

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

Marco Innocenti

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record.

Please cite this article as:

Marco Innocenti (2021): The Optical House of Tactile: The Bricolage-Like Response to COVID-19. *Aisthesis*. DOI: 10.13128/Aisthesis-12104

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

Keywords

Bricolage; Alois Riegl; Martin Heidegger; Aura; COVID-19.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has not had (nor it will continue to have) an impact on our lifestyle just in social and economic terms, but also in aesthetic ones. Alois Riegl's distinction

between tactile and optical approaches to the image can help us to understand its effects, also since his dichotomy between “tactile connection” and “optical isolation” can ring a bell in a year characterised by video calls and social distancing. In fact, the Viennese art critic intends to attribute a sort of tactility to the point of view that perceives images in their unity, while locating a more strictly optical gaze where people look at things in their mutual individuality (Riegl [1901]: 21). Applying these considerations to today's situation, we also have to keep in mind features such as the «uninterrupted and *immediately* convincing materiality» of tactile and the penchant for thoughtful detachment encouraged, instead, by the works of art made during an “optical” era such as the late-Roman period (Riegl [1901]: 65, transl. my own).

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

Therefore, the pandemic has led people to an optical gaze, both sudden and unnatural, which has been imposed on our minds too abruptly to replace harmoniously the haptic closeness we all mourn. That invites us to ask ourselves where the tactile approach could

be hidden now and how it can endure in an eye bombarded by signs to wash our hands, to wear a mask, and to stay six feet away from other people; or after hours of smart-working. The hypothesis that we will try to develop throughout this article concerns the possibility that the optical world-view is perceived (in a more or less unconscious way) as a sort of custodian of tactile. I will try to argue this point as a result of the diffusion in everybody of the *bricoleur's* way to look at things, in the terms in which Claude Lévi-Strauss describes it in his essay *La pensée sauvage* (1962).

The relational perspective

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

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

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

Hence, only regarding those who have an optical world-view we can draw a parallel with the *bricoleur* of Lévi-Strauss, if it is true that he has a «heterogeneous repertoire» (Lévi-

Strauss [1962]: 17) whose elements he combines inserting them one after the other in order to fill «each place» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 19). Although they are assembled, the pieces of a *bricoleur* do not hide their reciprocal differences, and indeed they put the spotlight on the intermediate space between them, i.e. on their relationship. A tactile approach could rise again only if singularity of the assembled pieces regains importance *after* the act of *bricolage*, and if each one is thereby conceived in itself and not in its bond with the others. Instead, an optical juxtaposition between recycled objects requires that, with a gaze on the whole (*Ganze ins Auge*), we can «overlook disturbing tactile details» (Riegl [1901]: 92, transl. my own). This attitude is deeply explained by the French anthropologist, who states that in totemism, a practice in which he says we can find a form of *bricolage*,

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

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

In the episode of Last Week Tonight on May 10 2020, John Oliver points out with irony that, if someone watches «old-timey clips» today, what catches your eye is, above all, the fact that people were close to each other in a public place «with no fear of dying» (LastWeekTonight [2020]: 15:52). This «severe quarantine brain» (as he puts it) is caused by the widespread diffusion of social distancing rules, which lead the individual to consider himself relatively to his spatial relationship with others and to think about their mutual position. Those measures were necessary due to the possibility of spreading the virus to others while being asymptomatic, a feature that makes SARS-CoV-2 unique among «any virus or pathogen we've experienced that has killing potential in the past» (Park [2020]: 10). Since the appearance of another person and our self-perception are not reliable indicators of our health and of the others' one, it is crucial to rely on the six feet apart rules and on masks capable of protecting others from ourselves.

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

Underlying tactile

Riegl asserts that late-Roman perception of things in their isolation hid the feeling of a magical bond between them. Leaving behind the previous concept of a mechanical relationship among elements, emerged a «new, positive belief in a connection between things that is extra-mechanical and nonetheless based on the individual shapes - thereby

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

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

Turning to our time and our mind, from the very beginning COVID-19 showed up as a curve of infections, graphs, and statistics. Whether data concern the effectiveness of a treatment, the filter of a mask, mortality by age group, a trend of the spread, or the effectiveness of certain measures, the pandemic has taken on an intensive, probabilistic tone everywhere. The cases described by an ascending curve cannot reasonably be expected to reset to zero the next day, but that does not imply that we perceive these

