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Rosebud: Exploring Deleuzian Temporality through the Wellesian Shot

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ABSTRACT. One of the central themes in Deleuzian metaphysics is his rethinking of the traditional ontological conception of time. Gilles Deleuze was significantly influenced by Henri Bergson's philosophy where he moves away from spatializing time and instead develops a qualitative account of it rather than a quantitative account. Deleuze's thoughts on time develop in fascinating ways in the context of cinema, as this medium provides a novel metaphysical context that throws in further complications regarding the issue of time and movement. For instance, Deleuze regards cinematic movement as a type of 'false movement' — it does not provide the viewer with an image to which movement is then added, nor does it reconstitute movement from particular instants, but rather it immediately provides us with a 'time-image' where movement, time, and image merge into one ontological entity. This concept of the 'time-image' that he introduces in his book *Cinema 2* is a central concept for Deleuze, and for this paper, as the time-image reverses time's subordination in relation to movement. Whereas historically in the western philosophical canon time was seen to be an entity that emerged from movement, Deleuze and Bergson begin to subvert this line of thinking, arguing instead that time is tied to duration rather than movement. This reversal of subordination manifests itself in interesting ways in the context of cinema, and in my paper, I will specifically explore the phenomenon of the time-image in Orson Welles' 1941 film, *Citizen Kane*. In particular, I will be taking a close look at the phenomenon of the 'rosebud' being used to traverse through time within Charles Kane's past memories. The case of rosebud is a unique example because not only does it connect to time through being a window into Kane's memory, it also functions as a recurring signifier throughout the film in a manner that allows us

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to connect theories of time to semiotics. I will use the discussion surrounding semiotics to explore Deleuze's concept of the virtual, ultimately arguing that the function of rosebud as a signifier provides us with a useful frame to explore the virtual nature of Deleuzian temporality.

The most productive starting point would be to begin with outlining Bergson's critique of the orthodox philosophical conception of time and examining the ways he departs from it. Bergson's primary objection is that philosophers mistakenly think of time as a spatial entity. This concept is deeply entrenched in both philosophical and colloquial thought — there are countless examples of people using space as an analogy for time. For instance, think of the concept of a calendar: it spatializes time into a discrete grid where a 'year' is taken as the holistic unit, which is then divided into months, then weeks, then days. Another example is the analog clock where a circular structure is divided into twelve equal parts to symbolize twelve equal hours, which are traversed by three 'hands' to signify a specific hour, minute, and second. In both these colloquial examples, time is thought of as spatialized, quantitative, and divisible: just as the quantitative unit of the year can be broken down to months, weeks, and days, so can the unit of an hour be broken down into minutes and seconds. Consequently, these units can also be aggregated into larger units, or different temporal instants can be swapped and substituted with other instants, since they all operate according to the same basic unit. Bergson refers to this phenomenon as a 'quantitative multiplicity'.

Bergson contrasts this quantitative multiplicity with a 'qualitative multiplicity' — while quantitative multiplicities are homogenous, discontinuous, and represented by space, qualitative multiplicities are heterogenous, continuous, and appear in *pure duration.* This idea of a pure duration is crucial as Bergson wants us to think of time as a duration rather than represented by space. This shift mainly has to do with the concepts of exteriority and interiority — within space parts are external to each other, whereas within duration parts are internal to each other. The archetypal Bergsonian example to explain this phenomenon is a harmonic melody: part of the definition of a melody is the succession in which the parts follow from each other, which precludes the ability to rearrange the parts. If one were to rearrange the notes in a melody, it ends up feeling like a completely different melody. In the western musical system melodies are constructed in the context of a specific 'key' in which there are seven notes, all of which have a unique relation to each other. For instance, in the key of C, the note G is harmonically consonant with the home note of C, while the note B is the most dissonant note

in the key. Therefore, any melody in the key of C is defined by the succession of its notes, based on each note's relationship to the note of C. Hypothetically, consider a melody with notes C, B, G, C in succession: the ontological function of the melody is to establish the home key with the first note, create an aura of dissonance with the second note, establish a harmonic climax with the third, and then resolve the melody back to the home note with the fourth. A theory of spatialization would theorize that one can divide the melody into its base units, i.e., the notes, and rearrange them in any order while still retaining the melody. However, this approach does not take into account the ontological weight of the *order* of notes — it is the ordering of notes that is the crucial element in determining the character of the melody, as each note as a unique relation to the other. Therefore, while melodies are often represented as quantitative multiplicities, they are in fact qualitative in nature, as the parts within the melody are internally related to each other. Bergson uses the idea of a melody as an effective analogy for the mistaken characterization of time: just as a melody cannot be divided or rearranged, time is also indivisible and impossible to rearrange. Time is fundamentally heterogenous and defined by its internal succession – all the spatialized representations of time fail to convey its nature as a dynamic unfolding process.

Deleuze affirms the changes that Bergson makes to the philosophical account of time and further elaborates on his critique by reintroducing the concept of intensity and arguing that time is a philosophically intensive concept. Mary Beth Mader outlines Deleuze's commentary on the concept of intensity in her article "Philosophical and Scientific Intensity in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze". Mader emphasizes that Deleuze is not simply engaging with the scientific conception of intensity; rather, Deleuze has his own novel ontological account of intensity that marks a fundamental departure from modern scientific intensity. Deleuze initially finds the historical origin of the concept of intensity in Aristotle, and studies the medieval reception of Aristotelian intensity. Aristotle created the term 'alteration' to describe qualitative change, i.e., cases in which a quality becomes more or less of itself, which medieval philosophers then transpose onto quantitative and scientific frameworks to develop the term 'intensity'. An example that Mader cites is Deleuze's commentary on intensive distance in relation to Bertrand Russell's theory of distance. Russell argues that technically speaking the idea of a distance is not a discrete quantity, but rather is a "one to one relation" between "any pair of terms of a given class" (Mader, 2017, p. 264) that are not divisible or addable. However, he thinks that despite distance being a relation we can still turn distances into measurable properties through

transposing them onto a mathematical grid of measurement using the axiom of Archimedes and the axiom of linearity. This transposition allows us to extract a quantifiable magnitude out of this relation between two entities that we term as 'distance'. Deleuze wants to call attention to this process and point out that scientists often forget the fundamental assumption they make when discussing intensive quantities. When science talks about intensities such as distance, they are not talking about these intensities in themselves, but rather they are transposing them onto an extensive grid and talking about them through the lens of these quantifications.

Mader also notes how Deleuze was influenced by J.H. Rosny's unorthodox reading of thermodynamics. Rosny claims that the source of any instance of energy is an intensity, and that any intensity is the product of difference — therefore, if energy is fundamentally intensive then sums of energy would be "sums of differences" (Mader, 2017, p. 269). Deleuze further emphasizes the generative aspects of intensities that science fails to capture: Mader states Deleuze's example of altitude. While one can scientifically examine changes in altitude through the lens of quantification, different changes in altitude also generate a qualitatively new state. For example, if one goes significantly higher in altitude, the air pressure and oxygen levels will drop, and vice versa, which causes one to perceive different altitudes very differently, essentially leading them to be fundamentally different qualitative states.

Mader thinks that another crucial distinction that Deleuze makes is that between the coordination of independent variables and the ordination of variations. Deleuze thinks that the former is an operation that is characteristic of the sciences, while the latter is the realm of philosophical expression. He maintains that the goal of science is to create the conditions for reference to states of affairs so as to determine the truth or falsity of propositions and functions that express referential claims — at the conceptual heart of this endeavor is the coordination of variables. Contrastingly, Philosophy attempts to create concepts, i.e., put conceptual elements together into an intensive formation, which therefore requires intensive ordination. To map purely intensive ordinates onto space and time is to functionalize an intensive reality and pair it with an extensive reality. Deleuze therefore regards philosophical intensity and scientific intensity as fundamentally different but related: philosophical intensity forms the conceptual foundations for scientific intensity, while scientific intensity is essentially philosophical intensity that is converted to extensive coordinates to render it measurable.

The final aspect of Deleuze's ontological framework that needs to be explained is the concept of the virtual. In Daniel W. Smith's article "Conditions of the New", he outlines how

for Deleuze a 'new' ontological element must exist in the realm of the virtual. The structures of the transcendental cannot be traced off from the structures of the empirical, as transcendental idealist philosophers such as Immanuel Kant had attempted in the past. Traditionally modernist philosophers thought of the relationship between the possible and real as one of resemblance: one may think of the possible as a field of options, some of which are then actualized by the real — the real resembles the possible, and the real is also therefore a limitation of the possible. However, Deleuze replaces this possible-real opposition with a virtual-actual complementarity. The virtual is not constituted through identity; rather, it is constituted through difference and when it is actualized it differs from itself, such that every process of actualization is the production of the new i.e., a new difference which therefore is difference-in-itself. In another article titled "The Concept of the Simulacrum: Overturning Platonism", Smith notes that Plato's theory of the Forms was one of the primary pillars of transcendentalist philosophy that prized this dichotomy of the possible and the real, which Deleuze attempts to reverse. While Plato's theory argues that there exist abstract and transcendental ideas of Forms that are then actualized in an imperfect manner in the corporeal world, Deleuze uses the concept of the simulacra to subvert this hierarchy between original and copy. Deleuze valorizes the idea of a distorted copy claiming that "Simulacra are those systems in which the different relates to the different by means of difference itself" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 106). In these virtual systems we find no prior identity and internal resemblance, but rather the simulacra are built up from difference-in-itself.

Now that the ontological groundwork has been set up, we can move on to examining Deleuze's thought on cinema through *Citizen Kane*. Deleuze primarily talks about *Citizen Kane* in chapter five of *Cinema II* where he uses the film to introduce the concept of the 'time-image'. Deleuze praises the film because of how it incorporates this concept into cinema — he thinks it is the first time a film has ever done so as he writes in Chapter 5, "the first occasion on which a direct time-image was seen in the cinema was not in the mode of the present, but in the form of sheets of past, with Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Here time became out of joint and reversed its dependent relation to movement; temporality showed itself as it really was for the first time" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 105). The last sentence is crucial for two new concepts that Deleuze introduces, i.e., the time-image and the movement-image, which he uses to correct Bergson's implicit critique of cinema when Bergson claimed that spatializing time stems from a 'cinematic illusion'. Bergson argues that we mistakenly spatialize time because we are trained

to think of a passage of time as similar to a movie clip, where time is made up of a collection of divided extrinsic moments which is analogous to the frame or shot in a cinema. According to this framework, just like in cinema how we get a clip by aggregating a bunch of extrinsic shots, a passage of time is also an aggregation of a collection of extrinsic moments.

However, Deleuze thinks that Bergson makes a mistake when he reduces cinematic temporality to a mere illusion of spatialized time, and Deleuze creates the concepts of time-image and movement-image to correct this. He challenges the belief that the fundamental building block of cinema is the immobile frame; instead, he believes that the frame functions as a 'time-image' — an image that is fundamentally connected to the temporality of the past images and the future images that are going to follow the 'current' image. Following this conception, the image of cinema is an intensity just like how Bergson claimed time itself is an intensity — the parts of cinema are intensively related like the parts in time, they are not divisible extensive parts like Bergson claims. Furthermore, in *Cinema 1* Deleuze introduces the concept of the movement-image which underscores that cinema "does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image. It does give us a section, but a section which is mobile, not an immobile section plus abstract movement". In this way the concept of the movement-image liberates time from its subordination to being the measure of movement, and instead lets time function as an intensive property that unfolds itself irrespective of the developments in axes of motion.

In this paper I aim to explore these cinematic concepts through *Citizen Kane,* both in order to explain why Deleuze attaches so much importance to the film, and also to explore what the film itself can teach us about Deleuzian temporality and cinematic theory. I will be discussing three clips in the film: Firstly, a clip of Charles Kane firing his close friend and business associate Jedediah Leland, which Paul Douglass writes about in his essay "Deleuze, cinema, Bergson"; then, a clip of Kane stumbling on his wife attempting suicide which Stephen Crocker mentions in his article, "Citizen Kant: Flatness and Depth in the Image of Thought"; and lastly, a clip that I myself identify where Kane's parents are discussing the matter of giving him away while he plays outside in the snow for the last time, unaware of the events that are taking place inside the house.

Figure 1. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

Beginning with the first clip, pictured above, Peter Douglass believes that the crucial cinematic technique that Welles uses that appeals to Deleuze is the *deep focus shot.* Speaking in the cinematic register, a deep focus shot is defined as a shot where the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus. This contrasts to a more conventionally focused shot that aims to highlight a certain aspect of a frame and create contrast by applying focus to the foreground over the background or vice versa. As Daniela Angelucci writes in her article "Deleuze and the Concepts of Cinema", deep focus is used by Welles to create a "diagonal perspective, in which the background is in communication with the foreground as well as with the intermediate levels" (Angelucci, 2014, p. 330). Douglass notes how Welles uses these "slights of hand" to "blend the flow of memory and perception images" (Douglass, 1998, p. 28). This sequence of shots incorporates complex temporal relations — the clip is being recalled by Jedidiah, so the clip itself is a memory that incorporates the past while it is unfolding in the 'present' while Kane and Bernstein themselves contain their own temporal relations to each other and the general narrative of the film. The deep focus shot therefore functions as a movement-image

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that displays a liberated form of time that moves freely between time states. As Douglass notes, after Jedediah finishes recounting the incident, "a ceiling beam in the upper right-hand corner becomes more noticeable to the audience, furnishing a dividing line between past and present" which further complicates the temporal relations in the frame as we see a mix of both the cinematic past and the cinematic present within the same shot. The clip functions as a useful example of Deleuze's commentary on cinematic temporal states in *The Brain is the Screen*:

> It seems obvious to me that the image is not in the present. What is in the present is whatever the image represents but not the image itself. The image itself is a bunch of temporal relations from which the present unfolds … the image renders visible the temporal relations which cannot be reduced to the present. For example, an image shows a man walking along a river, in mountainous terrain: in this case, you have at least three 'coexisting' durations in the image, which are not to be confused with the present of what the image represents … it will be clearer if we look at some examples: an Ozu still-life, a Visconti traveling-shot, and a Welles deep-focus shot. (Deleuze, 1986, p. 290)

As we can see in the last sentence of that quote, Deleuze cites the Wellesian deep focus shot as a paradigmatic example of a shot that exposes the complex temporal relations that are embedded within cinema, and this shot that Douglass picks out is an apt instance that illustrates what Deleuze means.

Figure 2. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

Moving on to the second shot, pictured above, this clip is also recalled by one of the characters, this time by Kane's second wife Susan Alexander, and it offers a useful explication of the Deleuzian concept of the time-image. Stephen Crocker also mentions the use of deep focus, but in this context the technique is primarily used to compress the events of a specific passage of time into one privileged instant. Crocker writes,

> In the Wellesian shot, the whole is contemporary with the elements it presents… In an extreme deep focus shot, we see Kane, a tiny figure in the background entering the room. In the middle ground Susan lies catatonic in her bed, and filling almost a third of the frame in the foreground is a drinking glass and a pill bottle, the evidence of her suicide attempt. If it were shot with shallow focus and analytical editing the scene would have been broken into a series of separate shots from which we would subsequently have to infer a meaning. (Crocker, 2017, p. 131).

As Crocker notes, conventional directors attempt to convey temporal information through linear montage using 'shallow focus and analytical editing' — we might get a series of frames

where in the first sequence the viewer sees Susan taking the pills, followed by a sequence of her reacting to the effects of the pills and passing out into an unconscious state, finally concluding in a sequence where Kane walks into the room and notices Susan's attempted suicide. Welles departs from this cinematic framework by "jamming all the elements into a single frame" (Crocker, 2017, p. 131) which allows the frame to function as a Deleuzian time-image by exhibiting its intensive quality: the various inter-locking parts of the frame work together to give us a temporal narrative in one instant, rather than forming a temporality through multiple instants.

Figure 3. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

The last clip, pictured above, offers us insight into the distinction Deleuze makes between privileged instants and 'any instant whatever's. As emphasized earlier, this is the crucial distinction that Deleuze thinks Bergson ignores with his critique of cinematic temporality: Deleuze argues that Bergson reduces all cinematic instants to any-instant-whatevers. Deleuze maintains that while there are shots in cinema that are interchangeable as Bergson claims, there

are also 'privileged instants' which he writes in *Cinema 1* are "remarkable or singular points which belong to movement, and not as the moments of actualization of a transcendent form" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 6). The key characteristic of privileged instants as Deleuze defines them is that they are immanently explained, and do not rely on an extrinsic transcendent dimension to explain their ontological status. They therefore stand as singular points in a temporal relation that are not interchangeable like any-instant-whatevers. The above shot stands as one of the key privileged instants of *Citizen Kane* as it forms the nexus for temporal relations in the film and ties the narrative together. It is the central moment in the narrative that is being referred to in the very beginning and the very end of the film: when Kane utters 'Rosebud' as his last words as he drops the snow globe and passes away, and in the last frame of the film when we see Kane's childhood sled burning away in the fireplace with the word 'Rosebud' etched onto it. In this deep focus shot one sees both the beginning of a new temporal arc for Kane—with the signing of the contract that hands over his custody to Walter Thatcher—as well as Kane's old temporal arc coming to a close, with Kane enjoying the final moments of his childhood out in the snow. To refer back to the point that Crocker makes, linear montage style directing would attempt to convey this narrative piece by piece, but with his deep focus shots Orson Welles manages to connect both these temporal arcs into the same frame.

The ending of the film supplies us with an aspect of the Deleuzian virtual: the ontological function of 'Rosebud' serves to cultivate an asubjective temporal structure that moves temporality away from the dichotomy of the possible and the actual and into Deleuze's favored metaphysical framework of the virtual by cutting off perceptions from the subjects of the film. Throughout the film the viewer receives first person accounts of the memories of all the characters, and temporality is therefore attached to a subject as the events unfold through their memories. However, when the narrative is resolved in the final scene by displaying the meaning of the phrase 'Rosebud', crucially, as Angelucci writes,

> the enigma [of rosebud] is revealed only to the eyes of the spectators -and not to those of the characters - in the last scene, in which is filmed a pile of by then useless objects once belonging to the protagonist in the past being thrown into the fire by the attendants: 'Rosebud' is the sign impressed on the wooden sled with which Kane used to play during his childhood. (Angelucci, 2017, p. 330)

The climactic reveal of the meaning of Rosebud departs from the subject-based metaphysical

framework of the film: it provides the viewer with a perception that is not tied to a subject—one that is therefore asubjective and virtual. Deleuze uses the concept of the 'ciné-eye' to emphasize the ability of cinema to provide such virtual phenomena. He writes in *Cinema 1*, that the cine-eye "couples together any point whatsoever of the universe in any temporal order whatsoever … this is not a human eye ... for although the human eye can surmount some of its limitations with the help of contraptions and instruments, there is one which it cannot surmount, since it is its own condition of possibility" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 80). The cine-eye therefore underscores the omnitemporal nature of cinema as it can "see without boundaries or distances" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 81): in this context we can identify that even though the meaning of Rosebud was not apprehended by human eyes, it was perceived by the cine-eye. This asubjective characteristic of the final scene creates a metaphysical entity that is fundamentally generative as part of Deleuze's virtual: a temporal relation that does not require the perception of a subject to exist, but instead unfolds on its own as a virtual phenomenon.

