire qui est au cœur de chacun de ses mouvements. En effet, il ne suffit pas d'être en présence d'un environnement réel, pour que la perception que j'ai des objets qui le peuplent soit imprégnée, voire habitée par une vie imaginaire. Cette vie n'est susceptible d'entrer dans mon acte perceptif que si mon corps s'éprouve lui-même travaillé par une mouvance imaginaire autrement dit, éprouve chacun de ses mouvements comme vibrant de possibles. Pour le dire autrement: un sujet qui marcherait, mais dont le corps en mouvement serait celui d'un automate – chacun de ses mouvements se réduisant dès lors à son effectivité – ne pourrait pas, telle est l'hypothèse, se nouer affectivement à ce qui lui apparaît et, par là même, se laisser mettre en jeu par celui-ci. En sens inverse, lorsqu'il la mouvance imaginaire du réel est éprouvée par le corps, grâce à une sensibilité accrue, voire éveillée par la marche, chaque chose perçue/donnée, de par son apparaître même, me renvoie implicitement à une diversité d'autres objets que j'ai perçus et pourrais percevoir. C'est ainsi que, par exemple, un corps dansant dans l'espace, est davantage susceptible d'accrocher le regard, de renvoyer l'acte perceptif à la texture imaginaire du réel qu'un corps se mouvant de façon mécanique et fonctionnelle[23].

Une connexion d'essence doit donc manifestement lier la vie perceptive dans la richesse foisonnante de ses variantes possibles, de ses multiples manières de vibrer sous le regard à l'imaginaire et à la motricité du corps[24] ; il s'agit d'une liaison que l'on ne peut pas supprimer arbitrairement et qui se manifeste autant pour son efficacité lorsqu'elle est présente que par son empêchement lorsqu'elle est absente.

Pour résumer : il ne peut y avoir d'imaginaire interne à l'acte perceptif que s'il y a un imaginaire

[22] Notamment les thèses développées dans le chapitre de la *Phénoménologie de la perception* consacré à « La spatialité du corps propre et la motricité » à l'analyse desquelles je me suis consacré dans le paragraphe 4.

[23] Sur la distinction entre un mouvement mécanique qui serait celui d'un automate et un mouvement vécu, entre un mouvement finalisé et un mouvement qualifié de présentiel, pour autant qu'il a la particularité de faire en sorte que « nous nous éprouvons nous-mêmes » et que « nous vivons non pas l'action, mais le faire vital » (Courtine (dir.), [1992]: 32), je renvoie aux analyses d'E. Straus déployées dans « Les Formes du Spatial. Leur signification pour le mouvement et la perception », in Courtine (dir.), (1992) ainsi que dans l'article intitulé *Le mouvement vécu,* Straus (1935). En d'autres termes, lorsque nous nous abandons à ce mouvement : « Nous ne sommes plus, par l'appréhension, l'observation, la volonté ou l'action, tournés vers les objets singuliers du monde extérieur, mais nous vivons notre présence, notre être-vivant, notre sensibilité » (Straus [1992]: 37).

[24] Sur ce thème, et plus précisément sur le rapport de la vie perceptive à l'imaginaire et à la théâtralité originaire du corps, je renvoie aux réflexions très riches développées par Gély (2002).

interne à la motricité du corps et réciproquement. Ces deux dimensions sont profondément liées l'une à l'autre et la plus grande partie des réflexions du dernier Merleau-Ponty était consacrée à les tenir ensemble (Barbaras [1998] : 225-241), sous la figure bien connue du corps comme «entrelacs de vision et de mouvement » (Merleau-Ponty [1964]: 16). C'est pourquoi elle nous semble d'une grande pertinence pour comprendre la complexité de l'expérience du spectateur engagé dans les promenades sonores que nous avons analysé. C'est sur ce point que je m'arrêterai brièvement, avant de conclure.

6. CONCLUSION

Pour conclure, je souhaiterais apporter un dernier éclairage sur ce que peut désigner l'imaginaire dans la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty[25] et, corrélativement, sur ce qui fait la pertinence de cette pensée pour capturer la spécificité de l'expérience esthétique que les promenades sonores ont mise en lumière.

Comme nous l'avons vu, à la différence de Husserl, Merleau-Ponty refuse de concevoir l'imaginaire comme le corrélat d'un acte imaginatif de la conscience d'image libre (*phantasia*) délié de tout rapport à la réalité effective. Pour lui, l'imaginaire surgit aussi bien de la chair du visible que du corps du voyant. En tant que tel, il doit être compris comme une modalité incarnée de la perception associée à l'intentionnalité motrice qui l'organise, ce qui lui permet de penser jusqu'au bout le va-et-vient perceptif entre les champs spatiaux correspondants au réel perçu et à l'imaginaire, que nos exemples ont mis en lumière.