"forces" as undefeatable. A middle ground is, for example, the one that CBS Channel 8 explained to the general public through some mouse traps ready to launch a ping pong ball (CBS 8 San Diego [2020]). The experiment aimed to show how, in the chain reaction triggered by releasing an "infected" ball, those traps that have been spaced a span apart are more likely to be untouched than the ones in close contact with each other, without assuming, however, that the first ones will all remain intact. Therefore, the intensity we *perceive* inside the viral energy is linked to the mutual relationships between the individuals it may infect, their reciprocal distances, and the precautions taken by each. Thus, it takes the form of an extra-mechanical force dependent on shapes and circumstances, which thereby does not unfold itself everywhere in the same way. Showing up as a force flowing across the planet, albeit bound to the exposure of individuals, the pandemic has reintroduced an energetic force field capable of uniting contemporary fragmentation, in a way that we can compare to the terrorism in the early 2000s. According to Emanuele Severino, the diffusion of technology in what he calls the «age of technology» (Severino [1998]: 46, transl. my own) entails, at the end of the twentieth century, a widespread fragmentation (Severino [1998]: 48) resulted from the detailed specialisation at which technology aims (Severino [1998]: 47). This form of the hegemony of the West (Baudrillard [2002]: 5) is, as Baudrillard puts it, a «system of generalized exchange» at the heart of which the attacks of September 11 claimed an «irreducible singularity» (Baudrillard [2002]: 9). Just as the terrorists used the same weapons of technological power to revolt against it (Baudrillard [2002]: 20), Ruggero Eugeni argues that it was necessary, in the same years, to give an order to media «pulverization» through a «meta-practice of construction and reconstruction of unitary, coherent worlds» (Eugeni [2015]: 40, transl. my own). It has been this "media-practice" what would have led to «subjectification of experience» we can find in the spread of the first person shot (Eugeni [2015]: 53, transl. my own). The «universal» has thus left room for «singularities» (Baudrillard [2003]: 96-97), but then, as Joan Fontcuberta points out, the construction of one's own identity alongside hundreds of thousands of others' ones has shown that «the meaning dissolves in excess and confusion» (Fontcuberta [2016]:

43, transl. my own), or, in the words of Walter Benjamin «[q]uantity has now become quality» (Benjamin [1935]: 32, 33).

Being faced with this new shattering, which combines the isolation of fragmentation with the homogeneous indifference of «various equivalents» (Baudrillard [1976]: 89), Coronavirus has instead given the world a tactile dimension that could reunite it, rather than the «irreducible alterity» that has divided it once (Baudrillard [2003]: 97). While the latter has then put tactility into play through a jumble of singular realities, the virus has also encouraged an optical approach through the various ways we confront it, on which its different powers on each nation, region, city, town, and private citizen depend.

The optical house of tactile (the optical aspect)

Among the features of a *bricoleur*, as described by Lévi-Strauss, there is the fact that «[h]is universe of instruments is closed» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 17). The optical aspect with which he will try to articulate the form he has in mind (or his tribe, in the case of totemism) does not extend beyond the borders of his set. However, this latter cannot even be reduced in quantity on the basis of an alleged inadequacy of some elements with the «mere sketch» which is the initial project (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 21). The French anthropologist explains, in fact, how the «set which has yet to materialize [...] will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts» (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 18). Therefore, it is on the relational aspect between the elements that a *bricoleur* focuses on as soon as he wants to arrange them "over" the sketched project. He has no regard for a greater or lesser essential (and therefore absolute and immutable) link between a part of the ideal outline and a piece he has to use, and, in this way, no element will be "closer" than others to the tactile essence over which the shapes will be cobbled together. Then, a successful *bricoleur* will be satisfied to have arranged

a system which can be employed as a grid is used to decipher a text, whose original unintelligibility gives it the appearance of an uninterrupted flow. The grid makes it

possible to introduce division and contrasts, in other words the *formal conditions* necessary for a significant message to be conveyed. (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 75, my italics)