This brings me to my concluding point, that the primary reason Deleuze valorizes *Citizen Kane* is because it is a fundamentally anti-representational film. It generates a unique temporal framework that could not have been experienced otherwise outside of cinema, and conveys the virtual over the dichotomy of the actual and the possible. Each character in the film has a particular theory of what Rosebud could possibly mean, and the journalist's attempt to uncover the meaning was a quest to represent an actuality from the realms of the possible, but the ultimate reveal of the meaning of Rosebud traverses all of the individuated subjects in the film. It becomes a signifier that is not perceived by a subject, a virtual entity that does not rely on the transcendent categories of the possible, but instead controls and distorts the temporal framework of the film and the intensive nature of cinematic time.

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On the Apparent Incompatibility of Perceptual and Conventional Accounts of Pictures

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ABSTRACT. What are pictures? To answer this question, one of the most successful approaches is what has been called the perceptual account. On this approach, pictures are fundamentally characterized by the way they are perceived by subjects. This principle can for example be fleshed out by claiming that pictures foster a specific type of twofold perceptual experience in subjects. By contrast, another type of account, that I shall call conventional account, is somewhat neglected nowadays because it appears as insufficient to distinguish pictures from other kinds of representations. These two types of accounts are often presented as incompatible. However, it is not obvious in what sense they are so. The aim of this paper is thus twofold. Firstly, to precisely identify the differences between the perceptual and the conventional accounts of pictures. Secondly, to suggest that there might still be a role for the conventional account. To provide support for this view, I will show that the perceptual and conventional accounts may not have the same explananda, leaving open the possibility that a theory of depiction integrating both might be built.

1. Introduction

What are pictures? When trying to answer this question, it seems that we have to choose between at least two different kinds of approaches. It is often said that these two approaches are not only different, but also incompatible (Hyman and Bantinaki, 2017).

The first kind of account is perceptual. It has been notably defended in the works of Christopher Peacocke (Peacocke, 1987) and Robert Hopkins (Hopkins, 1995, 2012), among

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others. To be sure, these authors' views are by no means identical and there are many different varieties of perceptual theories. However, it is possible to identify a common thread: a representation is a picture if can be experienced in a certain way under normal circumstances. The vitality of this idea is attested today by the vast and recent literature on the nature and components of pictorial experience (Ferretti, 2017; Jagnow, forthcoming; Nanay, 2018; Voltolini, 2018).

The other kind of approach is conventional (Hyman and Bantinaki, 2017). This conception has been famously defended by Nelson Goodman (1976). It is more difficult to pinpoint exactly the core principle of this account than for the first one. Let us say for now that its fundamental claim is that one can give a definition of a picture, without making reference to the way pictures are experienced (Kulvicki, 2003).

The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, I want to precisely identify what the contradiction between these two accounts ultimately boils down to. Secondly, I want to suggest that they may actually not be suited to explain the same cases. To do this, I will be relying on discoveries in developmental psychology that have not been given enough attention by philosophers. If the claim I defend proves to be correct, it leaves open the possibility that the two approaches might not really be incompatible and that a theory of pictures and depiction integrating both might be built.

I shall start by stating the basic sets of principles espoused respectively by the perceptual and conventional accounts of pictures (2). This will allow pointing out the disagreements that separate the two (3). Finally, I will try to show that these accounts are not suited to explain the same explananda (4).

2. Perceptual and Conventional Accounts

Let us start with the perceptual account. To be sure, this account does not consist in one totally homogenous theory. It actually comes in different versions. However, my aim is to pinpoint the common thread that lies at the core of these different strands. This common principle is the following: an object x is a picture if it can be experienced in a certain way. Moreover, this experience must be visual.

One version of the perceptual account is exemplified by Richard Wollheim's position (Wollheim, 1980, 1993, 1998, 2003). He claims that encountering a picture elicits a peculiar

perceptual experience, which he calls twofold. The idea is that perceiving a picture entails two aspects or dimensions. On the first hand, one has an experience of a marked surface located in front of them. On the other hand, one also perceptually experiences a represented scene. Twofoldness entails that pictorial experience has a particular phenomenology that is not shared with other representational experiences.

To account for the twofoldness of the experience of pictures, it is necessary to consider the faculty that Wollheim calls "seeing-in". Seeing-in is the ability to see y (what is represented) in x (the representation). To say more about what seeing-in actually consists in, Wollheim tries to distinguish it from seeing-as (Wollheim, 1980), which is the capacity to see x as y. This comparison unveils three characteristics of seeing-in. The first one is that, while we can only see some particular as some other particular, seeing-in extends to both particulars and states of affairs. The second feature which is specific to seeing-in is that it doesn't require localization. What Wollheim means by this is that when I see x as y, I need to be able to indicate which part of x I see as y. By contrast, Wollheim claims that there is no such requirement for seeing-in. When I see y in x, it is not because I see y in this or that part of x. Finally, and most importantly, seeing-in allows to give attention simultaneously to the features of the representational medium and to what is represented. For Wollheim, this is not true of seeing-as.

I want to address a possible objection, which is that Wollheim is not trying to give a definition for pictures. First of all, to answer this objection, it is sufficient to say that this paper does not purport to be a mere analysis of Wollheim's writings. It is rather concerned with the various answers that can be given to the question of what is a picture. Since the perceptual account, of which Wollheim is seen as the founder, is taken to be a plausible answer to this question (see Hyman and Bantinaki, 2017), it is useful to go back to his description of pictorial experience.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Wollheim actually intended his account to be definitional. This can be seen if we take a close look at what constitute the requirements for any theory of pictorial representation according to him (Wollheim, 1998, 217).

Requirement 1: If a picture represents something, then there will be a visual experience of that picture that determines it does so.

Requirement 2: If a suitable spectator looks at the picture, he will, other things being equal,

have the appropriate experience.

These requirements specify that a picture that represents something must be capable of eliciting a certain type of visual experience, characterized by twofoldness and seeing-in, from suitable perceiving subjects. At first glance, it may seem like Wollheim is only giving a condition for representational pictures, that is pictures that represent determined referents. Therefore, there could be non-representational pictures and those would be left out of Wollheim's account. However, the most commonly accepted way to separate pictures from other types of representations is the relation between them and their referents (Hyman and Bantinaki, 2017). Pictures are depictive, while words and sentences are descriptive. This way of characterizing pictures makes it difficult to accept that there are pictures that do not represent anything else. If pictures are to be identified by their being depictive representations, then Wollheim's theory should be understood as entailing that every picture has to be able to elicit a twofold experience in suitable spectators.

This kind of analysis has been developed in various ways in the more recent philosophical literature on pictures (Peacocke, 1987; Hopkins, 1995, 2012). In addition, Wollheim's claim that twofoldness is at the heart of pictorial experience and what pictures are is still the backdrop of a significant number of more recent studies (Abell and Bantinaki, 2010; Briscoe, 2016; Hopkins, 2012; Jagnow, forthcoming; Nanay, 2005, 2011, 2015).

I now turn to the conventional account of pictures and try to clarify its basic tenets. To do this, I shall focus on some key ideas put forward by Nelson Goodman and John Kulvicki.

To begin with, both perceptualists and conventionalists agree on at least one thing: pictures form a subclass of representations. They are representations that are in a special kind of relationship with what they represent, namely in a depictive relationship. This raises the question of what makes an object depict something else.

The conventional account differs from the perceptualist in the answer it gives to that question. Nelson Goodman states explicitly that resemblance is neither a sufficient, nor a necessary condition for depiction (Goodman, 1976, p.5). But he even goes one step further and denies the role of resemblance in depiction: he rejects experienced or perceived resemblance as the explanans of the depictive relationship. In fact, this amounts to turning the perceptual explanation upside down, as it is claimed that experienced resemblance is not the cause of depiction but its consequence (Goodman, 1976, p.38).

It is therefore necessary to find another way to explain why an object is seen as depicting another one. The conventionalist answer is that objects are pictures because they are part of a specific representational system, i. e., a depictive representational system.

To make this clear, one needs to define the notions of "representational system" and of "depictive representational system". It is helpful to use John Kulvicki's work on representational system, which can be construed as substantiating some of Goodman's ideas.[3] A representational system is a set of physical objects that count as token representations. These objects are grouped under symbolic types, thanks to a distinction between the objects' properties that are symbolically relevant and the properties that are not. The token representation's properties that are symbolically relevant are those on which its symbolic type supervenes. Moreover, a representational system contains certain rules assigning references to symbolic types (Kulvicki, 2014, pp. 92-94).

What then of depictive representational systems? It suffices to say that a depictive representational system is a specific representational system that is different from descriptivist representational systems. Depictive representational systems are those systems that consider relatively more object properties as being symbolically relevant than other representational systems (Kulvicki, 2014, pp. 94-95). Furthermore, in depictive representational systems, subtler differences in relevant properties are sufficient to change a token representation's symbolic type, whereas, in non-depictive representational systems, differences need to be more important if they are to change the symbolic type of a token representation (Kulvicki, 2014, pp. 96-97).

On a related note, one should be aware of the fact that representation systems are the products of stipulation (Goodman, 1976, p. 40). Therefore, they are conventional, hence the name of the "conventional account". This means that representational systems may very well, and probably do, vary between different cultures, but also that they have to be learned by each individual.

As indicated earlier, the experience of a resemblance between a picture and its subject is seen by conventionalists as an effect rather than as a cause of depiction. This conclusion follows from the claim that the assignment of a depicted scene to a picture is determined by the picture's belonging to a depictive representational system. To begin with, experienced

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[3]I should say that I don't take Kulvicki to be a strict conventionalist.

resemblance is supposed to be a consequence of the specific features of depictive representational systems. Moreover, since this correlation between picture and pictured scenes is understood as conventional, resemblance must depend on how standard and commonplace a certain depictive representational system is to us (Goodman, 1976, pp. 36-39).

3. Disagreements between the two Approaches

Now that we have a clearer view of what the perceptual and the conventional approaches amount to, we can ask in what ways these approaches precisely seem to disagree.

The first source of disagreement concerns the type of learning that is necessary in order to see objects as pictures. Proponents of the perceptual account do not deny that some training has to take place before objects can be treated and understood as pictures. As a matter of fact, even plain visual perception does not come fully formed to newborn babies and needs to be developed. The disagreement is therefore on the exact type of training or learning that is necessary and sufficient to view objects as pictures.

The perceptualist claim should be understood as meaning that no specific training is required to see pictures. On the contrary, we rely on faculties that are in no way specific to picture perception to experience a resemblance between some marked surface and an actual perceived scene. The perceptual claim is therefore that the only training required to construe objects as pictures is one that is sufficient to acquire such faculties as normal vision, object recognition and resemblance perception. By contrast, proponents of the conventional conception hold that this is perhaps necessary but not sufficient for picture perception. It is also necessary to learn specific skills regarding the understanding of certain representational systems, and to learn which objects are generally considered to be members of those systems. In sum, the first source of disagreement between perceptualists and conventionalists is on whether developing normal perceptual abilities is sufficient to see pictures or whether learning some specific skills is needed.

The second source of disagreement is suggested by a remark made by Malcolm Budd in "The Look of a Picture" (Budd, 2008). He states that, if a picture resembles two different objects as seen from a certain point of view, we will see it as resembling the object we are familiar with. This goes to show that, according to perceptualists, we need to be perceptually acquainted with an object to perceive a similarity between a picture and the way this object

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appears to us in our visual field. It follows that, according to perceptualists, we cannot have a full-blown picture experience if we have absolutely no perceptual acquaintance whatsoever with the represented object.

Notice that one might raise an objection against this characterization of the perceptual account. Indeed, even if I am not perceptually acquainted with the object that is represented in a picture, it does not mean that I cannot see resemblances between parts of this representation and things that I have already perceived. This would be a way to explain how we can see representations of objects we have never perceived as pictures. When I look at a photograph of a Moai statue, I can identify some parts of it: nose, mouth, eyes, human figure, etc. However, this account fails to provide the perceptual theory with an account of the perception of pictures of unknown objects. This is because perceiving a resemblance between some parts of a photograph and a human nose, a human mouth, etc., does not count as an experience of the type that perceptualists have in mind. The experience at hand may be called holistic, in the sense that it implies the recognition of the whole scene depicted on a given surface and not just of some disjoined parts of it. It follows that the mentioned objection is not convincing and that the perceptual account does indeed demand that the represented objects be known beforehand.

By contrast, the conventional account does not place such a restriction and demand that depicted objects be known beforehand. In fact, knowledge of, and familiarity with, a depictive representational system are taken to be sufficient to see an object as a picture, even if its referent is unknown to us. If I see pictures of the surface of Pluto, I can understand them as depicting something, even if I have never been to Pluto and have no previous experience of its landscape. Furthermore, I can interpret those pictures so as to gain information about the surface of Pluto, by distinguishing which of their features tell me something about the depicted scene (colours, shapes, etc.) and which do not (the weight of the picture, its size if I look at it on the Internet, etc.). This distinction is available to me because I am accustomed to using the depictive representational system of colour photography. Thus, the conventional account is more ambitious than the perceptual account on that matter. Indeed, it purports to explain not only how we can see some objects as pictures of things we already know, but also how we can use pictures of unknown objects as a source of information about them.

In sum, proponents of the perceptual and conventional accounts seem to disagree on at least two aspects concerning the definition of pictures. Firstly, they seem to have incompatible views on what kind of training or learning is required to be able to see objects as pictures.

Secondly, they seem to take different positions on the necessity to be perceptually acquainted with the subject of a picture to see it as such.

4. The Compatibility of the two Accounts

Bearing these differences in mind, I want to suggest that they do not lead to an incompatibility of the two accounts of pictures. The general idea is that they might both be correct and that there is no contradiction between the two because they do not ultimately share the same explananda.

Let us flesh out the idea that both accounts of pictures actually target different explananda. To do this, it is useful to distinguish two different capacities with regard to pictures: picture recognition and picture comprehension. This distinction is borrowed from developmental psychology (DeLoache and Burns, 1994).

Before showing how this distinction helps bridge the gap between the perceptual and the conventional account of pictures, let us briefly describe the empirical results that lead to the distinction. First of all, there is substantial evidence that young infants are sensitive to two-dimensional information and can recognize faces, objects, and abstract patterns in pictures (Barrera and Maurer, 1981; DeLoache, Strauss and Maynard, 1979; Dirks and Gibson, 1977; Rose, 1977). For instance, in DeLoache et al. (1979), 5-month-olds were acquainted with one of two small dolls. Then, the babies were shown either the actual two dolls or pictures of the dolls. The result was that they looked longer at the novel one (whether it was a new doll or a picture of a new doll), indicating that they recognized the picture of the familiar doll. This recognition of pictorial content cannot be attributed to failure to discriminate between two and three-dimensional stimuli. DeLoache et al. showed a doll and a picture of that same doll to a separate group of 5-month-olds in a standard visual preference test. There was no prior familiarization. The real doll was looked at longer than its picture, which indicates that the infants could discriminate between them. Other experiments have also shown that young infants, and even newborns, are able to discriminate between photograph and referent (Slater, Rose, and Morison, 1984). In sum, the main conclusions of studies on young infant's reaction to pictures are the following. (1) The higher-order information that is invariant in two and three-dimensional versions of the same object is picked up by infants. (2) Discrimination between entities and their pictures by infants is reported, showing that depth cues are not ignored.

However, further studies show that the ability to recognize what is pictured and to discriminate between two and three-dimensional objects does not empirically go with the capacity to exploit the symbol-referent relation to form beliefs about reality and guide actions. DeLoache and Burns (DeLoache and Burns, 1994) presented children of varying ages with a picture showing where a toy was hidden in a room. The children were then encouraged to retrieve the toy, which required using the picture as a source of information about the location of the object they were looking for. To succeed in this task, the children first needed to recognize the objects in the picture. At the same time, they also had to understand the relation between the picture and what it depicts. Furthermore, they also needed to be able to use the picture as a guide for action, that is, as a source of information about where they should search in the room. The main result was that children who are younger than 30 months do not use the picture of the room to guide their search efforts. The obvious conclusion that DeLoache and Burns draw from their experiments is that, in spite of infant's ability to recognize depicted objects, young children do not understand the relation between picture and referent. It follows that to know how a picture is related to what it represents or to be able to use pictures as sources of information, recognition of the referent is only the first step.

Those results lead to distinguish between at least two distinct abilities related to perceiving pictures. On the one hand, picture recognition is the ability to identify which object or scene is represented in a picture. Furthermore, it also involves the ability to visually discriminate between objects and their pictures. On the other hand, picture comprehension is the ability to understand the exact relation between a picture and its referent. It is this second capacity that is thought of as paving the way for the possibility to use pictorial information to form beliefs about reality and guide actions.

Once this distinction is clear, we may come to its consequences for the debates about what it is to see an object as a picture. Our hypothesis is that it is picture recognition that is explained by the perceptual account of pictures, while the conventional account is most likely to account for picture comprehension. To be precise, I am not suggesting that pure picture recognition without picture comprehension, such as can be found in children younger than 30 months, could also exist in adults. After this threshold has been crossed, those two faculties always seem to coexist. To make my claim clearer, I should say that it depends on the possibility that picture recognition and picture comprehension constitute different ways to relate to pictures, rather than two distinct faculties, in adults. The idea is that we do not always do the

same thing when we see an object as a picture. In some cases what matters is our recognition of an object as depicting something else, and in others our comprehension of what the picture tells us about its referent. In the first cases, even though we could use pictures to form beliefs about reality and to guide our actions, it is not because of this possibility that we see the objects that afford it as pictures. Rather, we see them as pictures because we experience them as depicting an object or a scene. Therefore, my claim is that seeing an object as a picture can actually indicate two different attitudes towards this object and that each picture account targets a different attitude.

To illustrate this, let us compare two distinct situations. In the first situation, a person sees a picture of an object she has already seen before, for example a photograph of the house she grew up in. In the second situation, the same person is presented with a picture of a previously unknown object, namely a photograph of the surface of Pluto. It is obvious that the first case requires the ability to see a resemblance between what is actually perceived and what is remembered. As a result, the perceptual account provides a satisfactory explanation of how we come to see the photograph as a picture. Indeed, the photograph brings about an experience of the resemblance between a marked surface and a visual memory. This is why the marked surface is seen by the perceiver as depicting her childhood's house. By contrast, the other case does not seem to rely on memory. Indeed, the task consists in interpreting a representation in order to learn about the features of the depicted object. This is obviously a process that is different from comparing visual memories with an actually perceived scene. Therefore, it is not convincing to say that the photograph of Pluto is seen as a picture because of an experience of resemblance between the image and the depicted object. What is crucial in this kind of cases is that knowledge of the norms of pictorial representation allows extracting information about reality from the picture. In other words, it is not thanks to a specific visual experience that the marked surface is seen as an image. Rather, the reason it is seen as such lies in the ability of the perceiver to understand in which representational system the artifact is to be put, namely a pictorial representational system. For example, one needs to know that the photograph is a colour photograph (and not a black and white photograph) to understand whether the picture actually provides information about the actual colours of the surface of Pluto.