Autrement dit, à la différence de Husserl qui établit une frontière stricte, et donc un conflit, une alternance, voire une concurrence entre le champ de la perception dite originaire et le champ de la conscience dite d'image libre (*phantasia*), Merleau-Ponty permet de penser leur simultanéité et coexistence spatio-temporelle.

Refusant de concevoir l'imaginaire comme le corrélat d'un acte imaginatif de la conscience, Merleau-Ponty opère en effet une démystification de l'imagination, perception et imagination étant conçue les modalités d'une seule fonction plus primordiale[26]. Cette démystification à son tour permet de penser une libération de l'imaginaire du cadre traditionnel dans lequel il n'a d'autre épaisseur que celle qu'un individu imaginant lui confère, et s'oppose en tant que tel au réel.

L'imaginaire va en effet pouvoir être défini par Merleau-Ponty comme un sens apparaissant à même le sensible, aimantant le surgissement imprévisible d'affinités suggestives entre telles et telles sensations. Cela dit, comme nous l'avons vu, cette vie (ou cette mouvance) imaginaire qui habite originairement le réel ne peut capturer véritablement, entrer dans mon acte perceptif, que lorsqu'elle se trouve intérieurement réactivée par l'imaginaire interne à la motricité du corps percevant susceptible autant d'en éprouver que d'en démultiplier les variantes possibles. En ce sens, Merleau-Ponty insiste tout particulièrement sur le fait que les perceptions dites en *phantasia* ne relèvent pas d'une perte du corps, mais d'un usage particulier de ses champs sensoriels et kinesthésiques.

Dès lors, ce qui est absolument nécessaire dans l'appréhension de la texture imaginaire du réel – c'est-à-dire dans l'enchaînement des perceptions ou des esquisses, ainsi que dans la coexistence des champs sensibles entre eux – ce sont les systèmes kinesthésiques, qui ne sont pas seulement des sensations à surajouter à la visée intentionnelle, puisqu'ils désignent des systèmes d'apparition à part entière, par eux-mêmes motivés et, à vrai dire, de façon visuelle, tactile, motrice, etc…

En un mot, l'étude de la motricité constitue un aspect de la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty qui permet de la prolonger vers des interrogations contemporaines touchant aux pratiques artis-

[25] Sur cette question, je renvoie au numero 5 de la revue Chiasmi International, dirigé par Renaud Barbaras et consacré précisement à Merleau-Ponty le réel et l'imaginaire. Barbaras (2004).

[26] *Cf.* les analyses magistrales consacrées à cette thématique par De Saint Aubert (2013): 257-280.

tiques situées. Qu'il s'agisse des parcours itinérants ou sonores, les kinesthèses et, plus en général, la motricité du corps jouent un rôle majeur quant à la possibilité de se transposer dans un champ d'expérience étranger.

À cet égard, il est intéressant de noter, avant de conclure, que les parcours itinérants *in situ* ne transforment pas seulement la logique de la perception, mais aussi les principes de la mimésis. Alors que la mimésis, au sens aristotélicien engendre le plaisir de la reconnaissance et parvient, pour ainsi dire, toujours à un résultat, les données sensorielles demeurent ici continuellement en attente de réponses et de développements. Ce que l'on voit et entend, demeure « en puissance », en appropriation différée et interpelle notre puissance d'agir, plutôt qu'il ne satisfait l'acte de perceptif d'un sujet étant en mesure de s'appuyer sur un ordre représentatif.

En ce sens et de prime abord nous pourrions dire que les pratiques performatives analysées nous invitent à repenser l'expérience du spectateur, sous la figure du pèlerin, du voyageur, de l'aventurier caractéristique des récits du XIX[e] siècle ou celle du flâneur baudelairien telle que l'a relevée Walter Benjamin – comme une voie sur la frontière entre le réel et l'imaginaire, ou plutôt comme un chavirement continu d'un ici et d'un ailleurs, d'une perception focalisée sur le phénomène dans son auto-référentialité et d'une perception élargie aux associations que ce phénomène peut déclencher.

Mais en deuxième lieu et de façon tout aussi bien significative, elles nous obligent à repenser la fonction de l'art, selon une perspective qui rejoint la profondeur des réflexions que Merleau-Ponty y consacra dans l'essai intitulé *Le langage indirect et les voix du silence*, cité en exergue.

Il est certain que la fonction de l'art ne se réduit plus à refléter le réel, à une fonction qu'on pourrait globalement qualifier de mimétique. Toutefois, il connaît aujourd'hui d'autres manières plus actives et plus dynamiques d'intervenir dans les lieux, les institutions ou les sites spécifiques où il s'inscrit, et avec lesquels il entretient un rapport dialectique pour ne pas dire ambivalent.