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

Like a dome made with heterogenous parts floating above the floor thanks to their reciprocal joints, then, *bricoleur's* elements form a sheath around the vague shape they are looking at. Since they keep intact their target, mediating an external gaze on it while staying at a distance, there is here in some respects a sort of "guardianship" of the tactile by the optic. It will be useful not to ignore how complex this definition could become drawing a parallel with Heidegger's thought. First, however, we have to observe under what circumstances should be possible to find this specific aspect of *bricolage* in life during the pandemic. It will be enough, for this purpose, to bring to mind those spaces that hosted our existence during the lockdown and those bars, restaurants, schools, library entrances, churches, etc. which have been set up from scratch in order to preserve, even under the shadow of social distancing, the aforementioned «capacity for spiritual relationships of man in general». In the Time magazine issue of April 6 and 13, there is a double-page photograph of a Catholic priest sitting in his chair, which was part of the «drive-through confessional» (Mages [2020]: 17) he put together in a parking lot with cones of traffic, wires, poles, and an old curtain. It would seem an act of *bricolage*, but it is not precisely what Lévi-Strauss described, as the priest looked for its pieces within a much wider "universe of instruments" than the set he used. Considering the way he outlines his setup, in fact, there can be little doubt that if he had thought another

«old curtain» to be more fitting for his project, he would have dismissed the other one (Mages [2020]: 17).

Instead, we have to look at those practices of refurbishing one's own apartment through which «[k]itchens and living rooms were transformed into classrooms, home offices, meeting rooms and sourdough breeding grounds» (BBC Radio 4 [n.d.]). As Ronda Kaysen and Michelle Higgins point out, in fact, even if they had never found a flaw in their furniture, it often proved unsuitable for the new dynamics. In fact, it seemed to be necessary to rearrange everything in order to make room for an unprecedented lifestyle. Furthermore, «[r]ethinking your space can offer a sense of control» (Kaysen, Higgins [2020]) on a tactile presence spread all over the world, whose influence on your existence you can try, in this way, to reduce. The advice of the two journalists is, in order «[t]o figure out the best use of your space, [to] try moving things around», letting yourself be guided by the function of the different rooms and by the "instrumental set" of the furniture (which remains the same), placing each piece after the other (Kaysen, Higgins [2020]). A similar challenge was then faced, with the addition of some dispensers, by anyone who had to rethink the arrangement of the spaces that would be reopened to the public in order to safely welcome, guide, accommodate, and ushering it out, thus preserving its relational life, whatever it is. As Lou Del Bello states, they too had to «reimagine those spaces from scratch» to «rediscover what togetherness means in new spaces» (De Bello [2020]).

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

practical terms, but it «lets the Being-be» because it «builds upon the house of Being» (Heidegger [1949]: 236).

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

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

The optical house of tactile (the tactile aspect)

Just as, in a synchronic point of view, the "house of tactile" closes around it in detachment, so an act of *bricolage* generates a sort of dome, as I said above. This happens by virtue of the way in which the "language/grid" is created by listening to what it has to take care of, or, in Heidegger's words, through its being "thrown" and "claimed" by it. The manner in which the *bricoleur* assembles the "grid" does not have any earlier origin than his first act itself and cannot be used later, and thus it is limited to its own. Whether this *assembly* of "language" is a medium through which its singular "words"

(the elements of *bricolage*) can be disposed to organise the inarticulate form, or vice-versa we look at it as the medium by which this latter can emerge through the selected pieces, the final setup will be useless elsewhere. In the arrangement of the furniture described in the previous paragraph, for example, the combinatorial possibilities are limited by the very objects you have at home, and even if they were the same for everyone, the spaces they have to organise and the life that flows through the rooms would always be different.

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

We can find a more in-depth explanation of the latter point of view in Nelson Goodman's *The Languages of Art* (1968). Here we can read that although «all correct musical performances are equally authentic instances of the work», «even the most exact copies of the Rembrandt painting are simply imitations or forgeries» (Goodman [1968]: 113), and learn that this is because the «symbol scheme» of a score is «substantially notational» (Goodman [1968]: 181), and thereby internally “differentiated” (Goodman [1968]: 152). In painting, instead,

with no such alphabet of characters, none of the pictorial properties [...] is distinguished as constitutive; no such feature can be dismissed as contingent, and no deviation as insignificant. (Goodman [1968]: 116)

Each painting remains unique by virtue of its tactile, seamless continuum through the elements. The same is true for *bricolage*, which from its tactile shape receives its «here and now», quoting Benjamin's words, meaning «its unique existence in the place where it is at the moment» (Benjamin [1935]: 5). According to the Berliner philosopher, this value of authenticity is related to the sphere of worship, be it magical or religious (Benjamin [1935]: 11). Therefore, the aura, i.e., the perception of the «singularity» of the work of art (Benjamin [1935]: 10), depends on a cultic approach towards the sacredness it houses inside. Lastly, by attributing an auratic nature to a «unique manifestation of a remoteness» (Benjamin [1935]: 9), Benjamin reveals that a work of art made for a contemplative gaze has still to preserve its tactile «sheath» (Benjamin [1935]: 10) in order to maintain its optical detachment from the public.