To motivate my claim, I would like to make two remarks about the empirical data mentioned previously. To begin with, one should remember that experimental studies show that picture recognition is present in very young infants (Barrera and Maurer, 1981; DeLoache,

Strauss and Maynard, 1979; Dirks and Gibson, 1977; Rose, 1977). Furthermore, psychologists go as far as saying that no specific training is necessary to acquire this faculty. In the words of DeLoache and Burns "No special picture-perception abilities are required to recognize the depicted information, because so much of the invariant information that one can pick up visually from looking at the real x is also present in the picture of x" (DeLoache and Burns, 1994, p. 105). It follows that this faculty satisfies the main condition of the perceptual account, which is that picture experience relies on unspecific perceptual abilities. This motivates the claim that this type of account is more suited to explain picture recognition. On the other hand, picture comprehension develops later on, as it is not found in children under the age of 30 months. This suggests that our general perceptual abilities are not sufficient for this faculty. What more is required? It seems that some kind of specific training related to how pictures should be interpreted is necessary to comprehend them, and not only recognize them. While the precise nature of this training is not entirely clear, it probably entails learning how to use pictorial representational systems to gain information about reality. Therefore, it is the conventional theory that seems more likely to account for this faculty. Indeed, this type of theory postulates that we have to undergo some kind of specific training before we can see objects as pictures and extract information from them. In sum, the perceptual account can be taken to target picture recognition, while the conventional account targets picture comprehension.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to pinpoint the basic tenets of the perceptual and conventional approaches to pictures. Then, I focused on the differences between these two accounts. In spite of these differences, I argued that they do not lead to an incompatibility between the two accounts. I have rather tried to show that they might ultimately have different explananda. On the one hand, the phenomena that perceptualists try to account for are typically cases in which we recognize a present or previously perceived object that is represented in an artifact, which we therefore see as a picture. Studies show that this experience does not rely on learning a specific set of abilities related to pictures; visual perception seems to be sufficient. On the other hand, conventionalists have built a theory that is very useful to tackle the fact that in everyday life, we very often use pictures of objects we have never seen. The reason we take those artifacts

to depict something else is that we have become so familiar with certain depictive representational systems that we almost forget we are using them. Thus, I have shown that those two accounts are not incompatible. This can be considered as a starting point for a syncretic theory of pictures, aiming to explain the vast array of cases in which we call something a picture.

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On Aesthetic Practices and Cultural Identity of Finnish Emigrants

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ABSTRACT. The aesthetic life of an emigrant often undergoes a transformation following the relocation - sometimes it is a struggle, sometimes an expansion. This transformation, including changes or adaptations of daily, seasonal or annual rhythms; and growth or evolution in one's aesthetic practices, taste, and sense of cultural identity, are a fruitful focus of research.

Aesthetic practices is an emerging concept that captures habitual activities that people do for aesthetic enjoyment as part of their everyday. In this article I will focus on aesthetic practices within the sphere of home; however, the concept in itself should not be limited to the act of residing or undertaking household chores. Aesthetic practices as activities may aim for an output, such as a tidied house or a prepared meal, but are undertaken equally for the aesthetic satisfaction they bring to the enactor. The focus is on the attitude, mindset or expectation: we can clean the house or repair a fence because their untidy appearances make us feel frustrated or embarrassed. Or, we can draw aesthetic enjoyment from the process and outcome of restoring and creating.

In my ongoing research project, I focus on aesthetic practices of contemporary Finnish emigrants regarding the home, such as interior decoration, seasonal decorations, tidying, gardening and cooking. My particular target groups are Finns in Australia and Canada as these are traditionally popular relocation countries of Finns since the 1800s. Both countries have a stable multi-thousand population of Finnish- and English-speaking Finnish (ancestry) emigrants. The purpose of my project is to examine the nature and subjective value/importance of aesthetic practices, expressed through or embedded in one's hobbies, habits and pastimes,

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that one engages in at home for aesthetic enjoyment.

But, what does the concept of aesthetic practices add to the field of aesthetics? Why introduce new terminology, instead of simply discussing artistic pursuits or creative pastimes? During the past decade or so, the scope of aesthetics has already meritoriously evolved to reclaim the aesthetic, ethical and philosophical value of everyday items and activities (Saito, 2022); acknowledged how everyday aesthetics maintain or improve subjective wellbeing (Melchionne, 2014); and expanded our understanding of art from object arts to process arts (Nguyen, 2020).

Aligning with Pauline von Bonsdorff (2022a, 2022b), I suggest that the significance of aesthetic practices as a concept lies in the theme of good life. In this paper, a good life is understood as a way of life that supports the development of 'authentic self', or the experienced coherence and integrity or wholeness of self-identity (Tallis, 2021, pp. 26, 167, 271) and which goes beyond the general value of having meaningful pastime activities.

Aesthetic practices are about the meaning and effect of action in human life as they emphasize interactivity (creation, reception, modulation and variation over time), development of skill and style, and the will to share and reflect experiences and achievements with others. Aesthetic practices as a concept underlines the significance of aesthetic activities as long-term and shared practices, which emerge and evolve as a part of culture, often form subcultures, and affect the formation of selfhood and lifeworld (Bonsdorff, 2022b).

Figure1.

Figure 1. For emigrants, cultural traditions and personal aesthetic practices may become more markedly an intentional individual choice, sometimes referred to as 'migrant aesthetics' by the host culture. Traditional

Finnish easter decorations.

1. Cultural traditions and aesthetic practices

Why study aesthetic practices of emigrants? Often, when a person relocates to a new country and culture, one has to leave behind a cloak of cultural practices, including traditions, conventions and cultural aesthetics. Such practices in turn have often served as a fertile ground for or a protective shield to one's personal aesthetic practices - habitual ways of doing things for aesthetic enjoyment.

This does not mean that an emigrant must give up cultural or personal aesthetic practices and activities, but such practices become more markedly an individual choice or a part of subculture, sometimes called migrant aesthetics or migrant architecture. Upholding traditions, cultural practices, as well as personal aesthetic practices, may become more intentional and deliberate, or at times, challenging and difficult.

In our team research project called 'Aesthetic Practices in the Transformation of the Self and the World' we understand aesthetic practices to cover a variety of preoccupations from professional art making to regularly performed everyday activities. Aesthetic practices also capture activities that have an instrumental goal, such as the mentioned tidying, repairing or gardening where the attitude is aesthetic, or the activity is aesthetically motivated and brings aesthetic enjoyment.

It is important to note the difference between cultural aesthetics or cultural practices, which are collective and to some degree normative, and aesthetic practices, which are personal, although they too can be shared and collectively influenced. These often overlap and intertwine, but are not synonymous. In a new country, one's habitual and familiar ways of doing things may become seen as a mark of minority, at times met with apprehension or even hostility. This may become a time of turmoil for a migrant who may feel that one's identity and self-expression are under scrutiny or actively denied.

What separates aesthetic practices from cultural traditions is that with aesthetic practices the enactor often, although not always, creates the framework - such as habits, patterns, plans or simply an idea - and then, simultaneously or consequently executes the aesthetically rewarding action that 'fulfils' the purpose of the framework. C. Thi Nguyen states regarding process arts and I concur regarding aesthetic practices:

The arts of action… are marked by distinctively self-reflective aesthetic appreciation. In these arts, the focus of the appreciator's aesthetic attention is on the aesthetic qualities of their own actions. (Nguyen, 2020, p. 2)

2. Gardening on the 'wrong continent'

Let us examine, as an example of an aesthetic practice, gardening and yard work. Gardening practices and preferences of different cultural or ethnic groups in Australia have been studied before, although this previous research does not include Finns. Many migrants have found settling in Australia both difficult and rewarding, due to the fact that compared to the Northern Hemisphere, the seasons and climate are 'the opposite'. Earlier findings indicate that people with English background in Australia prefer to grow flowering plants in the tradition of English gardens, whereas people of Southeast Asian or Mediterranean origin prefer to grow edible produce, plants and herbs that might be otherwise difficult or costly to obtain (Muir & Hampel, 2004, Armstrong, 2022).

Despite its relatively inhospitable farming climate, Finland has a strong tradition of kitchen gardens. During the short summer season, people love to grow edible plants and herbs, in particular root and vine vegetables, berries such as gooseberries, redcurrants and blackcurrants, and fruits including apples. However, many of these plants have adapted to and only thrive in cooler and rainier climates, being the opposite of conditions in Australia. How do Finns in Australia 'solve' this problem potentially hampering their gardening?

Based on my observations and generally speaking, Finns in Australia are less focused on growing edibles and more interested in other types of uses of the yard. Some important elements for Finns tend to be a sauna, a smoke oven, and to a lesser degree, a carpet rack. Sauna is perhaps the best-known of these Finnish traditions. A smoke oven is a small barrel where fish or meat is smoke-cooked and a carpet rack is a metal stand for dust-beating rugs. Thus, the importance of the yard is less in food production and more in other ways to 'properly run' one's household to live a life that feels familiar.

Both Pauline von Bonsdorff (2022a, 2022b) and Yuriko Saito (2022) have recently written about how household chores, such as tidying, repairing and gardening have an integral role in everyday aesthetics and in fact, are existential in nature. According to Bonsdorff,

creating order in the home through cleaning and tidying can be a significant source of pleasure, not just because of the calming after-effect of enjoying an organised space, but due to the process and practice itself: for someone who enjoys tidying, the act becomes a form of self-expression and is about adding and modifying through repetition and variation, instead of simply decluttering or removing.

Saito in turn talks about ethical dimensions of everyday aesthetic activities, where we show care towards ourselves, others and objects through domestic duties. Saito notes the intersubjective nature of household chores where we can relate to not just our contemporaries but to past generations and faraway cultures through the appreciation of the essential nature of the experience: preparing a meal, tidying a house, repairing a sock or tending to a garden are not just toil and drudgery, but can also be an expression of care and beauty. Due to this intersubjectivity one might assume that household chores do not vary greatly across countries and cultures; yet, they are always interwoven with not just cultural aesthetics and traditions but also with personal style, preferences and aesthetic practices.

2.1. Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*

Drawing from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), it is interesting to examine the abovementioned elements – sauna, smoke oven and carpet rack - as enablers of aesthetic practices through the lenses of labour, or sustaining basic life processes; work, or making things and tools to ease labour; and action, or connecting with others verbally and symbolically to affect the society and culture by establishing oneself as a person of (some degree of) influence in the world.

Firstly, to provide more context, according to Arendt, 'labour' captures physically draining or dull repetitive drudgery to meet immediate needs for one's own or species' survival; 'work', covers creativity and crafting of tools to ease labour to make life more worthwhile; and 'action' is about establishing oneself as an individual with identity, agency, will and voice about and for society (1958, pp. xv-xvi). Arendt's discussion is commentary and criticism of classic texts by John Locke, Adam Smith and Karl Marx and hence, mostly refer to the societies of antiquity, medieval times and early industrialisation. Here it is important to note that in this presentation I do not delve deeply in Arendt's categorisation or the criticism it has received. Rather, I use her framework to illustrate how a seemingly mundane everyday activity can

occupy multiple positions or layers of meaning.

2.2 Sauna, socially meaningful marker of identity

Firstly, looking at the example of a sauna, it can be labelled as labour, because bathing exists to sustain one's basic biological processes through hygiene and relaxation. However, for a Finnish emigrant, constructing a sauna in one's yard is not about hygiene, for every modern house has a shower; a sauna is far more than that. If we look at Arendt's definition of work, sauna is used as a tool to achieve an instrumental goal of cleanliness, but more importantly sauna exists for undertaking a beloved cultural and aesthetic practice that involves a sequence of activities to achieve invigorated calmness and peace of mind and body. Furthermore, under Arendt's term of action, a sauna at an emigrant Finn's yard is a socially meaningful marker of identity: it flags one as a foreigner yet proud of one's roots, and it transfers a sense of 'how to be a Finn' to one's offspring. Thus, sauna is not just a tool for but a symbol of ongoing cultural identity and aesthetic practice.

2.3 Smoke oven and carpet rack as action towards authenticity

These same observations apply to the smoke oven and carpet rack. A smoke oven is not really needed today with modern ovens and readymade meals. However, the goal of smoke-cooking is to enhance flavour and the process itself is often tied to positive sensations, memories and symbolism. A carpet rack, although not as common to have as a sauna or a smoke oven, is important to some Finnish emigrants for 'proper cleanliness': the instrumental goal is a dust-free home, but the process of achieving it differs from the standard modern way of vacuuming.

Again, labour is undertaken for cleanliness, yet the carpet rack is a tool for achieving the 'proper' or 'authentic' cleanliness: many like the fresh scent that the aired rugs bring indoors and some older generation Finns, including my parents, attest that the home is not fully cleaned until the rugs have been beaten. Reflecting on Arendt, the smoke oven and carpet rack enable 'proper' or 'authentic' housekeeping in a new homeland, a particular, familiar and aesthetically pleasing way of residing and being in the world that is simultaneously action, an attempt or wish to stake one's claim as an individual with a particular taste and preferences within a host nation of culturally different customs.

Aesthetic practices in the home often link to or stem from reproductive labour. Thus, it appears that focusing on aesthetic practices is not just about different perspective, but it as a concept can bind together different classes of activities - labour, work and action - to be interpreted or experienced in a more interlaced or diffused manner.

3. Temporality and aesthetic practices of migrants

Another important aspect relating to many aesthetic practices of emigrants is temporality, which can be examined from at least the following three angles:

Firstly, emigrants often draw from their childhood, or real or imagined past and nostalgia, in establishing aesthetic practices. A common, oft-shared understanding among Finns in Australia is that how things were done in their past is the original, true or the authentic way. Secondly, an aesthetic practice can evolve over time, either change in substance or in importance. Something that used to be very important in a different environment, life stage and culture may lose its status, or vice versa. Thirdly, aesthetic practices often carry an expectation for the future. For example, the enactor wishes to pass on a personally meaningful aesthetic practice, or at least memories of it, to one's children. Hence, the rhythms associated with aesthetic practices can be quite short, such as daily repetition, or very long, such as slow evolution or development over decades.

Recently I visited my friend Krista, a fellow Finnish-Australian who is a marine biology researcher and a mother of three young kids. We shared lunch, a homemade Finnish-style macaroni bake, had strong coffee and watched - and refereed - our children's play. When the kids got too rowdy, Krista directed everyone outside to a cumquat tree and promised the kids could pick all the fruit they could reach. This fun activity kept the offspring entertained for a good half an hour. Krista remarked, 'it's almost like having a real Finnish berry bush', despite the tree being exotically tropical from our perspective and the fruit nearly too tart for our palates. We discussed how the activity of picking and eating is what's important: the joy and sense of foraging, finding food from the wild, or growing your own, and eating it fresh from the bush. 'These Finnish style activities make me feel more Finnish and help transfer that identity to kids as well', Krista concluded.

Cumquats are not gooseberries or blackcurrants that we would normally pick in Finland. It is the act, the process, the sense of keeping a precious habit alive and experiencing

something aesthetically rewarding, that appears to matter the most.

What many emigrants appear to miss the most from their country of origin - in addition to family and friends - usually relate to the familiar everyday aesthetics and previously commonplace aesthetic practices. Many of us have met a person who laments the wrong flavours in the new country's cuisine, the wrong meal rhythm of the day, or how certain ingredients or items are not readily available in stores. Or, how the seasons change in the wrong order or seemingly do not change at all; an exotic lack of rhythm that many find exhilarating at first, but may grow weary of over time. Another Finnish-Australian friend of mine recently observed how the Australian seasons - six distinctive periods to the Aboriginals, one long summer with a rainy season in the middle for Finns - can never feel familiar to her. At times, the removal of the cultural cloak is so perpetually disruptive that the emigrant decides to abandon the venture and return to the original homeland.[5]

4. Concluding comments

I conclude by noting the previous relevant discussion by Pauline von Bonsdorff, Yuriko Saito, C. Thi Nguyen, Kevin Melchionne and artist Jenny Odell (see the reference list) who all argue from slightly different viewpoints, and through different terminology, that cultivation of everyday aesthetic sensibility and everyday aesthetic practices are essential for our individual and shared wellbeing and world-making. The hallmark of aesthetic practices is that *how* we do things matters as much, if not more, than the result.

The recurring themes underlying the aesthetic practices of the home, that I have identified in the accounts of Finns living in Australia, are agency, authenticity and aesthetics, which as a combination contribute to the formation of not just the sense of home, but one's identity and place in the life-world. A crucial element of aesthetics of homeliness is rhythm. At home we are able to follow our natural circadian rhythms, but also personal and cultural rhythms such as active and idle times, meal times, and signposts or milestones in time including seasonal celebrations. Research in residential architecture and design often focuses on the typology or physical elements of the dwelling, including the layout, materials, colours and

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[5] These matters are regularly discussed for example in the *Australian Suomalaiset [Finns in Australia]* Facebook group of 9000 members.

functionalities. But what truly makes a home are the activities the home affords us.

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Mood in Cinema. Towards a Unified Form of Time

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ABSTRACT. Postmodern times freed themselves from the enslavement to progress that in Modern times bound society to the need to realize unrealizable utopias. Postmodern times unapologetically recovered the past and appropriated it to meld it with present reality and fiction. This new attitude showed a relaxation towards the future and all the fights it had required previously. In recent years, however, we have found that consolidation of the postmodern condition has driven our society to a lingering presentism, a historical state that seems not to move forward; as if tomorrow had been supplanted by repetitive variations on today. This apparent slow-motion evolution has increased social injustices and widened the precarity of life in society, and is threatening the continuity of life on earth. In parallel with the rise of dissatisfaction and demands for a redefinition of social development, art too is experimenting with new articulations of time. In this paper I analyse a number of audio-visual works that set out to construct a new form of time marked by great complexity. I argue that this form of temporality is intended to counter the dominant notion that the time we live in is fragmented, dismembered, 'out of joint'. In the first, shorter part of the paper I discuss the current social context, in which human temporal experience is fragmented in different planes and dimensions. In the second part I analyse three films and show how they offer answers to the problems described in the first part. Between the second and third analyses I will argue that the most important audio-visual feature that glues the different temporalities in a unity is the construction of a cinematic mood.

1. The fragmentation of temporality in Postmodernity

The Postmodern age has assumed as one of its defining postulates the fragmentation of temporalities brought about by the deepening of the contradictions of Modernity. Following

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Huyssen (1995), Postmodernity has banished the previous spontaneous and fruitful relationship with the past, converting the past into a jumble of motifs and forms that can freely be taken to decorate narcissistic representations of the present. The Postmodern temporal fragmentation also means that a genuinely different—and better—future is seen, by the present, as something unachievable, making what is-to-come, following Jameson (2003), a mere extension of our current worst nightmares.