Notamment, l'art peut transfigurer son lieu d'inscription, quel qu'il soit, pour en actualiser le potentiel imaginaire, voire en engendrer des variantes significatives, en en changeant fictivement certains paramètres, comme le ferait un scientifique dans son laboratoire pour mieux connaître son objet. Il peut dès lors produire (*poïein*) de mondes possibles, créer des mondes alternatifs qui permettent de jeter un regard neuf et parfois critique sur ce qui se donne comme la seule réalité possible. Il peut rendre visible « l'imaginaire qui est logé dans le monde », s'approprier des correspondances, des questions et des réponses qui ne sont, dans le monde, qu'indiquées sourdement, et toujours étouffées par la stupeur des objets, il les désinvestit, les délivre et leur cherche un corps plus agile. » (Merleau-Ponty [1969]: 56). Et de ce fait, favoriser non pas l'identification mais la prise de distance ; non pas l'immersion mais l'émergence d'un regard neuf, critique, éloignée et de ce fait capable d'un travail de nature cognitive et critique, « dont l'analogue se retrouve en toute pensée philosophique ou politique » (Merleau-Ponty [1960]: 125).

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Note & Recensioni

Marcos Silva (ed.), *How Colours Matter to Philosophy*, Springer, New York 2017, 326 pp.

«Colours induce us to philosophize». This is how the editor's *Introduction* to this ambitious volume begins. Eighteen papers, divided into three parts, consider the relation between colour and philosophy from different points of view: History of Philosophy (Part I), Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind (Part II) and Philosophy of Language and Logic (Part III). In fact, one of the goals of Silva, who is also the editor of another volume on *Colours in the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), is to broaden the focus of the philosophical debate on colour, centered until now «primarily in the naturalist tradition of analytic philosophy». Silva's reference here is to some classical texts such as *Readings on Color*, edited by Byrne and Hilbert (1996), and *Colors for Philosophers* by C. L. Hardin (1988). These books are quoted and discussed quite often inside the volume, but the connection that they state between the very idea of colour and the enquiries of natural sciences is not the only point of view. In this respect, Silva's work aims at building a bridge between the «analytic and continental philosophical traditions» in relation to the question of colour. This means also that «the extant literature based on the naturalistic tradition» has to be examined «given the grounding of a conscientious historical perspective». It is not by chance that the first two essays of the book are dedicated respectively to Democritus and Plato. Moreover, according to Silva, it is necessary to extend the investigation on colour also to the sphere of language and logic (and this is actually what he does in the third part of the book).

The first part of the volume starts with a paper by B. Maund, editor of the entry "Colour" for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Maund starts from a famous fragment on colour by Democritus, in order to challenge the traditional difference between eliminativism and dispositionalism. In order to be consistent, he argues, dispositionalism – the theory according to which colours are dispositions to look in a certain way to a certain observer – has to admit a component of error or illusion in our experience. Dispositionalism

becomes compatible, this way, with eliminativism: colours don't really exist in the real world or, as Democritus says, they exist only «by convention».

In the second paper E. Txapartegi tries to show, through an analysis of Plato's *Timaeus*, that colour terms in ancient Greece referred to hues (and not brightness or other aspects, as many scholars suggested). This «adds credibility», according to Txapartegi, to the Universal and Evolutionary (UE) model, suggested by Berlin and Kay at the end of the 1960', according to which there are few basic colour categories to which all languages tend to approximate.

The third essay, by K. Walsh, considers Newton's revolutionary discovery about colour: natural light is not homogeneous but composed of different types of rays, which are reflected in different ways and give birth to different colours. Newton indicates 7 main colours and the author tries to investigate the reason of this. Newton is the starting point also of the following paper, by O. L. Müller, who compares Newton's research on colour to Goethe's. Müller's thesis is that, although Newton got the "right" result, Goethe reflected more deeply on the method of scientific investigation.

The last three papers of the section focus on Wittgenstein and Husserl. Concerning the latter, J. da Silva confronts Husserl's perspective, according to which truths about colours are synthetic apriori, with Schlick's objection that this kind of truths actually doesn't exist, because they rely on language. The phenomenological perspective is the object also of K. Mülligan's paper, which examines some important similarities between Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour* and David Katz's *Die Erscheinungsweisen der Farben* (1911). Yet there is also a fundamental difference: «what Katz and other phenomenologists think of as non-contingent connexions between colour phenomena» for Wittgenstein «are in fact rules for using colour words». The section is closed with a paper by A. Lugg, who aims at defending Wittgenstein from the naturalistic trend in philosophy, according to which colours have to be investigated through natural sciences rather than through an analysis of language (see for that A. Danto, *Preface* to Hardin, cit.). In order to do that, he takes up the case of the impossible colours (the most famous of which is Wittgenstein's "greenish red") and shows that the problems are not solvable by simply substituting the naturalistic approach to Wittgenstein's logical approach.