In the last sentence sight and touch seems to overlap and, quite above, we have talked about symphonic music and auras enveloping works of art, things to which it may be difficult to attribute a tactile or optical nature. It could be therefore useful to make more explicit the choice of referring to these adjectives in accordance with the values that Riegl and Benjamin give them, regardless of the physical nature of the art concerned. Instead, the dichotomy between tactile and visual has to deal with the relationship between the "closeness-detachment" polarity and the "indefinite-well defined" one. These aspects, of course, can be intertwined in manifold ways, e.g., in a "caressing" gaze, in which the observed things fade into one another, while the observer remains distant from them. In the case of music, this difference unfolds on different levels, since, although scores feature a definite notation,

[t]he performances of the most specific score are by no means exact duplicates of one another, but vary widely and in many ways. A moderately good copy and the original

painting resemble each other more closely than do performances of a Bach suite by Piatigorsky and Casals. (Goodman [1968]: 196)

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

Tactile between the acts of bricolage

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

there are systematic variations between the customs of even contiguous Australian tribes, the «rules of the game» are shared, and the underlying «social and philosophical style» is the same for each tribe (Lévi-Strauss [1962]: 90, 106).

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

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

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

Optical between the acts of bricolage

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

The means by which Western man has shaped nature, in fact, threatens to destroy the subject or the object among which it is, as the health emergency has had the opportunity to stress. Regarding the second, COVID-19 has highlighted how strong the influence of the industry and the transport is on pollution, while spreading the hope of a turning point in favour of nature. During the lockdown, for example, several clips of animals wandering on the streets (Garcia [2020]), whether they were real or fake, were watched worldwide because «[t]he idea that animals and nature could actually flourish during this crisis "could help give us a sense of meaning and purpose - that we went through

this for a reason"» (Daly [2020]). Concerning the "subject", instead, to the damages humanity suffers as results of an unhealthy planet, it has to be added that «[t]he deployment of robots as a response to Coronavirus was rapid. They were suddenly cleaning floors at airports and taking people's temperatures» (Semuels [2020]: 58). In fact, the replacement of real workers with robots or AIs has speeded up during the pandemic «as companies struggle to avoid workplace infections of COVID-19 and to keep operating costs low» (Semuels [2020]: 58). Meanwhile, «the number of new jobs is often minuscule compared with the number of jobs lost» (Semuels [2020]: 61).

According to Emanuele Severino, technology's enhancement has already made people abandon an undeniable *epistème* (Severino [1988]: 208) on which to base their will. That has happened due to the «ever higher level reached by technology when its purpose is not a specific value [...], but it is the improvement of the capacity to achieve any goal» (Severino [1988]: 139, transl. my own). That is because we have started targeting as our main aim the development of technology itself, which is the *medium* par excellence according to a modern conception (Severino [1988]: 8). However, this "reversal" (Severino [1988]: 135) has not affected the inner nature of Western culture, which is, according to Severino, its ability to «coordinate means with a view to creating aims» (Severino [1988]: 147, transl. my own). On the contrary, it protects Western man from waning with every durable truth, offering him as a new target «the infinite increase of his own creative freedom, his own infinite self-empowerment» (Severino [1988]: 148, transl. my own).

However, when technology turns out to be a threat to both the human subject and its object, *bricolage* can provide limited, unique media, which are, in their independence from each other, the opposite of Severino's "scientific-technological Apparatus" (Severino [1988]: 139). First of all, this technique can be, as we have seen, the house of what it cares about, and thereby of nature, without putting it into a subject-object relationship. Furthermore, *bricolage* can preserve the "*téchne*" with which, from the Greeks onwards, the West has identified humankind (Severino [1988]: 144), thus taking care of both the subject and the medium at once. Regarding the subject, the *bricoleur's* way of doing can protect the singularity of an individual, a people, or a period through

the uniqueness of every technique they create. Concerning the medium, instead, *bricolage* offers the opportunity to observe a medium from birth to death, free from causes and effects, and without external values or wills.