Figure 1. Damien Hirst, 'Demon with bowl' in the atrium of Palazzo Grassi, 2017.

The fragmentation of time affects our understanding of reality and our aesthetic experience of the world in three important ways. First, narratives are of no help in gluing the present either to the past or to the future. As Lyotard already made clear in 1979, big narratives no longer explain our current situation through our history nor define a transcendental goal that could motivate common action in the present.

Second, the gap between world time and subjective time has widened. On the one hand,

world time has become increasingly uniform and synchronous due to the acceleration of physical and digital communication and the globalisation of social and political trends (Crary, 2014). On the other, subjective time verges on a form of solipsism in which the subject may have any kind of experience at any time, so long as it does not invade others' subjective bubbles. Subjective heterochrony seems to have reached its splendour (Hernández, 2016, Bal, 2016), provided it remains an idiorrhythm.

Third, the growing disconnection between past and future, following Augé (1994), has also weakened the strength of rituals. The world has become a disenchanted place in which humans feel increasingly less at home. In this situation, ideologies of myth become relevant again. Ideologies of the end of history, and of the death of history, religion and art, speak the language of myth and in some contexts substitute for an accurate approach to reality.

All these factors tend towards a banalisation of the epistemic field, such that no experience can fulfil the need for a unitary intersubjective experience of the world. The never-ending quest for new experiences to replace the previous ones leads to a confusion between reality and fiction. In conclusion, the plurality of temporalities that seems a conquest of postmodernity over modernity has also brought a fragmentation between the subject and the world, and among subjects, that threatens the possibility of an integral experience of the world and a common project that will engage humanity.

2. New Ways to Recover Temporal Unity

In the context of the Postmodern scattering of time, we encounter certain contemporary cultural practices aimed at establishing a new unity of time. While showing a deep awareness of the plurality of times, these practices also try to gather this plurality up in an integrated experience that respects the underlying complexity. I will focus on three films—two documentaries and one rather experimental fictional film—that deal with time as their main topic. The two documentaries are Patricio Guzman's *Nostalgia for the Light* (Chile, 2010) and Mercedes Álvarez's *The Sky Turns* (Spain, 2005). The third film is *Cemetery,* by artist Carlos Casas (2019).

2.1. Voice and Narrativity in *Nostalgia for the Light*, by Patricio Guzmán

Patricio Guzmán travels through the Atacama Desert in Chile to talk to its various inhabitants and recover their particular relationships to this particular Chilean landscape. The director builds up a beautiful collage with reflections from astronomers, archaeologists, former inmates of dissident camps, relatives of detainees who were 'disappeared' under the Pinochet dictatorship, and others.

In this research film Guzmán builds up, from the stories and testimonies he encounters, a discourse about the Atacama Desert and about time in general. In the first two scenes the director confronts us with a temporal paradox. In the first scene, he tells us that every time he thinks back to his childhood, he remembers that he always lived in the present. In the second scene, however, we are told that humans can only live in the past. Guzmán interviews an astronomer who explains that for us humans the present does not exist: we can only perceive the past, because light takes a certain time (however short) to reach us from the objects we perceive, so we only ever perceive events after they have happened. The 'nostalgia' of the film's title refers to this cosmological impossibility of being in the present.

This philosophical problem prompts Guzmán to investigate Atacama's past. He discovers pictures painted 1,000 years ago by pre-Colombian people, a cemetery for Indian natives and another for mine workers, the ruins of a mining town that was converted into a concentration camp by the Chilean dictatorship, the remains of the camp's prisoners still being searched for by some of their relatives, and various other astronomers.

All these episodes point to different times: cosmological temporalities linked to the star dust in our bones and the formation of old stars, and social temporalities linked to the pre-Colombian era and the more recent and tragic dictatorship years. The documentary seeks not only to give present meaning to all these past events but also to give them a unity and to interrelate their heterogeneity in a totality, albeit a complex totality.

Three elements are used to achieve this purpose: the Atacama Desert, as the location where everything takes place; the voice of Patricio Guzmán; and the conceptual narrative that discloses the hidden relations between the different things and events shown in the film.

The most explicit of these three elements is the unity of space. We know from narratology the power of space to bring unity to events happening in the same place. Following Ricoeur, a unifying space gives coherence to heteronomy.

The second element is the voice of the author. It is Guzmán's voice that introduces all

the events and characters, relates them to one another and reflects on each one. Yet I would argue that Guzmán's voice plays an even more important role: it makes that the events described in the documentary acquire a subjective colouring. From the very beginning Guzmán places his own childhood in the foreground, as a clear manifestation of his subjectivity. In another scene he presents an old house full of objects covered in dust as if it were the one he had lived in as a child. Other biographical elements help give a narrative frame that brings a second element of unity to the overall heterogeneity.

The third element is the causal links established by the narrator between different, sometimes implausibly distant events. At one point, an astronomer relates the explosion of stars millions of years ago to the composition of our bones, which contain star dust. From there Guzmán moves on to the place in the desert where elderly wives and mothers of the victims of the Chilean dictatorship search among the stones for the bones and other remains of their loved ones.

Figure 2. Stills from *Nostalgia for the Light*

In conclusion, Guzmán uses mainly narrative, yet sometimes highly poetic, elements to bring unity to the heterogeneous pasts represented in the film.

2.2. Atmospheric Temporality in *The Sky Turns*, by Mercedes Álvarez

Like Guzmán's *Nostalgia for the Light,* Mercedes Álvarez's documentary represents several time lines crossing in a specific place, in this case a small rural village, Aldealseñor, in the Castile region of Spain. The film-maker was born there, but her parents moved to a big city when she was still a baby, so she has no conscious memories of it. At the most immediate level we find a personal trigger in recovering a personal past, a family genealogy.

However, the filmmaker's return to the village of her birth, documented in the film, turns into something much more complex. Through the beautiful takes of the landscape, the charming, sometimes funny and always wise peasants and Álvarez's poetic way of narrating all that she comes across, the documentary becomes a deep and fascinating reflection on time and its passing. During the course of the film, the viewer traverses many temporal lines that cross one another in unexpected ways. The film makes reference to the time of the dinosaurs, the Roman Empire, the region's medieval Muslim inhabitants, the Spanish Civil War and the post-war years, the present, the future and other temporalities.

What is interesting about this documentary, however, is not so much the reference to any particular chapter of history but the way different times are intertwined to create a single web. In this intertwining, we as viewers are given the feeling that these distant times somehow co-exist in an extended present. Through this experience in the present, we are able to cross temporal layers and see how certain very distant events shape more recent ones. To achieve all this Mercedes Álvarez uses various cinematic strategies, which are discussed below, ending with the concept of mood.

As already mentioned, *The Sky Turns* has a narrative structure centred around the film-maker's trip to Aldealseñor. The events referred to in the documentary are therefore superficially intertwined through a place and a temporal structure.

A second narrative element helps build this relationship between distant historic times, namely, the division of the film into four parts, corresponding to the four seasons of the year. Thus, the diegetic time of the film is one year, from autumn to the end of summer the following year. This circular structure not only breaks the linearity of chronological time but also has the function of including distant events in time in the same period of the year. For instance, the presentation of a medieval castle, the first mention of the dinosaurs and the decline in the town's population due to emigration are grouped together in the autumn chapter. Each season

is marked by visual features of nature and climate, such as a particular quality of light and particular colours and textures, as well as the sounds of nature, such as the wind, the rain and certain animals. As we will see, these seasonal markers also play a significant role in building an atmosphere.

Figure 3. Stills from *The Sky Turns* (2005), 3'42''. Shot of Pepa showing the dinosaur footprints

Apart from these two narrative techniques, other visual procedures help build a close relationship between temporally distant events. The commonest and most obvious is the superposition or juxtaposition of objects through visual analogies established through similarities in shape and size, colour or movement. These analogies serve to break linear temporality and bring to light new, unforeseeable relationships between two or more events or places.

An early and particularly remarkable example is an introductory scene in which an old woman, Pepa, shows some dinosaur footprints to the camera. She explains that when she was a child, she used to play with her friends there without knowing that all these footprints were so old. She goes on to say that one day some archaeologists came and told them the footprints belonged to dinosaurs. These scientists made visible something that was already there as an implicit part of the surroundings. Then, in a remarkable scene, the old woman starts stepping on the prints and walks in the dinosaurs' footsteps, as if she were one of those ancient beasts. Through the coincidental similarity in visual form and movement, the take builds an analogy between the dinosaur's steps and those of the old woman, superimposing the two eras. The film thus brings an ancient, prehistoric age back into the present.

A fourth cinematic procedure that emphasizes time is the long take. Jean Mitry noted that showing unvarying images for a relatively long period gives the spectator an intense sensation of the passage of time. As Jaime Pena explains (Pena, 2020), when long takes of this kind are not central to the main story, they create a more dense sensation of slowness.

Finally, a very important part of the film is the voice of the filmmaker herself, who plays the role of the narrator. She has a very calm, non-professional voice, often talking in the first person and recounting personal experiences. It is easy to empathize with this voice and almost internalize it as one's own inner voice.

Looking back at these various procedures, we note that some belong to the representation of the external world, some to the filmic means and one to subjectivity. Each might be able to act separately from the others, in a heterogeneous way, to establish a relationship between different timelines in different scenes of the film. However, the film joins all these elements in a totality, harmonizing the external elements with the subjective and the filmic ones. Over the course of the film this harmonization builds up a particular atmosphere that links each temporal line not only to one other line but to all the other lines. Creating an atmosphere is what unifies all the heterogeneous elements, and the heterogeneous elements are joined in such a way as to build an atmosphere.

Figure 4. Stills from *The Sky Turns* (2005), 33'30''-36'35. Passage from autumn to winter: 'things started to change. As in winter, the first signs of change came from the north…'

The preceding discussion leads to a consideration of the concept of atmosphere. In the following sections, first I explain the concept of mood, following the notion of *Stimmung* in the Romantic tradition in painting, while also considering some newer approaches to this

concept in film theory. I argue that mood is the aesthetic element mainly responsible for our perceiving the various elements of a film as belonging to the same unity. After that, following Augustine of Hippo's reflections on time, I argue that mood is what brings all the different temporalities together in a unity.

3.1.   Mood or *Stimmung* as the Unifying Feature in Painting and Cinema

Mood is a state of mind or a feeling that is felt by a person or a group of people. It can also refer to the atmosphere of a landscape or the particular tone of a place. As we can see, it has as much to do with a subjective dimension as with external reality.

As Kerstin Thomas has explained, mood was first used as an aesthetic category for Romantic painting through the German word *Stimmung* (Thomas 2004). The term *Stimmung* comes from *Stimme*, voice, which connotes expressivity. However, the word is also closely related to the German verb, *stimmen*, which means to attune or tune, in the sense of bringing two strings into accord or harmony. Two instruments can be attuned not only when they play the same sound but also when they play two different sounds that concord. It is in this very basic sense of *stimmen* that we find the twofold dimension of this phenomenon (Thomas 2004). As already stated by the old Pythagorean tradition that described the Western tonal system, the harmony between two sounds depends not only on an objective relationship between the sounds, but on their being perceived as harmonious. Harmony of sounds has a consonant or concordant effect of harmony in the listener. *Stimmung* thus refers to both a physical, external phenomenon and an internal, subjective state. This explains why in Romanticism *Stimmung* and mood referred to both an external reality, such as the atmosphere of a place, and a state of mind produced by the perception of the place.

When *Stimmung* refers to an atmosphere, it may include elements of weather and landscape, light, colour and texture, sounds and types of movements. When it refers to the emotional dimension, the associated state of mind arises through the particular duration and rhythm of the surrounding phenomena. Thomas observes that one of the most important features of *Stimmung* is that it is very difficult to identify any one element as the one that triggers the emotion. The difference between mood and ordinary emotions is that ordinary emotions are focused on specific objects or actions, whereas mood is associated more with a general state of things. That is why it is possible for discordant elements or movements in a

scene (painting or film) to disturb or even break the particular mood shaped by the whole. Thomas also notes that mood tends to be longer-lasting. Whether linked to an ephemeral, volatile atmosphere or to a more enduring state, mood is characterized by a sort of suspended temporality.

If the concept of *Stimmung* or mood has always been significant in painting theory, it has been rarely studied in film theory. One of the first to do so may have been Gregg M. Smith in a 1999 chapter on emotions in cinema. Smith argued that the cognitivist approach to emotions applied to cinema needed to be broadened. According to him, common cognitivist theories in cinema adopt the prototype model of emotion. This involves constraining emotional states to intentional dispositions that are linked to actions: 'Definitions of emotions rooted in cognitive philosophy tend to have some combination of these central characteristics of the emotion prototype: an action tendency, an orientation towards objects, and a goal orientation. Films cognitivism has inherited these assumptions' (Smith, 1999, p. 104).

Smith suggests complementing cognitivist theories with a wider approach to emotions in which other, more general affective states are also taken into account. This so-called associative model would include states that can last from several minutes to days, such as being happy or depressed. These are more than actual emotions: they are affective predispositions that sometimes frame other emotions. Being depressed can trigger emotions such as sadness or dejection but is not incompatible with shorter moments of anger or even happiness (Smith, 1999).

To attune to a film's atmosphere means to empathize with it, maintaining an emotional disposition towards the film throughout its duration. Moreover, being engaged with the film will make the beholder receptive and able to react to each scene in an emotionally appropriate way. Smith therefore argues that mood is a general affective predisposition within which other emotions, of varying intensity and valence, can take place.

Accordingly, when a film creates a mood, the mood usually lasts for the whole of the film and, while it lasts, is experienced in the present as affect, a general atmosphere surrounding the explicit actions and events.

Robert Sinnerbrink, following Smith, has analyzed some of the elements that build up a filmic atmosphere, including lighting, staging, cutting, rhythm, pace, colour, texture, gesture, action music and sound (Sinnerbrink, 2012, p. 152). For him, a mood is a type of affective response to the film that varies in emotional level but is maintained throughout the different

scenes (Sinnerbrink, 2012). It is a sort of persistent but fluctuating affective disposition. For that reason, it can only be perceived overall and is not the effect of any particular stimulus; it is also liable to become more conscious as the film draws to an end.

Mood thus refers both to elements of the images and to the affective state of the subject. The affective state of the subject mirrors two levels of elements in the film: first, a set of heterogeneous elements of an image, such as light and composition, which can be perceived synchronically; and second, a series of heterogeneous takes and scenes, which are perceived diachronically. In this last case, however, the order of the scenes is relevant, since a change of order might break the mood. A mood lasts for a relatively long time and may even continue after the film has ended. It is not a direct reaction to particular phenomena but an active predisposition of the subject. Considering these features, we can see that the concept of mood may correspond to the concept that Augustine of Hippo thought the most important element of time, that is, *affectio*.

3.2.   The Concept of *affectio* as the Reverse of Time in Augustine of Hippo's Theory

In what follows I argue that the concept of mood in the arts and cinema is closely related to the concept of *affectio* in Augustine of Hippo's theory of time. I also show that *affectio* is central to Augustine's theory. First, I outline Augustine's theory of time in three basic points.

The first idea is that time is a psychological experience that depends on external phenomena. Augustine of Hippo's theory of time is a reply to the Aristotelian theory, which conceived of time as a natural category that relies only on *physis*, that is, on nature (Aristotle, 2008). Augustine's theory, in contrast, is the first complete psychological theory of time in Western philosophy. It was really original. It denies the objective existence of past, present and future (I omit the argument here, so as to not to oversimplify), which can only exist in the mind. Since the mind thinks always in the present, both the past and the future are phenomena of the present: we have a present of the past, a present of the present and a present of the future.

The second idea is that these three experiences of time are possible through the subject's adopting an active role. The subject is not passive or receptive. The subject mind's builds a temporal relationship between events using memory to recover past events through

recollection, perception to represent present phenomena, and expectation to anticipate possible future events. The mind thus measures temporal intervals between phenomena and builds a line of duration between a thing's present state and its past and future states.

The third idea is that the mind's representations of events do not reflect objective properties of the events but the effect the events have on the subject. For Augustine, what we compare in our soul in order to build up a temporal experience is the *affectio* or *the way things affect us*. Again, I must stress that 'the way things affect us' is not a passive experience but an active one, one that is only possible through the disposition to articulate memory, perception and expectation. Augustine's favourite example is a musical one. When I am about to sing a song, I have the whole song in my mind, through rhythm and tonality as cross-cutting features of the song. The properties of the song do not belong to specific elements but to the relationships among them. It is only because there is a subject that builds up the relationships among elements that it is possible for a song to be sung as a song, that is to say, in a more or less achieved unity of rhythm and tonality. When I have sung part of a song, that part is in my memory, the part I am singing is in my perception and the rest is in my expectation. But if I direct my attention to all these parts as one, taking into account the way these parts affect me, the song still forms a whole. This is what Augustine calls the act of *attention and distention*. Through attention, the mind focuses on individual elements, while through distention it attends to the structural elements that form the whole.

As we have seen, in Augustine's theory of time the concept of *affectio* is central to building the notion of time. The next step is to realize that the concept of *affectio* is closely linked to the concept of mood.

Traditionally, Augustine's *affectio* has been translated into English as 'impression'.[7] However, there is a misunderstanding here. In English, impression refers rather to the mark or footprint left by something in a surface. Impression is also the term that classical empiricist theory of knowledge uses for the footprint that external stimuli leave in our minds. Latin has

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[7] At least, this is the case in both the translations I have consulted (as cited in the bibliography). The most important fragment is Augustine, *Confessions*, Book Eleven, Chapter XXVI, ∫36, which Chadwick translates as follows: 36. 'It is in you, O mind of mine, that I measure the periods of time. Do not shout me down that it exists [objectively]; do not overwhelm yourself with the turbulent flood of your impressions. In you, as I have said, I measure the periods of time. I measure as time present the impression that things make on you as they pass by and what remains after they have passed by--I do not measure the things themselves which have passed by and left their impression on you. This is what I measure when I measure periods of time. Either, then, these are the periods of time or else I do not measure time at all.'

its own word for this basic cognitive phenomenon, namely, *impressio*. According to *Olivetti's online Latin dictionary*, the Latin word *affectio* refers, first, to a 'mental condition, mood, feeling, disposition' and, second, to 'affection'. 'Affection' in English, like *affectio* in Latin, is closer to the emotional dimension than the term 'impression'.[8]

The way Augustine defines the experience of time as *affectio* confirms the analogy with 'mood'. In a well-known passage, Augustine describes *affectio* as an extension of the soul through events. It is not possible to have all the words, tones and tempos of a song present in one's mind; but it is possible to have them present in a kind of extended present, felt as a mental state. An affective disposition maintained throughout the song makes it possible to perceive the song's parts and its unfolding as a whole.