The second part of the volume opens with a paper by P. Ross, who defends a physicalistical view of colour. According to physicalism, colours have to be identified with certain physical properties of objects. Yet this doesn't imply, according to Ross, to consider colour as a «primary quality». Colour remains a «secondary quality», because the physical properties that constitute colours are filtered by our perception. Yet physicalism undergoes also another kind of problem, which is examined by N. Unwin in the following paper. How can we know that other people see the same colours that we see, rather than, for example, inverted colours? Unwin argues against this famous hypothesis of the «inverted spectrum», showing that there are some important analogies between the phenomenology of colour and its physiological perception.

In the third paper, B. Ainbinder asks himself why Heidegger never wrote about colour. According to Ainbinder, far from being a problem for Heidegger's thought (as many scholars state), colours can be considered from an Heideggerian perspective in a way that permits to solve many problems. The following contribution, by Stekeler-Weithofer, goes back to Wittgenstein. Like A. Lugg, Stekeler-Weithofer starts from the privileged position that physical sciences have acquired in the present philosophy of colour. His suggestion, against this physicalistic approach, is to understand colour sensations as a limit-concept and colours as general distinctions that we *make*. A guide to this task, according to the author, is not only Wittgenstein, but also Hegel (whose thoughts on colour, however, are not mentioned).

The last paper of this section, by O. Bueno, is dedicated to the question of colour in the arts. Bueno's thesis is that whether colour's phenomenology is quite «constant», its meaning in the arts can «vary» considerably.

The last section starts with an essay by G. Priest, who addresses from a logical point of view an intriguing question: can we see contradictory colours (like red and green) at the same time? Priest's answer is yes. In order to demonstrate this, he shows a continuous progression (a «sorite progression») from red to green, in which the transition-states are at the same time red and green. Colour predicates are «vague», then. This is also the thesis of the following contribution, by D. Raffman. Raffman as well starts from a sorites series of colors, processing from blue to green. She refers to some experiments that have been done, in which the application of colour predicates (blue or green) by the same subject varies according to the two phases – from right to left and vice versa – in which the series is seen. The following two papers are dedicated to the «homology of relations» between natural logic and the logic of colours. Both structures are represented by D. Jaspers through an hexagon of oppositions, while J. Y Beziau picks up Jaspers' hexagon in order to suggest a combination of colours and «phsychic dispositions». The last two contributions are dedicated to some mathematical problems that have to do with colours: the Four Color Theorem, analysed by G. D. Secco and L. C. Pereira in the light of Wittgenstein's idea of a surveyability of mathematical rules, and Ramsey's theory of finite combiatorics, through which W. Carnielli and C. di Prisco investigate «why colors matter for mathematics».

This volume offers a great overview of how broad the question of colour can be. Even more importantly, it shows how colour requires from us a very philosophical task: that of crossing borders. Of course some fields remain barely sketched, for example the problem of colour in art (addressed only in one paper). A deeper investigation of this question may have contributed to shed light on another more general issue. In fact, the volume considers attentively the tension between natural sciences and logic. Yet there is another border that seems to be less considered in this text: the «borderline between logic and the empirical» (Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, III.19), or between abstract colours and colours in our everyday experience. If we focus on this sphere – on our normal experience of colour – another question arises. Can the perception of colour really be separated from its meaning? In other words, is it really correct to consider subjectivity – as Stekelr-Weithofer states – as a limit-concept, in order to focus either on colour terms (linguistic approach) or on colour perception (naturalistic approach)? This is a puzzling question indeed and certainly this book increases our will to puzzle.

Table of contents: *Introduction* (Silva, Marcos); Part I. History of Philosophy: *Dispositionalism: Democritus and Colours by Convention* (Maund, Barry); *Hue, Brightness & Saturation in Classical Greek Chroma Terms* (Txapartegi, Ekai); *How Many Colours?* (Walsh, Kirsten); *Goethe contra Newton on Colours, Light, and the Philosophy of Science* (Müller, Olaf L.); *On Color: The Husserlian Material a Priori* (Silva, Jairo José); *Impossible Colours: Wittgenstein and the Naturalist's Challenge* (Lugg, Andrew); Part II. Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind: *Colours – Wittgenstein vs (Katz & Bühler)* (Mulligan, Kevin); *What the Mind-Independence of Color Requires* (Ross, Peter W.); *Explaining Colour Phenomenology* (Unwin, Nicholas); *Dasein Is the Animal That Sorts Out Colors* (Ainbinder, Bernardo); *Subjectivity and Normativity in Colour-Distinctions* (Stekeler-Weithofer, Pirmin); *Colors: Presentation and Representation in the Fine Arts* (Bueno, Otávio); Part III. Philosophy of language and Philosophy of Logic: *Things Are Not What They Seem* (Priest, Graham); *Vagueness, Hysteresis, and the Instability of Color* (Raffman, Diana); *Logic and Colour in Cognition, Logic and Philosophy* (Jaspers, Dany); *A Chromatic Hexagon of Psychic Dispositions* (Beziau, Jean-Yves); *Proofs Versus Experiments: Wittgensteinian Themes Surrounding the Four-Color Theorem* (Secco, Gisele Dalva et al.); *The Wonder of Colors and the Principle of Ariadne* (Carnielli, Walter et al.).