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

References

Baudrillard, J., 1976: *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, transl. by I. Hamilton Grant, SAGE, 2016.

Baudrillard, J., 2002: *The Spirit of Terrorism*, transl. by C. Turner, Verso, London, 2003.

BBC Radio 4 (n.d.): *How the spaces we inhabit will change after lockdown*. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk>.

Benjamin, W., 1935: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, transl. by Underwood J. A., Penguin Books, London, 2008.

Berman, J., 2020: *Welcome to the golden era of livestreaming*, “Time Magazine” 195 (14), pp. 46-47. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.

CBS 8 San Diego, 2020: *Social distancing explained with mouse traps and ping pong balls* [Video file], Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwynEVOZVco>.

Daly, N., 2020, March 20: *Fake animal news abounds on social media as coronavirus upends life*, "National Geographic". Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com>.

De Bello, L., 2020, May 28: *How Covid-19 could redesign our world*. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com>.

De Luca, A., 2020, April 4: *'Dear Customers': These Are the Emotional Store Signs of a Closed New York*, "The New York Times", p. MB7. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com>.

Deleuze, G., 1981: *Francis Bacon*, transl. by D. W. Smith, A&C Black, London, 2005.

Eugeni, R., 2015: *La condizione postmediale*, Editrice La Scuola, Brescia.

Fontcuberta, J., 2016: *La furia delle immagini. Note sulla postfotografia*, transl. By S. Giusti, Einaudi, Torino, 2018.

Garcia, S. E., 2020, April 1: *When Humans Are Sheltered in Place, Wild Animals Will Play*, "The New York Times", p. D4. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com>.

Goodman, N., 1968: *Languages of Art*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis.

Heidegger, M., 1949: *Letter on Humanism*, in Krell, D. F. (ed.), *Basic Writings*, Harper & Row, New York, 1977, pp. 189-242.

Heidegger, M., 1959: *On the way to language*, transl. by P. D. Herz, Harper & Row, New York, 1971.

Kaysen, R., Higgins, M., 2020, April 1: *Rearranging the Furniture to Pass the Time*, "The New York Times", p. RE5. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com>.

LastWeekTonight, 2020: *USPS: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)* [Video file], Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loL8g0W9gAQ>.

Lévi-Strauss, C., 1962: *The Savage Mind*, transl. by J. Weightman, Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, 1966.

- Mages, E., 2020: *The Father will see you now*, "Time Magazine" 195 (12-13), pp. 16-17. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.
- Messina, S., 2020, March 27: *Nel fuorionda di Mattarella, l'umanità del presidente: "Giovanni, non vado dal barbiere neanche io"*, "la Repubblica". Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.repubblica.it>.
- Ortoleva, P., 2012: *Dal sesso al gioco. Un'ossessione per il XXI secolo?*, Espress Edizioni, Torino.
- Park, A., 2020: *The risks of COVID-19's asymptomatic spread*, "Time Magazine" 195 (23-24), p. 10. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.
- Riegl, A., 1901: *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn im Zusammenhange mit der Gesamtentwicklung der Bildenden Künste bei den Mittelmeervölkern*, k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, Vienna.
- Samuels, A., 2020: *Fewer Jobs, more machines*, "Time Magazine" 196 (7-8), pp. 56-63. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.
- Severino E., 1988: *Il destino della tecnica*, BUR, Milano, 2009 (II ed.).
- Steyerl, H., 2009: *In defense of the poor image*, "e-flux" 10. Retrieved November 16, 2020, from <https://www.e-flux.com>.
- Vecchio, C., 2020, March 28: *Chi è Giovanni, l'uomo del fuorionda da anni ombra di Mattarella*, "la Repubblica". Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.repubblica.it>.
- Worland, J., 2020(a): *The defining year*, "Time Magazine" 196 (3-4), pp. 30-36. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.
- Worland, J., 2020(b): *Justice for all*, "Time Magazine" 196 (3-4), pp. 60-65. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.
- Yamey, G., 2020: *The power of masks*, "Time Magazine" 196 (3-4), pp. 19-20. Retrieved from <https://time.com>.