The soul achieves this by using its capacity to concentrate and to relate. Augustine talks about the mind's capacity to bring intention and distention to things. This is like narrowing and widening the focus, concentrating and expanding, *attending* and *distending*. Through the mental capacity to concentrate, one brings attention to particular parts of an event or action; through the capacity to open one's mind and detect relationships, one gathers phenomena together.

It may be surprising but it is not a coincidence that Romantic painting and film theory, on the one hand, and Augustine, on the other, should have so much in common, given that the former talk about mood and the latter about time. My claim is that these are two sides of the same coin. Mood is the mental state or emotional disposition that unifies different events; time as continuity is the form or structure which this disposition builds in order to unify events and grasp the plurality as a whole.

For us, as for Augustine, it is important to understand that this mental capacity to relate different events can apply at different scales. On the one hand, intense concentration can make all the parts of a very short phenomenon, such as a car driving past quickly, present in the mind. On the other, prolonged distention (extension of mind) can bring events occurring over a long period of time into a unity.[9]

Accordingly, Augustine ends his uchronic reflection on time with a beautiful passage in which he applies his understanding of the way the soul measures time to his own life and to the

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[8] Searched in Olivetti's Online Latin Dictionary and at *Latinitium. https://latinitium.com/latin-dictionaries/*. Last searched 30 November 2022.

[9] I wonder whether this is related to what I would call global listening in music, that is, the capacity to have a whole piece of music in one's mind, not in every detail but in its structural, architectonic aspects.

whole of human history.

> What is true of the poem as a whole is true equally of its individual stanzas and syllables. The same is true of the whole long performance in which this poem may be a single item. The same thing happens in the entirety of a person's life, of which all his actions are parts; and the same in the entire sweep of human history, the parts of which are individual human lives. (Augustine, 1999, *The Confessions*, Book XI, Ch. 28, 38, p. 309).

4. Sound as the Main Element for Creating Mood in Carlos Casas's *Cemetery*

I would now like to apply the previous reflections about mood and time to a film that also has many heterogeneous elements but uses sound to cement them together.

Cemetery (2019) by Carlos Casas is a fiction film that contains some documentary images. It was presented at Tate Modern in 2019. The film tells the story of the last elephant. After a natural catastrophe, the last elephant makes it way to the mythical elephants' cemetery. Before the departure, some hunters enter the area; but after a fruitless search, they succumb to the jungle. Then the elephant leads the viewer into a dark cave, where almost nothing can be seen, so that the cinematic experience becomes mainly acoustic. At the end, some landscapes suggest the possibility of a new beginning.

The film is structured in four parts related to cinema genres. The first part introduces a traditional narrative film in which a journey is prepared. It is the journey to be taken by Nga the Elephant in its last days, after a natural disaster. The elephant and its human keeper, Sanra, prepare themselves for the trip. The second part is close to an adventure film, with elements of suspense. The poachers arrive at the site and search for the elephant. The third part is much more experimental, showing a trip through the caves, with all their dark images and with visual perception obstructed for nearly ten minutes. The screen is in darkness almost the whole time, inducing a state of hypnagogia through the camera movements, the flickering shadows and, above all, the sound. In this part, the viewer's sense of hearing becomes much more acute. What we hear are jungle noises (leaves being crushed, birds) and the elephant humming, vibrations and low-frequency sounds. The last images, shot in the Atacama Desert, show still landscape views from which all life seems to have disappeared. Yet the music and the light may also indicate some kind of new beginning. It resembles a science fiction film.

The mixture of genres could give the impression of a fragmented film, a kind of collage of different narrative forms tacked together. That is not the case, however. The film evidences a great effort to create a unified experience that will drive the viewer from beginning to end, without breaks or marked changes.
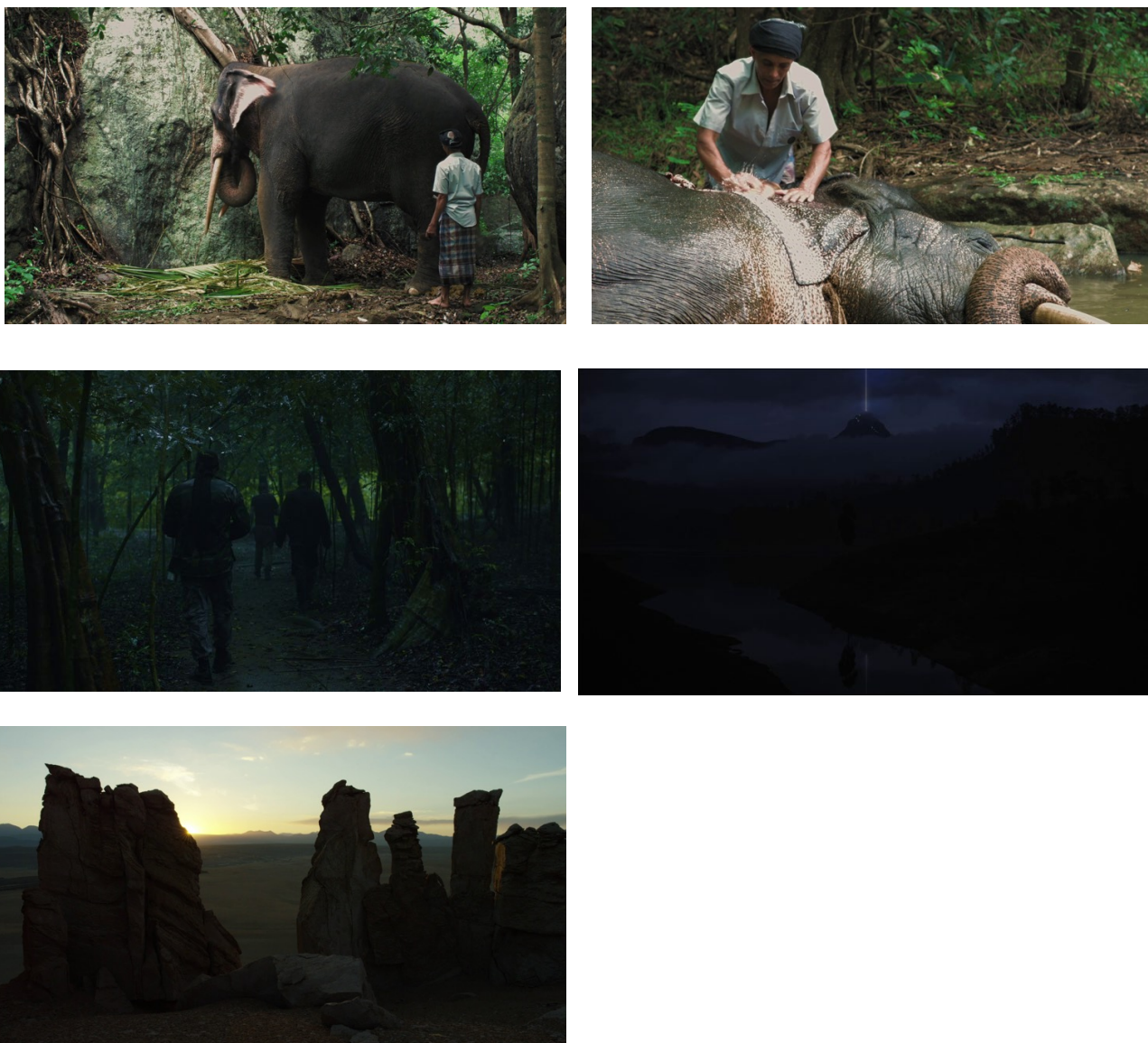
Figure 5. Stills from *Cemetery* reflecting the different filmic genres represented in Casas's film.

First, certain cinematic elements, such as the long takes with a fixed camera, Sanra's slow and repetitive movements while washing the elephant and the long views of landscapes, impose a slow pace based on a durational temporality.

Second, the film focuses constantly on weather elements such as rain, wind, water,

clouds, fog, and the changes of light throughout the day. Many of these elements, including fire, are more often heard than seen.

This brings us to the third and most important element, which is the soundtrack, especially the natural sounds of the jungle. The director does a great job using these sounds, with the help of sound artist Chris Watson. Both Casas and Watson have recorded large numbers of natural sounds from different places and animals, which they use in the film to create a sort of sound archive, or Noah's Ark, in which hundreds of species find their proper space or voice.

Sound is deeply embedded in the structure of the film, as it is the main narrative element. The film has a fully articulated sound structure that unfolds in parallel with certain processes of our circadian cycle. The circadian cycle attunes our body to times of activity and rest and regulates a corresponding cycle of activity in the brain, which can be detected through different thresholds of low-frequency brain waves. While we are awake, our brain activity produces a flow of electrical signals at around 30 Hz (Beta waves). In the evening the wave frequency drops to around 7.5 Hz (Theta waves). While we are asleep, brain activity reaches its lowest phase (Delta waves), at around 0,2-4 Hz. The film's soundtrack begins with Beta waves and unfolds to reach Delta waves in the third and darkest part, quasi inducing a state of hypnagogia in the viewer. This is the state in which we are most likely to experience spontaneous images and thoughts.

In the film's presentation at Tate Modern, sound artist Chris Watson and sound engineer Tony Myatt built a sound installation to reproduce some infrasound frequencies from the elephants, especially recorded for the film. These frequencies cannot be detected by the human ear but can be sensed by our body as vibrations. These sounds bring the film to a non-visual, non-narrative climax, in which the acoustic atmosphere surrounds the audience, eliciting a new perceptual experience.

The film's sound thus creates a mood that is not only motivated by natural elements but also follows a human psychophysiological pattern.

The printed catalogue for Carlos Casas's film includes some reflections by composer and musician David Toop on this subject. According to Toop, the low frequencies used by elephants are, for humans, associated with sadness and mourning, evoking a mood of catastrophe. However, they also expand the perceptual field, evoking a connection to the earth that goes beyond any anthropomorphic mood. 'To listen as a feeling, sensing, merging being

is to hear the ghost of that which is not quite lost. The world booms and rumbles with the vibrations of its own making and unmaking' (Toop 2020).

The main natural sources of infrasound are movements of the earth, oceans, fire and air. We do not hear these sounds with our ears but with our whole body. They awaken the feeling that our surrounding reality is moving and evolving, and that all ends bring us to a new beginning.

4. Conclusions

From the above film analyses and theoretical reflections on mood and time, we draw the following conclusions:

1. The films discussed here aim to reflect different temporal aspects of our reality (plurality of time, movement, standstill, origin, telos, etc.), while integrating them in a unitary whole. They offer a complex experience with an overall structure.

2. This complexity is more perfectly unified when the main composing element is the construction of a mood. Mood is understood always in an objective sense (atmosphere) and a subjective sense (state of mind).

3. As an aesthetic category, mood is distinct from Modern (more typically narrative) and Postmodern (typically fragmentary) strategies. It affords a Postmodern view of the heterogeneity of reality, especially the heterochrony of time, but reflects this complexity in a unitary experience. In this complex unitary experience, past, present and future can be articulated in a new, fruitful form.

4. This experience harmonizes subjectivity and objectivity through creative imagination. It brings the fields of documentary and fiction closer together without mixing them. And it fertilizes the imagination to once again conceive of the future as a contingent and productive field of experience.

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From Infinite Rapprochement to the Open
From Kant to Hölderlin

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ABSTRACT. For Hölderlin, Kant is the starting point of his thinking. However, religion for Hölderlin is not primarily inscribed in the matrix of practical philosophy, but contains essential impulses from its relation to aesthetics. Hölderlin wants to move from "philosophy to poetry and religion" without taking the path via practical philosophy. In the "Fragment of Philosophical Letters" Hölderlin concludes: "Thus all religion would be poetic in its essence." While Kant opens up ethically based religion to aesthetic categories only in selected places, Hölderlin places the latter at the centre. This is particularly evident in his reference to God in poetry from 1800 onwards, which borrows essential motifs developed by Kant in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. For Kant, beauty has to do with the "feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive faculties" (KdU § 45), which of course does not mean lack of rules. The creative and free character of the imagination is expressed in the fact that it produces an abundance of ideas for given concepts, which accompany those concepts but escape their regulation (cf. KdU § 49). This open moment, which Kant allows but does not develop further, provides a key to the peculiarity of Hölderlin's writing. His poems always have a concept, an idea, a theological object (the question of God) as their theme. This concept is enriched with new ideas in an unfinishable process of revising the poems. Newer versions of the texts usually do not erase the older ones, but rather fan the linear textual design into a variety that is no longer entirely controllable. This process of multiplication of ideas is particularly intense where God is concerned.

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1. From infinite progress to the aesthetic

When Hölderlin wrote from Jena to his brother Carl on April 13, 1795, he gave an excellent, brief introduction to the significance of the moral law and the postulates of practical reason in Kant's work. Of central importance here is the motif of infinite progress. On "coming nearer to his aim of the greatest possible moral perfection",[11] he writes:

> But since this aim is impossible in this world, since it cannot be attained within time and we can only approach it in infinite progression, we have need of a belief in an infinite extent of time because the infinite progress in good is an uncontestable requirement of our law; but this infinite extent of time is inconceivable without faith in a Lord of nature whose will is the same as the command of the moral law within us, and who must therefore want us to endure infinitely because he wants us to make infinite progress in good and, as the Lord of nature, also has the power to realize that which he wants.[12]

Here Hölderlin is still within the realm of practical philosophy; the matter of aesthetics is not mentioned in the entire letter. About half a year later, in a letter to Schiller dated September 4, 1795, the unification of subject and object appears as the decisive question that every philosophical system must ask itself, alongside the motif of infinite progress[13]:

> I am attempting to work out for myself the idea of an infinite progress in philosophy by showing that the unremitting demand that must be made of any system, the union of subject and object in an absolute… *I* or whatever one wants to call it, though possible aesthetically, in an act of intellectual intuition, is theoretically possible only through endless approximation, like the approximation of a square to a circle; and that in order to arrive at a system of thought immortality is just as necessary as it is for a system of action. [14]

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[11] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtlicher Werke und Briefe*, Münchener Ausgabe, ed. by Michael Knaupp, Darmstatt: Hanser 1998 [below MA], Letter 97, 13. April 1795, MA II 576-579, here: 577; cf. MA III, 481-482; Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe in acht Bänden, ed. by Friedrich Beissner, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1946-1985 [below StA], StA 6.2, 731-735/ Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters ed. and translated with an Introduction by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth, London: Penguin Classics, [below EaL], EaL 48-52, here: 49.

[12] Brief 97, 13. April 1795, MA II 576-579, here: 577f/EaL 48-52, here: 50.

[13] I doubt whether one should speak of the emergence of a "philosophy of unification" in view of this new central question about the unification of subject and object, as Christoph Jamme does in his outstanding study on Hegel and Hölderlin (cf. Jamme (1983), pp. 71-98). Already at this time Hölderlin has, as can be seen in *Being Judgement Possibility*, a strong awareness of the meaning of difference, which cannot be abandoned.

[14] Brief 104, 4. September 1795, MA II, 595f/EaL 61-63, here: 62.

In these sentences, a program is presented for a philosophy to be developed: "I am attempting to work out for myself […] by showing […]", whereas in the letter to his brother, Hölderlin initially only summarizes Kant's formative philosophical system. At the center of the short passage from the letter, as mentioned above, there are two important motifs, one of infinite progress or infinite rapprochement and the other of the unification of subject and object. First: The image of infinite progress recalls the central question in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as to how reason deals with the inevitably occurring figures of an infinite *progressus*, which are in danger of being understood as an inadmissible extension of our knowledge of objects. Kant talks about "transcendental illusion" ("*transzendentalen Scheine*"[15]). However, the postulates of practical reason, under the moral law, entail a figure of infinite progress. Hölderlin explicitly refers to immortality.

Second: Hölderlin states that every philosophical system must be concerned with the unification of subject and object in the absolute. He still tries to conceive of this within the realm of Kantian critical philosophy. However, the problem of the separation of subject and object gains more importance, and a first shift away from Kant becomes visible. Talking of a unification of subject and object, Hölderlin does not want to make the entire intermediate space disappear, which in Kant is located between the categories of the subject's intellect and the data of perception and which is about the constitution of potential objects of experience (*Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding /Schematismus der reinen Verstandesbegriffe*). I cannot here delve into how Hölderlin adopts especially the categories of modality to develop a primacy of possibility.

In his letter to Schiller, Hölderlin does not really name the point of unification in the absolute, but merely indicates it with a placeholder, pointing rather towards a function: *absolute ego* – "or whatever one wants to call it". It becomes clear that it is not his intention to positivize something unconditional that precedes all separations. Rather, Hölderlin is concerned with the movement of overcoming otherwise disparate aspects of reality. He thus takes up the most fundamental dichotomy of modern philosophy (subject/object) and suggests that overcoming the dichotomous character of the concept of reality must be the task of philosophy. The unification has an aesthetic character and is conceived of as *intellectual intuition* (*intellectuale*

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[15] Kant, 1998a, p. 352/ Kant, 1998b, p. 385.

Anschauung). While the infinite rapprochement is still present and shapes the passage, the aesthetic emerges as a new element.

2. From intellectual intuition to the aesthetic sense

While infinite progress in Hölderlin's development then fades into the background, the aesthetic becomes even more important. This can be shown in a letter Hölderlin sent to the philosopher Immanuel Niethammer half a year later, in February 1796:

> In the philosophical letters I want to find the principle that will explain to my satisfaction the divisions in which we think and exist, but which is also capable of making the conflict disappear, the conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world, and between reason and revelation – theoretically, through intellectual intuition, without our practical reason having to intervene. To do this we need an aesthetic sense, and I shall call my philosophical letters *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. And in them I will go on from philosophy to poetry and religion.[16]

In echo of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Hölderlin wants to write *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. He mentions as essential content the transition from philosophy to poetry and religion. This transition is connected with the search for a way of dealing with the divisions with which modern philosophy operates. While in his letter to Schiller Hölderlin had only mentioned the separation of subject and object, he now adds the "conflict" between self and world, as well as between reason and revelation. Obviously, he is not only concerned about the modern subject/object constellation, but about a modern development in which thinking – in various respects – to the extent that it is characterized by conflict that cannot be mediated, falls apart.

For Hölderlin, it is clear that there is no way (back) to a tensionless primordial unity that precedes the divisions. At first the divisions in which *our* thinking is caught must be understood: "to find the principle that will explain to my satisfaction the divisions in which we think and exist". The goal is about understanding our current situation.

Moreover, Hölderlin is also concerned with preventing the disintegration of thought into two completely separate areas that can no longer be mediated. When Hölderlin speaks of

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[16] Brief 117, 24. Februar 1796, MA II, 614f, here: 615; cf. StA 6.2, 783-787/EaL 66-68, here: 67.

a "principle", he does not mean a metaphysical principle of unity that could be objectively conceived. In this principle, reason as expressed in Kant's terminology would fall prey to the *transcendental appearance* (*transzendentaler Schein*) that arises when one considers the conditions of thought in the subject as something positively given.[17] The principle mentioned must therefore be found in a form of thinking, a function, a process; unlike Kant, however, Hölderlin does not (primarily) think of practical reason as the pivotal point of the mediation of the dichotomies and antinomies that constantly break open anew in thinking. He strives to understand and explain them from the point of view of theoretical knowledge, again mentioning the motif of *intellectual intuition*. In my opinion, this motif is initially a sort of cipher for an aspect beyond the dichotomies, which nevertheless is not to be found in practical philosophy, but instead has to do with intuition. This begs the question: What is the point of naming this motif at the point of transition from philosophy to poetry and religion?