(di Alice Barale)

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., and Koelsch, S., *The distancing-embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception*, "Behavioral and Brain Science", 40, 2017, 1-58.

The article of Menninghaus and colleagues focuses on the well-known (and apparent) paradox concerning the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception. On the basis of recent psychological data, the article proposes a model centered on two kinds of mechanisms. The first group of mechanisms (art, representation, and fiction schemata) represents distancing processes that allow the personal safety of the recipients, thereby preventing negative emotions from becoming incompatible with enjoyment and pleasure. The second group of mechanisms (compositional interplays of positive and negative emotions, aesthetic virtues of the representations, and meaning-making efforts) allows recipients to positively embrace the experiencing of negative emotions.

The model represents an interesting proposal, even if at present the hypotheses are too speculative and rest on scarce evidence. Above all, in the present version the model has two relevant theoretical limitations, the first one concerning the distancing factors (1), the second one concerning the embracing factors (2).

(1) The authors correctly stress that negative ordinary emotions have three key properties: they are particularly powerful in securing attentional resources, intense emotional involvement, and privileged storage in memory. According to many strands of evidence, the underlying rationale is that negative ordinary emotions have a strong personal relevance. This is precisely the meaning of the formula quoted by the authors: «bad is stronger than good». Obviously, in virtue of their personal relevance and negative valence, negative ordinary emotions are generally not associated with pleasure and enjoyment. In contrast, negative aesthetic emotions, that is emotions in response to art, are often integrated in pleasurable experiences. According to the model, the precondition of this phenomenon is constituted by the cognitive mechanism that keeps negative aesthetic emotions at some psychological distance. As a consequence of the so-called "art, representation, and fiction schemata" (p. 4), subjects are aware that during aesthetic experience there is a condition of personal safety and they are in control of the situation.

So, in line with a widespread agreement among experts, the model posits that negative aesthetic emotions, although genuine and authentic emotional episodes, are not activated by ordinary, immediate, instrumental, and practical personal goals. However, if by definition negative aesthetic emotions entail «little direct personal goal relevance» (p. 13), how can they engage the same three properties of negative ordinary emotions? The authors explicitly argue that the distancing effect «does not convert, let alone erase, negative emotional responses, and need not even reduce the felt intensity of these responses in order to make them (more) compatible with positive enjoyment» (p. 15). However, the distancing mechanism inhibits the strong real-world personal relevance and therefore it does not explain how negative aesthetic emotions can activate a powerful grip on attention, emotional involvement, and high memorability. Moreover, this difficulty cannot be solved by the intervention of the embracing factors. By definition they «allow art recipients to positively embrace the experience of negative emotions«» (p. 1): they link a negative experience with a positive one, but they do not endow this negative experience with strong personal relevance. So, this is the first missing point of the model: it does not explain the personal relevance of negative aesthetic emotions and how they can have the same three key properties of negative ordinary emotions.

(2) The pleasurable experience allowed by the embracing factors is denoted by different terms: "enjoyment", ("hedonic") "reward", "rewarding quality", "liking", ("intellectual/emotional") "pleasure", ("pleasurable/positive") "affect", "aesthetic appeal, appraisal, appreciation". However, these terms evidently refer to a heterogeneous set of very different affective and emotional phenomena that ranges from elementary and immediate reac-

tions to elaborated and sophisticated processes of appraisal. So the model does not afford an accurate typology of the pleasurable experiences associated with negative aesthetic emotions.

In particular, the model does not distinguish between first-order pleasurable experiences and higher-order ones. From this point of view, «interplays of positive and negative emotions» (p. 17) and «concomitant mixed emotions as bipolar mediators» (p. 20) are clearly first-order emotional reactions directly experienced in response to the representational properties – such as setting, characters, and events in narrative. In the case of sadness, Menninghaus and colleagues explicitly reject the hypothesis about compassion/empathy as a self-gratifying response involving a meta-emotional (re)appraisal. Accordingly, «aesthetic virtues» factors are largely first-order emotional reactions directly experienced in response to aesthetic properties inherent to the representation itself – such as coloring, execution, poetic style, and so on. On the contrary, there is a widespread agreement among experts that aesthetic pleasure is a higher-order experience accompanying elaboration, grounded in and function of first-order processing experience of artworks. Precisely, it is usually defined as a higher-order phenomenal signals provoked by constant self-monitoring of ongoing cognitive processing, automatically elicited by internal and experiential cues associated with fluency – or dis-fluency, that is insightfully predictive error reduction.

This is another very relevant missing point for the model. Because aesthetic pleasure is a higher-order phenomenon, it is largely irrespective of the artwork's intrinsic affective and emotional contents as such. Even if the first-order experience provided by the artwork is strongly negative, this experience may result pleasurable and appreciated at the higher-level because it allows a relevant dynamic of fluent/dis-fluent understanding. So, for instance, in the case of horror films there is no need of additional explanatory mechanisms like the «benign-masochism hypothesis» (p. 35).

In my view, both the theoretical limitations of the model can be quite easily overcome. The main step is to consider aesthetic experience as an experience of knowledge: it is a function of previous knowledge and already acquired skills and at the same time a powerful means of improving advancement of understanding and enabling further skills acquisition. Obviously, the basic goal of knowledge can be instantiated in two opposite ways that correspond to two fixed and constantly active sub-goals of the brain: confirmation and preservation, exploration and growth of knowledge. The basic goal of knowledge enables the real-world personal goal relevance of negative aesthetic emotions. Immersed in intense negative feelings, subjects can re-enact emotional schemata previously entrenched in memory and/or discover new emotional features that defy habitual expectations. Accordingly, negative aesthetic emotions can be associated with a pleasurable experience as a consequence of two different forms of aesthetic pleasure, the first one as a fluency-based higher-order experience monitoring the goal of confirmation, the second one as a disfluency-based higher-order experience monitoring the goal of exploration.

In sum, the theoretical limitations of the model directly derive from the mistaken methodological choice of considering the «functional benefits» of art irrelevant for «the immediate experiential correlate of exposure to artworks» (p. 7). On the contrary knowledge plays a pivotal role in determining the experience of art and its personal relevance.

(di Gianluca Consoli)

François Jullien, *Si près, tout autre. De l'écart et de la rencontre*, Grasset, Paris 2018, pp. 234.

Con il suo volume *Si près, tout autre. De l'écart et de la rencontre* (Grasset, Paris 2018), François Jullien – filosofo, ellenista e sinologo da molti anni impegnato nell'esplorazione dei rapporti tra pensiero europeo e pensiero cinese – offre al dibattito internazionale un ulteriore, importante momento

di elaborazione della sua riflessione, per molti versi incardinata sulla ricomprensione di quel nodo filosoficamente cruciale che è il tema dell'alterità. In *Si près, tout autre* il punto di partenza dell'indagine sviluppata, con la consueta finezza, dall'autore è costituito dalla consapevolezza che, se «penser autrement» è la "parola d'ordine tradizionale" della filosofia, o piuttosto – precisa Jullien – il suo «vieux rêve» –, è precisamente la possibilità di accostarsi a qualcosa che sia veramente "altro" a dover essere interrogata e ripensata radicalmente. Cosa significa, insomma, "accedere all'altro"? È possibile farlo? E come?

Secondo l'originale taglio prospettico offerto qui da Jullien, indugiare nella perlustrazione di questi interrogativi significa innanzitutto rilanciare la possibilità di un pensiero che, ponendosi all'altezza di questa sfida teoretica tutt'altro che ovvia, sappia rimettere in discussione abiti di pensiero e pratiche di sapere, "atavicamente" incorporati nella cultura occidentale, che si qualificano invece per la loro tendenza a procedere per opposizioni e distinzioni, per delimitazioni e definizioni. Il che, sempre secondo Jullien, presuppone un'idea del pensiero come strategia demarcante-differenziante che "lavora" con (e a partire da) termini *già* concepiti nella forma di "enti" o di "stati di cose": termini, cioè, ripiegati sulla loro identità con sé stessi e rigidamente chiusi nel loro isolamento. È quanto la tradizione metafisica occidentale, in modi diversi, ha ratificato e consacrato, eleggendo perentoriamente ad assioma fondativo della propria strategia epistemica l'aristotelico principio di non-contraddizione. Di qui, allora, il prevalere di quella logica disgiuntiva e definitoria (classificatoria e categorizzante) che trasforma le *antonimie* linguistiche, vale a dire le opposizioni e le differenze istituite all'interno del nostro linguaggio comune, in vere e proprie *antinomie* ontologiche ed epistemologiche.