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the end of "Transcendental Aesthetics", Kant emphasizes that intellectual intuition can only be possessed by an "original being", but not by man as "one that is dependent as regards both its existence and its intuition".[18] For Kant, intellectual intuition would mean a form of immediate self-knowledge, which would skip the temporally structuring synthesis in which the ego (the "consciousness of itself"[19]) evolves and which marks a non-closing moment of displacement, of difference in the self. The ego does not intuit itself "as it would immediately self-actively represent itself, but in accordance with the way in which it is affected from within".[20] The "self-intuition of the mind" ("Selbstanschauung des Gemüts")[21] is thus characterized by affecting and being affected – two processes that do not coincide completely (otherwise the inner intuition would be intellectual). This hiatus, which cannot be closed, is time or emerges as time. Kurt Appel expresses this as follows: "There is an unbridgeable gap between the act of positing and the representation of it, which is why representing not only consists of the active moment of affecting, but – equally – signifies being affected. Time is precisely this interval between activity and passivity, this difference that

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[17] Cf. Baumgartner, 1988, pp. 101-104.
[18] Kant, 1998a, p. 72/ Kant, 1998b, p. 192.
[19] Kant,1998a, p. 68/ Kant, 1998b, p. 189.
[20] Kant, 1998a, p. 69/ Kant, 1998b, p. 190
[21] Kant, 1998a, p. 69/ Kant, 1998b, p. 190.

unfurls in every act of self-affecting."[22]

Hölderlin does not fall short of this insight either[23], but – as will be shown later – he will determine this difference to be one of *discretion and continuity*. The recourse to *intellectual intuition* in the letter to Niethammer does not seek to encompass or abolish this difference, but refers, as Johann Kreuzer points out, to the fact that the forms of antagonism, of separation, of difference must be thematized in the aesthetic experience:

> "Intellectual intuition" is a necessary prerequisite for the reflection on the structure of self-consciousness as well as for the explanation of the opposites that we discover as self-consciousness or rather that we find within self-consciousness. Intellectual intuition is neither something positive and factual nor is it something that can be theoretically determined. Concerning this, Hölderlin abides by Kant's criterion. What is regarded as intellectual intuition, is the reality of an aesthetic experience. There is no object of intellectual intuition. (TS XV)[24]

The way in which aesthetic experience can symbolize and express this difference and this hiatus without retracing them to a preceding motif and thus dissolving them, but also how their tension can be balanced without turning their reconciliation into an infinite progress, will be clarified in the next chapter, paving the way for considerations that "will go on from philosophy to poetry and religion".[25]

3. How to conceive of the aesthetic sense

When Hölderlin juxtaposes the terms "theoretical" and "intellectual intuition", a direction is indicated that ranges from the theoretical evidence of the possibility of objective world experience (theoretical knowledge) to aesthetic experience, in Kant's words, from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *aesthetic judgement*: "To do this we need an aesthetic sense",[26] Hölderlin

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[22] Appel, 2022, p. 159. Kant writes about "the form of intuition, which, since it does not represent anything except insofar as something is posited in the mind, can be nothing other than the way in which the mind is affected by its own activity, namely this positing of its representation, thus the way it is affected through itself, i.e., it is an inner sense as far as regards its form" (Kant, 1998a, p. 67f / Kant, 1998b, p. 189).

[23] This applies to Hegel in the same way (cf. Appel, 2022).

[24] Translation: Sara Walker.

[25] EaL 66-68, here: 67

[26] Brief 117, 24. Februar 1796, MA II, 614f, here: 615. On the significance of Kantian aesthetics for Hölderlin, cf. the note to Hegel in the letter of 10 July 1794: "My preoccupations are pretty focused at the moment. Kant and

states. This is what Hölderlin – following Schiller – wants to cultivate. The path leads from philosophy to art and religion. Hölderlin never wrote the *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* that he announced, but a fragment exists that gives an indication of the path he had in mind. The text has no title and is usually referred to as either *Über Religion* (Stuttgarter Ausgabe) or *Fragment philosophischer Briefe* (Frankfurter Ausgabe).[27] In this fragment, Hölderlin points to the inter-referentiality of religion and art.

First of all, the starting point is important. Hölderlin contrasts mechanistic thinking with thinking of intersubjective-linguistic-historical mediation. For this second type of thinking, he uses the term "sphere".[28] In religion, Hölderlin sees a strong differentiation of these intersubjective-linguistic-historical relations. He defines religious relationships as distinct from "intellectual moral legal relationships on the one hand, and on the other hand, physical mechanical historical relationships".[29] The first set of terms stands for man in his individuality, personality and morality, i.e., in his freedom, the second set of terms for his being included in general relationships, connections, determinations, i.e., for his nature. The first set stands for discrete relations, the second for continuous ones. The two areas never collapse into one – individuality always repels generality and cannot be completely represented in it; conversely, individuality cannot produce its innate constitution, its continuity and its contextual integration by autonomous self-activity. The subject exists as the difference of these moments, which can never be brought into congruence or dissolved into one another. This is the non-closing moment of displacement, of difference in the self as we encountered it in Kant. Here, religion appears as a form of mediation and differentiation. Hölderlin defines it as "intellectual-historical, that is, mythical" by including a term from the first set and a term from the second set.[30] Religion is able to connect the two series and balance their moments in tension without resolving them into a comprehensive point of unity or subordinating one of the series to the other. With the word "mythical", he finds a term that is intended to encompass both sides.

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the Greeks are virtually all I read. I am trying to become particularly familiar with the aesthetic part of the critical philosophy." (Brief 84, 10. Juli 1794, MA II 540f, here: 541/EaL 27-29, here: 29)

[27] Cf. EaL, pp. 234–239. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. by Johann Kreuzer, Hamburg: Meiner 1998 [below TS], pp. XV–XVIII, 10–15, 120 et seq, Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*. StA 4.1, pp. 275–279, 416 et seq. and StA 4.2, pp. 786–793; Hölderlin, *Sämtlicher Werke und Briefe*. MA III, pp. 387–389; Franz, 2000, pp. 330–344, here: pp. 335–344; Franz, 2020, pp. 224–246; Kreuzer, 2020, pp. 147–161; Böckmann, 1935, pp. 203–210; Gaier, 2008, pp. 75–92, here: pp. 83–85, 91 et seq; Louth (2016), pp. 124–138.

[28] EaL, p. 234.

[29] EaL, p. 238.

[30] EaL, p. 238.

The intellectual-historical, which is the hallmark of religion, expresses itself *mythically*, i.e., in a form of narrative or, more generally, of performance. This is not about an escape from rationality into myth. The mythical characteristic lies in the fact that myth is narrative, which does not convey (religious) knowledge of the world, but only comes to life in the act of narration or performance. It can give expression to that hiatus that constitutes the human being: Narrative is able to aesthetically unite those two logically divorced aspects, that of singularity and that of continuity, and the therein contained separation of morality/freedom and nature. Thus, an image "expresses the character of the individual life that each can and does live infinitely in his or her own way",[31] i.e. it is a mediation of the infinite differentiation of the sphere in which human beings live. All this is embedded in Hölderlin's effort to show that life means "more than machinery [Maschinengang]".[32]

By means of the mythical in its narrative structure (demanding some sort of performance), a connection of religion with art (poetry) is alluded to but has to be developed further. In order to give the two areas of art and religion a more precise definition, Hölderlin refers back to each in relationship to the other: art can be more precisely differentiated by referring to religion's ability to balance the two aspects of the singular and the continuous. Depending on the form of the relationship between the two poles, art defines itself as "epic myth", "dramatic myth"[33] or as the "lyrical-mythical".[34] In these modes of artistic expression, the emphasis is on one of the two sides (on personal relationships, i.e. on the first set, or on historical ones, i.e. on the second set). Specific tensions are thereby established in each case. However, Hölderlin points out "that both the personal and the historical parts are always only subordinate sections, in relation to the true main section, to the *God of the myth*"[35]. Hölderlin takes up the term "mythical"[36] again, which had previously denoted the connection between "intellectual-historical", and thus refers once again to the unifying power of religion. When he determines God as the "main section" in the context of the differentiation of art, this does not mean that art is ultimately dissolved into religion, but rather that art in all its manifestations is about the absolute. Art does not disintegrate into a collection of individual works of art and

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[31] TS, p. 15.
[32] EaL, p. 234.
[33] EaL, p. 239.
[34] TS, p. 15.
[35] EaL, p. 238 et seq.
[36] EaL, p. 238.

styles, but is, in all its finite particularities, a representation of the Absolute.

Conversely, the "higher connection"[37] or the lively differentiation that Hölderlin associates with religion ("sphere") must not remain "in thoughts alone"[38] but must find an expression that only art can grant. Hölderlin uses the expressions "subject-matter" and "presentation" for this.[39] Religion cannot be reduced to its content, its *subject-matter*; it always requires its performance, its *presentation*. This is never merely the external expression of existing content, but all along its cultural-artistic mediation, without which it would not exist: "everyone honours his own god and all honour a common one in poetic representations".[40] Religion has no expression of its own, but is a repetition and free adoption of gestures and motifs, of elements from poetry, narrative, painting, sculpture, dance, music and architecture. This reference of religion to art, i.e. this repetitive adoption of its elements, is summed up for Hölderlin in the beautiful sentence: "Thus, all religion would in its essence be poetic".[41]

Let us summarise: Art refers to that infinite differentiation that is connected with religion. It gives narrative form to the hiatus or displacement which is man's existence and is therein also an expression of the absolute: its "true main section" is the "*God of the myth*".[42] Conversely, the concept of God cannot be detached from cultural-artistic mediations, for all honour God "in poetic representations".[43] It is thus not replaced by or traced back to art, but it is *essentially* connected to it. For Hölderlin, religion has an aesthetic character.[44]

4. Poetry as expression of aesthetic ideas

As pointed out before, religion and art entail both subject matter and presentation. Neither art nor religion can ever refer to fixed content whose performance (presentation) is a merely arbitrary moment. Art and religion as a means of dealing with the ego's displacement need this moment of constant renewal (as this gap can never be closed). From 1800 onwards, this moment reaches deeper and deeper into Hölderlin's poetry.

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[37] EaL, p. 237.
[38] EaL, p. 237.
[39] EaL, p. 238.
[40] EaL, p. 239.
[41] EaL, p. 239
[42] EaL, p. 239.
[43] EaL, p. 239.
[44] This section is closely based on the essay: Deibl, 2018.

In order to show this, I have to return to Kant once more. The openness in Kant's conception, which Daniel Kuran[45] highlighted and which Hölderlin sought to develop further, has its highest expression in *aesthetic ideas*. These refer to the richness of imagination, which can never be summed up by a determined concept and which accompanies every process of logical judgement. It is precisely this anarchic opening of new possibilities that can help us understand a development in Hölderlin's poetry after 1800.

In his poems after 1800, especially in the so-called *Homburger Folioheft*, a vast revision process begins: It is a revision process of adding further text variants to existing texts, not correcting earlier ones but repeating them in free variation. This corresponds to a reading process, in which the texts open up in an ongoing transition through the variants. As Gunter Martens points out, where "there […] are no explicit eradications carried out by the poet, we have to hypothesize the alternative (or even multiple) validity of those texts written next to or on top of each other"[46]. It is not about corrections, but about "extensions of the imaginative space" according to the "formal principle of simultaneity resisting by and large its reproduction in the linearity of print"[47]. Thus, we have to seek meaning in the oscillation between the variants, i.e., at the point of transition. However, the possibly emerging forms of meaning cannot be fixed, but must be suspended once again. The text not only offers possible beginnings everywhere it "*gives* itself to our understanding"[48], but also represents a "labyrinth of possibilities with several exits"[49]. Each reading has contingent beginnings and endings which it may not record as definite.

Often these intense revisions and new and alternative passages can be found in those sections where God is mentioned. This fragility of the text indicates both the rupture and the multiplication of linguistic expressions related to the notion of God itself. According to Hölderlin, the concept of God is closely connected to the openness of language (and the artistic process in general). The transcendent character of God is translated into openness. Neither the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence nor the concept of infinite progress helps us to conceive of God, but rather the open.

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[45] Cf. the article by Daniel Kuran "From Ethics to Aesthetics. On an Aesthetic Sense in Kant's Philosophy of Religion" in this volume.
[46] Martens, 2017, P.147.
[47] Martens, 2017, pp. 148 et seq.
[48] "Angefangen werden kann an jeder Stelle, die sich dem Verständnis *gibt*." (Reuß, 2017, p. 87)
[49] Sattler, 1975, p. 120.

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The Laocoön and the Devil: A Path through the Franciscus Hemsterhuis' Letter on Sculpture

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ABSTRACT. This paper intends to show the key role of the Franciscus Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Sculpture* (1765) in the frame of the late eighteenth-century Aesthetics. More specifically, through the transition from a 'mimetic' to a 'relational' paradigm, according to which beauty emerges from the relationship between the subject and the art object, the Dutch philosopher theorizes two different – but equally valid – ways to represent beauty through art: the classical way, which is exemplified by the *Laocoön*, and the modern one, whose peculiar subject is the devil. The legitimation of these two ways of representation plays a crucial role in the context of the famous eighteenth-century *Querelle* between the Ancients and the Moderns, involving the thesis that the principles of their Aesthetics, even if different, are equally valid because equally linked to a metaphysical desire for unity. What I want to articulate is that the transition from a classical to a modern Aesthetics is based on the reconsideration of the system of arts under the aspect of the principles of representation and culminates with the elaboration of two Aesthetics categories – the *plastic* and the *picturesque* – which are strictly linked to the dialectic between the Ancients and the Moderns.

1. The Definition of Beauty in the Letter on Sculpture

In the eighteenth-century Aesthetics was still considered as a 'young' section of gnoseology. In this sense, the studies in the field of Aesthetics were closely associated with the ones on sensibility, such as in the Kant's first *Critique*. Indeed, the *Transcendental Aesthetic* configures the science of sensibility and its *a priori* forms (space and time). However, Kant himself

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recognized the problematic nature of the word 'aesthetics' with the distinction between two different meanings, the transcendental one and the psychological one:

> The Germans are the only ones who now employ the word "aesthetics" to designate that which others call the critique of taste. The ground for this is a failed hope, held by the excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to a science. But this effort is futile. For the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve *a priori* rules according to which our judgment of taste must be directed; [...] For this reason it is advisable again to desist from the use of this term [...]. Or else to share the term with speculative philosophy and take aesthetics partly in a transcendental meaning, partly in a psychological meaning. (Kant, 1998, p. 156)

We also find this oscillation of meaning in the Hemsterhuis' philosophical works, where the reasoning on beauty is closely associated with that one on the senses involved in the aesthetic experience, mainly touch and sight. However, it should be noted that the Dutch philosopher never uses the word 'aesthetics' to indicate his own reflections on beauty and arts, further confirming the fact that, at that time, this term was only used in Germany where moreover Aesthetics as a science was just born.

Some of the main eighteenth-century European philosophers, such as Crousaz, Batteux and Hutcheson, defined beauty as the 'unity in variety' that is possible to observe in nature. This interpretation goes back to the ancient philosophical tradition to some extent: in particular, to Aristotle who, in the *Physics*, presents art as an imitation of natural processes and phenomena, and to the platonic reflection on the figure of the "μιμητικὸν". According to this ancient perspective, beauty is conceived in light of an external normativity, represented by the order and the proportion of nature or by classical canons (according to the Renaissance principle of imitation). Consequently, the artist should look to external rules to reproduce the characteristics of the 'beauty in itself'. From this point of view, beauty represents the result of a 'mimetic' process with respect to something objective and external to the artist which is considered as a model to draw on. That can be defined as a 'natural' conception of beauty, according to which the subjective and emotional aspects are secondary compared with the objective rules – such as, for example, the order, the proportion and the unity –. In a word, beauty has its own reality, regardless of the subject.

Hemsterhuisian thought on beauty is to a certain extent more unbalanced on the part of the subject. Beauty is not presented as an already given external reality but, on the contrary, it is considered as an achievement based on human abilities and desires. However, this theoretical approach does not merely configure an idealistic perspective, since beauty is not intended as an exclusive construction of the subject but as the result of a peculiar relationship between the subject and the external reality. Therefore, Hemsterhuis' conception about the beauty could be defined as 'relational'. Neither the external (natural) reality or the interior (ideal) reality can explain alone the aesthetic experience: beauty is, rather, the exceptional outcome of the relationship between these two realities, the subjective one, animated by the metaphysical desire for unity, and the objective one.

As many critical studies have already observed, the role of subjectivity – strictly linked to that of temporality – represents one of the most original aspects of the Hemsterhuisian reflection on beauty. One of the most relevant outcomes is precisely the fact that the 'unity in variety' or, in other words, the harmony between heterogeneous parts which properly configures the aesthetic experience is not a reality in itself, but it is the result of an effort made by the subject, whether he is the observer or the producer of a piece of art. As a result, Hemsterhuis argues that beauty should have no reality in itself:

> Il y a encore une observation à faire, qui est assez humiliante à la verité, mais qui prouve incontestablement que le beau n'a aucune réalité en soi-même. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 508)

From a 'relational' point of view, the mimetic paradigm, according to which beauty would be the imitation of the objective and real beauty of nature or, at most, the imitation of the classical canons, is inadequate. The incipit of the *Letter on Sculpture* (1769) documents the need to overcome the mimetic criterion for choosing a more adequate definition of artistic beauty:

> Le premier but de tous les arts est d'imiter la nature ; le second de renchérir sur la nature en produisant des effets qu'elle ne produit pas aisément, ou qu'elle ne saurait produire. Il faut donc examiner premièrement comment se fait cette imitation de la nature, et ensuite ce que c'est que de renchérir sur elle et de la surpasser, ce qui nous mènera à la connaissance du beau. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 496)

This passage places the Hemsterhuisian reflection on beauty in an ambiguous relationship with

respect to tradition. Indeed, if in the first instance art is traditionally defined as an imitation of nature, in the end it is the overcoming of the natural norm that properly leads us to the knowledge of beauty. The weakening of the mimetic criterion, according to which the artistic production is subordinate to a natural and external normativity, emphasizes the role of the 'effects', that is, the relational and emotional dynamic that properly defines art and differentiates it from the productions of nature. But in what terms does Hemsterhuis illustrate this transition from imitation to the overcoming of nature? And what does it mean, in the context of the Hemsterhuisian reflection, to overcome nature?

In the first part of the *Letter on Sculpture* Hemsterhuis presents these two passages distinctly. The mimetic paradigm, on which all the arts are based in the first instance, is illustrated through the example of the cone, with the following conclusion: «[...] *Il s'ensuivra que pour l'imitation parfaite du cône il faut l'imitation de tous les contours, ce qui n'appartient qu'à la sculpture*» (Hemsterhuis 2001, p. 498). The imitation is here assumed as a realistic reproduction of the external object. To the extent that the success of the imitation is given by the representation of all the contours of the object, the sculpture is the most perfect of the arts. The artifice of imitation is based on the axiom by virtue of which, thanks to multisensory perception, the subject is able to get a clear and distinct idea of visible objects and to classify them due to their contours. Therefore, the imitation of all contours, presented as the "first aim of all the arts", would not be feasible without the subject's capacity to use the senses in order to define and categorize objects. This connection between perception and imitation obviously draws from the Empiricism leading to a full revaluation of the sensibility, now considered as a source of clear and distinct knowledge:

> […] et cette réflexion me servira d'axiome : c'est que, par un long usage et le secours de tous nos sens à la fois, nous somme pervenus en quelque façon à distinguer essentiellement les objets les uns des autres, en n'employant qu'un seul de nos sens. […] De là a résulté que nous avons divisé tacitement par classes bien déterminées tous les objets visibles, aussi bien ceux qui sont productions de l'art que ceux qui ont été produits par la nature. (F. Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 498)

This first passage only analyzes the notion of imitation, although it is not sufficient to define beauty. Indeed, it is not negligible that the example introduced is based on the geometric figure

of the cone and does not take into consideration an object of art, since the mimetic criterion does not properly lead to the knowledge of beauty: "in his discussion of imitation, for instance, he took as his model the cone. This is significant: imitation as such does not give rise to beauty" (Sonderen, 1996, p. 329).

To illustrate the second step, namely the one in which is outlined the overcoming of nature and therefore of the mimetic criterion, Hemsterhuis introduces the experiment of the two vases. It is significant that he now refers to two objects of art. The experiment is conducted through the design of two vases, respectively called "vase A" and "vase B". Then, Hemsterhuis asks various subjects to express their opinion on which one is the most beautiful. This procedure follows the methodology of modern science, assuming a varied and heterogeneous sample consisting not only of competent subjects but also of inexperienced ones, "*qui n'avait pas même une connaissance mediocre des arts*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 500). This variety of the subjects questioned serves to some extent as a support for the validity of the experiment itself, since all the subjects questioned unanimously indicate "vase A" as the most beautiful motivating this choice with the greatest "*effet*" that it arouses on their soul. From a comparative observation, it is not a formal characteristic of the object that determines its beauty but the relationship that is established between the object and the soul of the subject.

Hemsterhuis continues with a clarification of the experiment specifying the relationship between the quantity of ideas represented by the object – in this case the two vases – and the time needed to grasp them, through the notions of "*intensité*" and "*durée*": since both vases have the same "*intensité*", that is the same visible quantity, the discriminant for which "vase A" has a greater effect than "vase B" is attributable to the "*durée*", that is the time the soul employs in connecting all the visible points of the figure to obtain an idea of its totality. This reasoning would lead to a conception of beauty focused on the moment of synthesis, that is, on the speed of vision that allows the soul to grasp the object (in the multiplicity of its parts) in its entirety (in the unity of the idea). Therefore, following this approach, it is logical to conclude that the subject should prefer "*un seul point noir sur un fond blanc au plus beau et au plus riche de groups*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 500), because it would be quicker to see. As a consequence, it would result the senselessness of the work of art and its "*ornements*". For this reason, Hemsterhuis introduces a second fundamental parameter in order to acquire an adequate knowledge of beauty, namely that of the multiplicity or quantity of ideas that the object should provide to the soul. This parameter is based on the invariability of the principle

according to which "*l'âme veut donc naturellement avoir un grand nombre d'idées dans le plus petit espace de temps possible ; et c'est de là que nous viennent les ornements*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, pp. 501-502). Therefore, beauty is defined as the result of the relationship between a synthetic instance (*minimum*) and a multiple quantity on which this synthesis is exercised (*maximum*), a relationship from which we derive not a mere knowledge of physical reality, but the *optimum* that the soul, by its nature, always desires: "*le beau dans tous les arts nous doit donner le plus grand nombre d'idées possible, dans le plus petit espace de temps possible*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 504). This definition shifts the focus from the object to what 'the soul considers beautiful', highlighting the role of the subject and of his desires in the dynamic of overcoming nature by art:

> Il me semble qu'il est aisé à comprendre […] qu'il est très possible pour ce qui regarde le beau, de surpasser la nature ; car ce serait un hazard bien singulier qui mettrait un certain nombre de parties tellement ensemble, qu'il en résultât cet *optimum* que je desire, et qui est analogue, non à l'essence des choses, mais à l'effet du rapport qu'il y a entre les choses et la construction de mes organes. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 508)

2. "*La contradiction dans un tout*"

In the previous paragraph it was concluded that beauty is related to the metaphysical desire for unity of the subject. Therefore, the object 'becomes' beautiful, and does not remain a mere object of knowledge, to the extent that it satisfies this desire. However, the unity the art provides is only a sort of substitute for that metaphysical unity-truth which is accessible only to the "infinite Being", who receive every idea intuitively. Faced with two art objects, as in the case of the experiment of the two vases, we are therefore able to indicate which is the most beautiful on the basis of the greater effect – the greater sense of unity – which it is able to provide us in the shortest possible time, although this unity is mediated by senses and not grasped in the immediacy of an intuition.

As Hemsterhuis will later clarify in the *Letter on Desires*, the metaphysical desire for unity belongs to the whole reality as an asymptotic and infinite tension. The metaphysical impossibility to reach the unity depends on the "*état force*" in which the nature of finite entities (including man) is found. This condition expresses the contradiction between the absoluteness

of the objective towards which everything tends (the unity) and the relativity of the means to reach it. For this reason, the unity provides by arts represents something precarious and fleeting, which quickly turns into a sense of 'disgust'. This emotional reaction signals to the subject the unsuccessful outcome of the aesthetic enterprise in order to achieve metaphysical unity, directing the soul, within a sort of *scala amoris*, towards objects that are more 'homogeneous' and with which the possibility of union is greater: "*Par exemple, on aimera moins une belle statue que son ami, son ami que sa maîtresse, et sa maîtresse que l'Être Suprème*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 540). Therefore, art is one of the attempts (actually the lowest) made by the subject to approach the metaphysical unity. But, due to the division of the whole into individual and separate parts, unity can only manifest itself in terms of a coexistence of different and heterogeneous parts – and not as a totality *tout court* –, both in nature (which acquires, in this case, the meaning of totality of finite entities) as in art: "*Ce qui est l'ouvrage de l'art, n'est que le résultat des rapports désirés dans un assemblage de choses avec nos organes, ou avec nos façon d'apercevoir ou de sentir. Ce qui est l'ouvrage de la nature, est le résultat de son αὐταρκέια, c'est-à-dire de sa suffisance à exister*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 556). Unlike nature, which appears as a coexistence of heterogeneous parts autonomous and independent from the subject, in art this agreement of parts is achieved by the subject and is related to his ways of knowing and feeling. The 'relational' and 'artificial' character of beauty is therefore confirmed by the fact that it does not have any reality independently from the desires and the perception of the subject.

Let's now move this analysis from the consideration of the cognitive act involved in the fruition of the work of art to the study of the practical-operational moment related to its production.

The process of artistic fruition is essentially presented in terms of a cognitive process governed by the laws of optics and perception. In the sphere of the artistic production, however, the cognitive-productive process towards the desired unity moves in the opposite direction: not from the multiplicity of the parts to the unity of the idea (from the perception of the multiple parts to the intuition of the idea) but from unity to multiplicity, that is, from the intuition of the idea to its sensible representation in the work of art:

> Celle-ci naît de la succession continuelle de parties intégrantes de l'objet, là où l'autre se
> crée à l'instant sous la forme d'un tout et sans succession de parties, tellement que si je

veux réaliser cette idée reproduite par le moyen de la peinture, de la sculpture ou de la poésie, je dois la diviser dans ses parties, lesquelles se doivent succéder ensuite les unes aux autres pour représenter ce total. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 502)

The role of the artist is that to produce a whole through the construction of an agreement among heterogeneous parts. This whole corresponds to the *optimum* the soul desires and it should be something easy to grasp in the totality of its parts: "*Le rôle de l'artiste se réduit en effet à faciliter au spectateur de parcourir l'objet des ses yeux of him, et à créer an optimum qui ne se trouve pas dans la nature*" (Verbeek, 1995, p. 243). The production of a piece of art must therefore take into account not only the *minimum* of time that the subject takes to grasp the object in its entirety but also the *maximum* of ideas that this object conveys. The beauty is presented, in fact, to the extent that the object is not only a totality easy to grasp but, at the same time, something rich and multiple. From the point of view of the subject, the knowledge of beauty rests on the laws of optics that govern visual perception, but also on the ability to use it and on the moral condition compared to what is depicted:

> Le jugement des hommes ne différera qu'à proportion de leur situation morale par rapport à la chose représentée ; par example: lorsqu'un homme échappé du naufrage voit le tableau d'un naufrage, il sera plus affecté quel les autres. (Hemsterhuis 2001, p. 502)

And, conversely, the point of view of the production shifts the focus to the object of art and to its formal characteristics (the outline) and content (actions and passions). These characteristics should correspond in any case to the desires of the subject.

The Hemsterhusian analysis identifies two different ways to represent beauty: decrease the *minimum* so as to allow the subject a more rapid perception of the totality expressed by the art object through the simplicity of the outline or increase the *maximum* in order to provide a greater number of ideas through the representation of actions and passions. In the first case, that is, in the case in which the artist works to reduce the *minimum* of time, it is emphasized the unity of the work of art, while in the second case the multiplicity has an advantage (in terms of actions and passions). Both solutions, if are not adequately balanced in the *optimum*, present the risk of not having the effect desired by the soul, to the extent that the unity of the work could invalidate its "*intensité*" or, on the contrary, its multiplicity could prevent the speed of the vision, that is, the "*durée*":

Je veux bien croire que toute passion exprimée dans une figure quelconque doit diminuer un peu cette qualité déliée du contour, qui le rend si facile à parcourir pour nos yeux ; mais au moins en mettant de l'action et de la passion dans une figure, on aura plus de moyens pour concentrer un plus grand nombre d'idées dans le même temps. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 506)

Between the two solutions Hemsterhuis tends towards the first, due to the laws of optics and visual perception: if observed at a certain distance, the work simple in the outline, although rich in parts, will be easier to perceive in its totality while the one in which the expression of actions and passions is greater, to the detriment of the fluidity of the contour, will be more difficult to perceive. The examples reported in this regard are Michelangelo's *Hercules and Antaeus* and Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabines*:

Lorsqu'on voit ces deux pièces à une grande distance, celle d'Hercule et d'Antée est fort au-dessous de l'autre, puisque la magie de l'expression ne saurait atteindre à une grande distance, et qu'alors il ne reste que la quantité d'idées que peuvent donner quelques membres médiocrement contrastés : l'Enlèvement des Sabines aura un effet exactement contraire. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 506)

The formulation of a judgment of taste on the two works of art – in both cases two sculptural groups –, is introduced here as an example of the two different paths that lead the artist to the production of beauty and anticipates, as we will see later, the discourse on the differences between the sculpture of the Ancients and the sculpture of the Moderns.

Admitting both ways as valid in the field of artistic production, what destroys beauty lies in the "contradiction" of the totality, a contradiction that can concern both the outline and the expression of actions and passions, invalidating the sense of unity of the work of art and, consequently, the ease of its fruition. That is: an ambiguous outline as well as the contradiction in the expressions can likewise prevent even the most trained eye from grasping the unity. In other words, the contradiction implies a loss of coexistence or harmony between the heterogeneous parts, a coexistence that properly configures the beauty.

3. "*Une route bien différente*"

Now let's see in what terms the choice of one way over the other, that is the choice of unity or

expressiveness, determines the boundaries between the arts (sculpture and painting) and to what extent the comparison between the Ancients and the Moderns is involved in identifying such differences.

The second part of the *Letter on Sculpture* presents a historical excursus on the arts, starting from the problem of their origins. The hierarchy between the senses, which recognizes an anteriority in the development of touch with respect to that of sight, leads to the recognition of the greater antiquity of sculpture compared to painting and other arts. Having ascertained the greater antiquity of sculpture, the excursus proceeds with the discussion of the historical development of this form of art, placing the relationship between the Greeks and other cultures and, ultimately, between the Greeks and the Moderns. The movement of 'return to antiquity' implied in reference to the history of sculpture is a sort of art history in which antiquity is not assumed as something homogeneous but, more realistically, as a concatenation of peoples in history, each marked by a "spirit" that radiates on all its cultural expressions – including art – and each in a relationship of continuity with the others.

Despite the historical perspective, the excursus identifies the excellence and perfection of sculpture among the Greeks, such that "we can consider them as if the arts were really born among them". In other words, while recognizing sculpture as one of the expressions of the "spirit" of the different peoples in history, Hemsterhuis embraces the thesis of the uniqueness and perfection of the Greeks in the field of this art and of art in general. The Hemsterhuisian position with respect to the problem of the excellence of sculpture presents however, upon a more careful analysis of its developments, some strong ambiguities, since the adhesion to the Winckelmannian instance, and therefore the affirmation of the superiority of the ancients (of the Greeks) compared to the Moderns, is counterbalanced by the awareness of the historical dimension of the artistic phenomenon. This awareness leads the Dutch author to a more complex elaboration of the relationship between the Ancients and the Moderns.

Let us now retrace the fundamental passages of this complex hermeneutics of the relationships between the Ancients and the Moderns with an argument that will develop through the following moments: a) the historical excursus on sculpture, carried out through the binomen of art-nature, highlights the excellence and perfection of art among the Greeks; b) having ascertained the perfection of sculpture among the Greeks, the author moves on to consider this form of art under a more general profile, identifying the fundamental principles that regulate its production and that differentiate it from painting. On the basis of these two

argumentative passages, it will be possible to derive the following conclusive reflection: c) if the sculpture has reached its excellence among the Greeks, since among them the moral dimension and the desire for unity are expressed with the utmost perfection, as we move towards modernity the artistic productions are unbalanced in the direction of the *maximum*, that is towards a greater expression of actions and passions. This *maximum*, in order to constitute itself as an *optimum*, and therefore as something harmonious and unitary despite the multiplicity represented, must express itself in a new form of art that can be traced back to the principles that govern painting. Therefore, the following relationship is established: sculpture: ancient = painting: modern. This relationship can be read in this sense otherwise: sculpture = first way of artistic production (diminution of the *minimum*); painting = second way of artistic production (increase of the *maximum*).

a) The discussion of the historical development of sculpture among different peoples, from aegyptians to moderns, is based on the notion of beauty introduced in the first part of the *Letter on Sculpture*. The artistic representation of beauty is analyzed in connection with the relationship between art and nature. According to the Hemsterhuisian thesis, beauty is not properly configured as an imitation of nature, that is, as a mere realistic reproduction of the external object, but as an overcoming of it, aimed at making the transition from the sensible to the intelligible plane. Only in this passage does beauty emerge properly. The desire of the soul is to move from the multiplicity of perceptions to the unity of the idea, thus attempting to pursue its own natural metaphysical destination. This procedure connotes both the production of beauty (the artist tries to bring together the multiple parts in the whole-unity of the work of art) as well as its fruition which, as we have seen, is aimed at grasping the unity of the work (his idea, based on the multiplicity of its parts). Based on this specific idea of the experience of production and artistic fruition, the Greeks are the first to have properly produced beauty: "[…] *les Grecs, après avoir épuisé les beautés de la nature, sont pervenus à trouver ce beau idéal, suivant lequel ils ont produit tant de chefs-d'oeuvres inimitables*" (Hemsterhuis 2001, p. 514). What is decisive, for the purpose of identifying the excellence of the Greeks in the arts and, specifically, in sculpture, is the analysis of the "political condition" ("*l'état politique*"), to the extent that it affects the relationship that every population establishes with nature, considering it either as a term of perfection or as an obstacle to be overcome. The first case configures the "spirit" of the slave peoples, where artistic production stops at the imitation of nature or, at most, of the peoples who preceded them. The second case, on the other hand, introduces the

profile of an active people marked by the independence of the productions of the spirit from nature.

The aegyptians, with whom Hemsterhuis began the excursus, just imitate the nature, applying to the artistic production the same disposition that connote them on the level of the political condition, namely that of a slave and submissive people. Taking as a model the immensity of the territory on which the power of their despot is extended, they identified the beauty with the 'immense', orienting the artistic production on the basis of this criterion: "*Ainsi ce fut le merveilleux qui devint l'esprit général de leurs arts*" (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 510). The problem of the 'marvelous' is translated, therefore, in terms of a production of the spirit in which beauty, understood as the unity of multiple parts accorded to each other to the point of resulting in a totality, does not find a place. In its place the marvelous realizes something immense and great but devoid of harmony and composition between the parts.

On the contrary, among the Greeks, that are an active people because politically organized in small states in constant war with each other, each citizen actively participates in the defense and organization of the city-state. This pushed the Greek people to progress from the point of view of knowledge, which expanded mainly in the field of morality, with great advantage for arts. Rather than the physical and natural dimension, they preferred to investigate the moral and metaphysical one going from the imitation of nature to the ideal beauty. In other words, among the Greeks Hemsterhuis identifies a greater perfection of the moral dimension of each individual and, consequently, a greater effectiveness of the desire for unity that connotes, or should connote, artistic productions. The same theoretical perspective based on the relationship between art and nature guides the Hemsterhuisian analysis of other peoples, the Etruscans, the Romans and the Goths. In all three cases, the aesthetic experience is marked by imitation – of nature or of a previous people –. It is interesting to dwell on the discourse relating to the Goths, whose artistic productions fail its objective because it does not properly create beauty but an "assembly of parts", without any regard for the sense of agreement and of units:

> […] On peut dire qu'ils ont consideré un total seulement comme un assemblage de parties, qu'ils ont orné autant qu'il leur a été possible ces parties, et qu'ils se sont imaginés d'avoir orné par là le total. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 516)

b) Having identified the excellence of art among the Greeks, the Hemsterhuisian discourse moves to consider sculpture and its specific difference from the other arts. This transition from the historical excursus to the analysis of art under a more general and normative profile plays a decisive function in delineating the relationship between the artistic productions of the Ancients (the Greeks) and those of the Moderns.