Ebbene, è precisamente a questo livello che, secondo Jullien, occorre *aprire uno scarto* (un «écart»), valorizzando e *facendo lavorare* le linee di separazione e di divaricazione, le distanze e le fratture: quelle emergenti innanzitutto tra termini o nozioni che, nella frequentazione ordinaria del nostro linguaggio quotidiano, tendono a essere assunti semplicemente come "simili", come "sinonimi" o come "omologhi". Si tratta allora di introdurre nella fissità dell'ordine logico-linguistico storicamente vigente, nella pretesa trasparenza e nella quiete rassicurante delle sue differenziazioni demarcanti-delimitanti, quell'istanza euristicamente sempre attiva di dissenso e di disturbo, di deregolamentazione e di decategorizzazione, che dissocia il pensiero dalla fissità del "noto": dall'inerzia del già-conosciuto e del già-pensato. È quanto Jullien traduce, a livelli diversi, attraverso la messa in campo di una vasta costellazione di nozioni-chiave, tra loro strettamente interrelate, che ruotano tutte intorno all'idea dell'effrazione e della trasgressione, del turbamento e della dissidenza: *débordement* e *dérangement*, *décalage* e *clivage*, *embranchement* e *béance*, *dérèglement* e *désarroi*, *défaillance* e *fêlure*.

In questa prospettiva, "pensare altrimenti" significa essere in grado di *fessurare* il dato: significa far esplodere la coerenza semantica, e insieme la coesione sintattica, di quella trama di relazioni attraverso la quale il linguaggio e il pensiero articolano il mondo, e il nostro farne esperienza, in sinonimie e similitudini, in equivalenze e omologie, in rapporti di contrarietà e-o di complementarietà. Ma il punto è che, una volta riassorbito all'interno di quella trama logico-categoriale che il pensiero costruisce per dare ordine e stabilità al caos dell'esperienza, *dell'altro non ne è più nulla*: la riduzione dell'"altro" al rango di "opposto", infatti, è già il risultato della messa in opera di una strategia di inquadramento che, nel porre *analiticamente* il diverso "di fronte" all'identico – nell'assegnargli, cioè, un ruolo e una funzione all'interno della relazione differenziale-oppositiva (come esemplarmente avviene nel caso della *diaìresis* platonica) –, finisce per collocare e per allineare quella stessa presunta alterità nella griglia di un ordine già da sempre governato dalla non-contraddittorietà dell'identico. Includere l'altro nella tessitura di un ordine semantico-concettuale già fondato sul primato preventivamente accordato alla datità dell'identico significa, allora, "perdere" l'altro: significa negarlo, appunto, *in quanto* altro.

Da questo punto di vista, il compito al quale il pensiero deve essere in grado di assolvere si rivela fondamentalmente duplice: si tratta infatti, per un verso, di dare corso a una pratica di *dis-assimilazione del simile* (per scongiurare il rischio omogeneizzante-uniformante di una prospettiva francamente "monistica") e, per altro verso, di procedere alla messa in atto di un lavoro di *dis-esclusione degli opposti*, intendendo con ciò la capacità che il pensiero deve avere di portare a manifestazione la loro interdipendenza e la loro indisgiungibilità (il che, invece, permette di evitare quella scissione della vita, quella lacerazione cioè della sua unità, che è invece l'esito al quale conduce ogni possibile prospettiva di tipo "dualistico"). Di contro a ogni possibile dualismo, dunque, ecco riaffiorare potentemente l'idea eraclitea della *palìntropos harmonìe*, l'idea cioè di una permanente "cooperazione degli opposti", da intendersi come un *antixoùn* paradossalmente coincidente con la dimensione del *symphèron*.

"Dis-assimilare il simile", quindi, e *insieme* "dis-escludere gli opposti": a questo deve mirare un pensiero autenticamente capace di porsi all'altezza di quella sua irrinunciabile sfida teoretica, e insieme etica, che è la ricerca dell'*altro in quanto altro*. È quanto Jullien appunto ci propone nella densa trama argomentativa del suo *Si près, tout autre*. Qui, infatti, quale che sia la coppia di termini apparentemente simili/affini di volta in volta presa in esame (scarto-differenza, senso-coerenza, incontro-relazione, godimento-piacere, ripresa-ripetizione, differire-rinviare, equivocità-ambiguità, altro-opposto, esplorare-spiegare), la messa in atto dell'originale strategia critico-decostruttiva suggerita da Jullien si traduce operativamente nell'*inscrizione* di una distanza, nell'introduzione cioè di una incrinatura (una *fêlure*) e di una divaricazione (un *embranchement*), capace di mantenere produttivamente in *tensione reciproca* i due termini appartenenti a quella medesima coppia concettuale.

In questo modo, ad affiorare con la massima flagranza è la virtù tipicamente *esplorativa* ascrivibile alla nozione di "scarto": la sua capacità di promuovere il dispiegamento attivo del pensiero proprio attraverso il riconoscimento di quella inesauribile fecondità di *risorse* semantico-concettuali – risorse da sondare e da difendere, da scrutare e da valorizzare – che è implicita nello spazio *intensivo* del "tra-due" e che, sola, è in grado di aprire il pensiero alla possibilità del "nuovo". «C'est en percevant de l'écart entre les semblables, à proximité, comme en percevant du commun entre les termes opposés – ci ricorda infatti Jullien – que pense la pensée». A delinearsi così è un quadro interpretativo all'interno del quale è precisamente l'incontro con l'inassimilabile eccedenza di senso incarnata dal "*così accanto-tutt'altro*" a costituire la risorsa essenziale della vita: il vettore capace di favorire e di sollecitare quell'inquieto «*déploiement de la vie en ex-istence*» che, in quanto espressione di una sua «*dé-coïncidence*» rispetto alla positività del già-noto e alla fissità del già-compreso, ha la virtù di rigenerare l'orizzonte del senso.

Procedendo dunque per scarti e "smarcandosi" così dal già-pensato, il pensiero ha la forza di *liberare l'altro*: ha l'abilità di farlo "sgorgare" («*jaillir*») e "risaltare" («*saillir*») come pura *esteriorità* non-sussumibile nell'ordine astratto del concetto: come espressione di un "fuori" che non si lascia integrare funzionalmente nello spazio del "proprio". Liberare l'altro significa allora liberare la possibilità di fare esperienza, nel finito, dall'interno stesso cioè di quel che *di più vicino vi è nel vicino* – dall'interno stesso, insomma, di quel che *di più sensibile vi è nel sensibile* («*au* plus près, *au plus sensible du sensible*») –, di qualcosa che eccede il finito stesso. È quello che Jullien non esita a definire come lo spazio *del* "metafisico" (ma con la consapevolezza che "il" metafisico non coincide affatto con "la" metafisica, tradizionalmente intesa). Con questa espressione, infatti, Jullien allude a quella possibilità di trascendere l'immanenza *dall'interno stesso* dell'immanenza della quale la nozione irriducibilmente paradossale di "*jouissance*", opportunamente "smarcata" dalla nozione solo apparentemente simile di "piacere" (e ricompresa, dunque, proprio attraverso lo "scarto" che la separa da essa), costituisce una delle espressioni esemplari.

Di qui, più in generale, l'emergere del tenore propriamente *etico* ascrivibile alla nozione di "*si*

près-tout autre" tematizzata da Jullien: «L'inouï est […] une catégorie foncière, à défaut d'être fondatrice, puisque se défiant de l'ontologie. En disant l'Autre si proche, mais ne s'assimilant pas, l'inouï définit de façon rigoureuse ce qui fait la tension propre à l'*ex-istence*. Par suite, en disant cet Autre inaccessible, mais dont on se laisse heurter, l'inouï est une catégorie éthique. Car on accepte, ou non […] de *rencontrer* cet inouï de l'Autre. "Il faut l'oser"». L'incontro con l'assolutamente Altro richiede, dunque, coraggio e impegno: esige un passaggio dalla logica identitaria del concetto alla logica paradossale dell'esistenza, imperniata innanzitutto sulla densità insieme emotiva e cognitiva del nostro *sentirci in situazione*. In questo senso, l'incontro con l'Altro presuppone la nostra *disponibilità a credere* nella possibilità del suo effettivo dispiegamento: la disponibilità, in termini eraclitei, a "sperare nell'insperabile". Si tratta dunque di una dimensione che, potendo essere solo *scelta*, fa appello innanzitutto alla nostra libertà. «Croyance *hardie* – scrive, a questo riguardo, Jullien – croire, non pas à ce qui est ou n'est pas, mais bien "que ce qui est est". *Que ce qui est est*: autrement dit, c'est l'effectif, à portée, mais inaccessible comme il est, ou le "réel", comme on dit, mais non pas à séparer comme "en soi", qui est l'inouï; et c'est à cet inouï qu'il faut "croire" pour le rencontrer».

Indice: Avertissements; I. Sous la proximité, la béance (*Ou du plaisir à la jouissance*); II. L'opposé n'est plus autre (*Ou comment les contraires s'entendent entre eux*); III. Il faut fracturer le semblable (*Ou les vrais embranchements n'apparaissent pas*); IV. L'écart qui s'ouvre fait découvrir (*Ou de la jouissance à l'existence*); V. Si près surgit l'Autre (*Ou qu'est-ce que rencontrer?*); *De l'inconscient à l'inouï*.

(di Antonio Valentini)