Tracing the difference between the arts means, first of all, distinguishing their boundaries and identifying the specific characteristics of each. The "necessary principle" that regulates the production of the sculpture is identified with unity or simplicity, which is associated with the "easy quality" of the outline. These fundamental principles, the unity of the representation and the fluidity of the outline, are obtained on the basis of the cost and hardness of the material used in the production of a sculptural work. These factors necessarily limit this production – which among other things represents the subject in all its solidity and entirety – to the representation of a simple figure or, at most, a composition of a few figures. Therefore, in order to make the sculptural productions appreciated even from a great distance, it is necessary that the sculptor works on the simplicity of the contours to reduce the *minimum*, rather than on the representation of actions and passions. For these reasons, sculpture puts the "stillness" and "majesty" of the represented figure before the expression of actions and passions. It is evident that in the discourse relating to the production of the sculpture Hemsterhuis takes up the first of the two ways accepted in the production of artistic beauty, namely the one that works on reducing the *minimum*.

Having identified the principles of sculpture – unity and ease of outline –, Hemsterhuis proceeds to consider it in relation to painting. The discriminating element between the two arts is significantly traced back to the problem of the expression of actions and passions. In fact, while sculpture, for the reasons just explained, must be limited to the stillness and unity of the represented action (*minimum*), painting can instead accommodate, in conditional terms, a multiplicity of actions and passions (*maximum*) without the general sense of wholeness and harmony is invalidated. The compositions of the painting are, in fact, more extensive than those of the sculpture and allow, therefore, to compensate for any representation of the "disgusting". In other words, the "disgusting" is now introduced to indicate an excess of the actions and passions represented, an excess that could imply a loss of the unity and, consequently, the emergence of the "contradiction" in the totality of the work. However, the principles of painting allow the artist to compensate for the *maximum* represented due to the greater space of

representation available to him: "Painting can sometimes use disgusting to increase horror, since its compositions, being very extensive, can mitigate it elsewhere". The creation of a pictorial work can therefore be traced back to the second way of artistic production of beauty, namely the one that works to increase the *maximum* through the representation of actions and passions, provided they are harmonized in the overall unity-totality of the work.

c) To try to obtain a conclusive reflection on the relationship between the Ancients and the Moderns in the field of artistic productions, we consider the following passages:

> Nous verrons bientôt que les nations, qui commencent par être copistes des autres, arrivent à leur perfection par une route bien différente de celle qu'ont tenue les Grecs. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 512)

> Il ne faut pas chercher à mon avis ce degré de plus chez les Grecs dans l'expression des actions et des passions, puisqu'en cela les modernes ne cèdent rien à leurs maîtres, mais dans cette qualité déliée et facile du contour. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 518)

> […] Que l'artiste soit peintre autant qu'il veut dans l'expression de l'action, mais qu'il soit sculpteur pour enrichir également, autant qu'il est possible, tous les profils. […] D'ailleurs on ne peut guère accuser les Grecs de ce défaut; mais on peut dire que nos sculpteurs modernes sont trop peintres, comme apparemment les peintres grecs étaient trop sculpteurs. (Hemsterhuis, 2001, p. 522)

The first consideration introduces the thesis of a different way to gain beauty ("*une route bien différente*"), compared to the one followed by the Greek artists. Now, it seems legitimate to hypothesize that here we are referring precisely to the path followed by the moderns, that is, to an artistic modality different from that of the ancients, although very valid for the purposes of the production of beauty and the achievement of some form of perfection ("*à leur perfection*") in the field of aesthetics.

This hypothesis finds further confirmation if we consider the following quotation, since it to some extent undermines the idea of an absolute perfection of the Greeks with respect to the moderns, introducing for both the possibility of a form of perfection in the arts, albeit on the basis of differential principles. In the case of the Greeks, it is the way of the *minimum* that leads them to the representation of beauty, which is characterized by the "delicate and simple quality of the outline", for the moderns it is that of the *maximum*, that is a form of representation

centered on the "artistic expression of actions and passions". The result of this theoretical solution is clearly that of identifying and legitimizing two different manifestations of artistic beauty, both acceptable as long as they satisfy the metaphysical and meta-historical desires of the subject. These considerations overturn the idea, of Winckelmann ancestry, of the uniqueness of the Greeks and that, consequent to it, of the principle of imitation of the Greeks as the only way to reach beauty and achieve aesthetic perfection on the level of artistic productions.

To further underline these differences ("*Pour finir le parallèle des artistes grecs et modernes*"), Hemsterhuis introduces an interesting consideration: the devil, as a representation of the "repugnant" and "ridiculous", is the only subject belonging to modernity. The representation of the devil on the artistic level requires, in fact, the application of principles very different from the simplicity of the outline and the stillness of the figure and such as to render, through the expression of the actions, all its monstrosity. The Greeks, following a production way of representation and artistic outline based on its essential characters, quiet and simplicity of the outline, could not carry out principles to represent it or, if they had done so, deprived it of its essential characters, attributing to it a "constant figure" , and therefore connoting it according to regularity, order and quiet, characters that are not representative of a figure as peculiar and irregular as that of the devil. Following this reasoning, logically the *Laocoön*, considered the plastic work *par excellence*, should figure as the highest expression of the art of the Ancients. The Hemsterhuisian position is, however, quite different: "[…] I dare to add that the two Rhodesian masterpieces, the Laocoön and the Amphion, belong much more to painting than to sculpture". This consideration appears anything but provocative, if we consider the note introduced by Hemsterhuis himself. The author specifies that, although the *Laocoön* indisputably belongs to sculpture, the fact that its original location placed it at a great distance from the subject, thus offering "a single point of view", would bring it closer to painting and its principles of representation.

The crux of the question is ultimately traced back to the differences between the Ancients (the Greeks) and the Moderns. In fact, the reflection on the *Laocoön* is inserted within a broader reasoning that involves, precisely, two different ways of representing artistic beauty – "[...] that the artist is a painter as much as he wants to express the action, but that he is a sculptor to equally enrich all the profiles as much as possible" –, attributable respectively to the Greeks ("*trop sculpteurs*") and to the Moderns ("*trop peintres*"). What is at stake are,

therefore, not only the two ways of representing beauty on an artistic level, the one that can be traced back to the *minimum*, therefore to the principles that regulate sculpture, and that of the *maximum*, that is, typical of painting, but the same relationship, read in the light of the different "spirit" that distinguishes them, between the ancients and the moderns. In others, having ascertained that beauty, to be defined as such, must correspond to the wishes of the subject and in terms of representing a means, the lowest among other things, to approximate the metaphysical unity sought, the ways it is achieved can be different, providing they provide the soul with the maximum number of ideas (*maximum*) in the shortest possible time (*minimum*).

The Hemsterhuisian reasoning developed in the second part of the *Letter on Sculpture* stops on this point, without deepening the question. The difference between sculpture and painting from the point of view of the principles that regulate its production, becomes a complete theory in the romantic context, where, strictly following the Hemsterhuisian indication, August Schlegel formulates the distinction between 'plastic' and 'picturesque', also formulated on the basis of a comparison between the Ancients and the Moderns. It should be pointed out, however, that the Hemsterhuisian distinction between the principles of sculpture and those of painting, although it is elaborated within the framework of a "*parallèle*" between the artistic productions of the Ancients and those of the Moderns, sometimes takes on the characteristics of a more typological than historical distinction: for example, the *Laocoön*, apparently belongs to the productions of the Ancients, is traced back to the principles of painting (the way of *maximum*), while Michelangelo's *Hercules and Antaeus*, which belongs, instead, to the artistic productions of modernity, is qualified as a representation that can be traced back to the principles of sculpture (the way of *minimum*).

In conclusion, the overcoming of the mimetic paradigm entails the emergence of the problem of the expression of actions and passions and, therefore, the possibility of a representation of beauty not attributable to the criteria of classicism – the simplicity of the outline , the unity of the figure, the stillness –, but open to the representation of the disgusting, the irregular, the repugnant and the ridiculous, whether they are finally converted, for the subject, into an experience of unity. Modernity, which also benefits from the imitation of the Ancients, elaborates, in the context of the production of artistic beauty, its own principles which, compared to the perfection of the Ancients, do not connote it as a moment of decadence but as a different and equally asymptotic path through which the individual tries to recompose the original unity with the whole.

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The Uncanniness of the Ordinary: Rethinking the Uncanny within Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT. Through the many reinterpretations of Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) within French Postmodernism, in recent decades the uncanny has become a vague synonym for the methodology of deconstruction instead of being characterized as an aesthetic category. The essay aims to disambiguate the uncanny by reestablishing its characterizing nucleus and relocating it within the aesthetics. To do so, it turns to Juliane Rebentisch's notion of "uncanniness of the ordinary", which translates a term coined by Stanley Cavell into aesthetics. According to Rebentisch, this emotional state is called up by the encounter with artworks which, through minimal dislocations and distortions, deprive objects of daily use of their familiarity, forcing us to look more closely at their material, sensorial and phenomenological dimensions. Challenging habitual patterns of sensory perception, this aesthetic experience evokes a disturbing, uncanny feeling. Rebentisch draws on Freud's definition of the uncanny as an emotional state due to the appearance of something familiar in an unfamiliar light and thus offers a path to reconstitute a more stable conceptual framework. At the same time, Rebentisch proposes a novelty by interpreting the uncanny not only as frightening and disturbing, but as a feeling that encourages implementing alternative modes of perception to rediscover what has been taken for granted.

1. Introduction

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.) (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 500)

In the last twenty years, the uncanny has become «one of the most supercharged words in our current critical vocabulary» (Jay, 1998, p. 157), with the effect of losing its characterizing nucleus and turning into «an insidious, all-pervasive, "passe-partout" word to address virtually any topic» (Masschelein, 2011, p. 2). Following this evolution, the notion has been put to work in a myriad of disciplines: from architecture (Vidler, 1999) to film studies (Spadoni, 2007), from visual arts (Kelley, 2004) to cultural studies (Collins and Jervis, 2008), from literature studies (Slethaug, 1993) to queer (Palmer, 2012) and postcolonial (Bhabha, 1992) theory.

This expansion of the uncanny well beyond the boundaries of aesthetics has led to a loss of its conceptual core. Therefore, the present article aims to redefine the uncanny as an aesthetic category, i.e., the description and evaluation of a feeling called up by a specific sensorial experience with artistic or aesthetic objects. To do so, the first step is to disambiguate the concept by tracing its genealogy, focusing on Freud's seminal text *Das Unheimliche* and some of its numerous – sometimes controversial or even betraying – reinterpretations within French Postmodernism. This operation is not intended to be a historical reconstruction of all the transformations of this prolific yet elusive category but a mapping of the processes of its conceptualization. The aim consists of understanding the reasons beneath the evolution of the uncanny and identifying the main features that can still be useful for the present aesthetic discourse. The second part of the essay will focus on Juliane Rebentisch's attempt to actualize the concept through the notion of "uncanniness of the ordinary" yet remaining faithful to its classical nucleus.

2. Genealogy of the uncanny: from an aesthetic phenomenon to an abstract critical tool

The first philosophical references to the uncanny can be found already in Schelling, Nietzsche, and, above all, Heidegger. However, the seminal text which originates the discourse about the uncanny is Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* from 1919. Freud seeks to delve into the specific qualities of the uncanny, which, according to him, until now was neglected by the aesthetics, too concentrated on positive feelings such as the beautiful and the attractive. The first necessary step is distinguishing it from the eerie and the horrifying. In fact, even if the uncanny «is

undoubtedly related to what is frightening» (Freud, 1974, p. 219), it also has its own conceptual core that the research has hitherto failed to identify.

The lack of a sufficiently precise framing of the feeling is also the reason for Freud's dissatisfaction with Jentsch's analysis of the uncanny, the first psychoanalytical work devoted to this subject. Describing it as an affection due to «intellectual uncertainty» – for example about whether something is animate or inanimate – Jentsch «did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar» (Freud, 1974, p. 221). It is essential to keep in mind the critique against Jentsch because, as we will see, most of the postmodern and contemporary interpretations of the uncanny insist on linking the feeling with an intellectual doubt, a cognitive insecurity creating a sense of ambiguity. However, Freud notices that intellectual uncertainty, even if bounded with it, neither constitutes the peculiarity of the uncanny nor is a sufficient condition for its manifestation.

To pin down the distinctive aspects of the feeling, Freud undertakes a detailed linguistic analysis, remarking on the impossibility of translating the German *unheimlich* into other languages. *Unheimlich* is, in fact, the antonym of *heimlich*, which is not univocal, but «belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different» (Freud, 1974, p. 224). Its first and most obvious connotation relates to the root of the word from *Heim* (home). *Heimlich* indicates something familiar, comfortable, intimate, and hence also agreeable and friendly. At the same time, the word *heimlich* also means concealed, clandestine, and kept hidden.

Unheimlich should therefore negate both the meanings of *heimlich*: the familiarity as well as the concealment. However, as observed by Anneleen Masschelein, the "un-" in the word *unheimlich* does not work as a classical linguistic negation, but it is «the token of repression» (Freud, 1974, p. 245). The repression does not know negation in the usual sense since it does not respond to the law of noncontradiction. Even when something is repressed, it remains buried but still pulsing in the unconscious, therefore «it is perfectly possible that something can be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time» (Masschelein, 2011, p. 8). Freud's most concise and effective definition explains the uncanny as «something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression» (Freud, 1974, p. 241).

The second part of the essay constitutes a collection of experiences from fictional works

and real life commonly described with the word *unheimlich*. A long section is dedicated to the close reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman*, whose uncanniness lies in the protagonist's fear of losing the eyes, explained by Freud as repressed castration anxiety. Then Freud turns to the difference between the feeling of the uncanny aroused by works of fiction and its occurrences in reality. The last ones are due to the return of repressed and forgotten infantile material, such as the castration fear, or to the revival of surmounted primitive modes of thinking of the human species, including animism, magic, and the omnipotence of thoughts. For example, Freud claims that «all supposedly educated people have ceased to believe officially that the dead can become visible as spirits» (Freud, 1974, p. 242). For this reason, when someone sees a ghost-like apparition, this results not only frightening or weird but uncanny. The feeling does not lie in the intellectual uncertainty whether the ghost is real or not (as in Jentsch's explanatory model) nor in the sensory properties of what we're looking at. Rather, the affective state is caused by a psychological reaction: the ghost-like presence evokes allegedly surmounted, but in truth just repressed, beliefs in the afterlife.

Nevertheless, hidden elements in the folds of Freud's essay allow us to read the uncanny as a feeling due to a sensorial experience. First of all, Freud highlights the peculiar connection of the uncanny with the fear of losing the eyes, or more generally to the idea of something that should have remained kept out of sight and become visible. However, he encloses this intuition within his psychosexual framework, explaining the loss of the eyes as a symbol for castration anxiety rather than linking it with questions about gaze and visibility. Secondly, Freud does not seem concerned with the reasons behind the shift in the meaning of the word *heimlich* from familiarity to concealment, but this is an important passage that needs clarification. It is possible to formulate the hypothesis that intimacy, by becoming extreme closeness, turns into impenetrability and concealment. What is close and constantly before our eyes blurs its shape until it loses its contours and becomes extraneous to us. Following this line of interpretation, it is possible to conclude that the *un-heimlich* negates both the spheres of what is familiar and what is hidden because it is a feeling called up when something arises from the opacity to which our extreme familiarity had confined it and imposes itself in the space of vision. Freud himself quotes in his essay two times Schelling's famous definition of the uncanny «as something which ought to have remained hidden but had come to light» (Freud 1974, p. 241), a description that evokes the idea of the uncanny as a shocking sensorial

revelation of something that should have been restrained to the shadows.

Both Jacques Lacan and Georges Didi-Hubermann propose a similar line of thinking in their rereading of *Das Unheimliche*. In *Seminar X*, Lacan turns to Freud's text considering it «indispensable for broaching the question of anxiety» (Lacan, 2014, p. 41). The uncanny takes over when the materiality of existence irreducible to a univocal system of signification – what Lacan calls "the Real" – undercuts habitual perceptual schemata which try to secure the experience into a stable symbolic structure. The feeling is thus due to the emergence of something hidden within the space of vision; something that «was already there, at much closer quarters, at home, *Heim*» (Lacan, 2014, p. 75), repressed inside a familiar and well-organized landscape of the visible. The loss of the eyes, central in E. T. A. Hoffmann's short story, epitomizes this fear: being robbed of one's own eyes means losing control over the space of vision, losing the privileged position of ordering things into a rigid symbolic structure through a central perspective.

Returning to this topic in *Seminar XI* (1998), Lacan illustrates the occurrence of the uncanny through the analysis of another artwork: Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*. The painting shows two high dignitaries surrounded by items that symbolize their mastery of the arts of the *quadrivium* (astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music), indicating their power and culture. Nonetheless, the attention is attracted by a seemingly shapeless spot fluctuating in the middle of the composition. The disciplined space of vision is distorted and defamiliarized by an uncanny presence that almost imperceptibly disturbs its smooth and coherent surface, forcing an uncomfortable change of perspective. It is a skull, realized thanks to the technic of the *anamorphosis* and recognizable only by looking at the painting from one side. A slight alteration of the well-known picture that, by challenging familiar modes of perceiving and thus interpreting reality, reveals the ephemeral nature of the ambassadors' power.

With a similar move, the French philosopher and art historian Didi-Huberman turns to the uncanny to describe «the threatening character of the visual experience» (Didi-Huberman 1992, p. 181, my translation). According to him, the visual experience exceeds the mere perception of what is visible, of what is given for the eyes to see. What we are trying to capture by looking at it eludes us, exposing the viewer to the feeling of losing control over the space of vision (the loss of the eyes in *The Sandman*). We usually try to erase this disturbing character by thinking of perception as a process of decoding visual marks, but the uncanny reminds us

of this obscure, indecipherable residuum within the visual space. Therefore, the uncanny «manifests well the power of the regarded on the one who is regarding» (Didi-Huberman, 1992, p. 179), the possibility that something lies open to view still remaining impenetrable and concealed. In this way, both Lacan and Didi-Huberman reconduct the uncanny to something repressed within visual experience, whose emergence shakes up a familiar sensorial and symbolic order.

Lacan and later Didi-Huberman were not the only ones to undertake a rereading of Freud's essay, which, after being overlooked for decades, was rediscovered in the mid-1960s. Thanks to its intrinsic ambiguity and vagueness, the uncanny affirmed itself as «a veritable goldmine for deconstructionists and post-structuralists» (Griffero, 2021, p. 106). Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Freud's essay experienced an intense phase of new conceptualization, sometimes even intentional distortion. The following analysis does not seek to survey all the authors involved in creating the «postmodern uncanny» (Vidler, 1999, p. 8), but to detect the main trajectories that brought the concept to the present, uncontrolled expansion. The visual and perceptual interpretation previously outlined remained minor, while two other lines of thought prevailed.

The first one turns to Freud's essay in order to bring out the ambivalence between imagination and reality, fiction and truth. As Jacques Derrida observes, in the second part of *Das Unheimliche,* Freud distinguishes the uncanny feeling experienced in real life from the one aroused by artistic, mainly literary, productions. Freud admits that «fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations than are possible in real life» (Freud, 1974, p. 251). Fictive texts can deceive us «by promising to give us the sober truth and then after all overstepping it» (Freud, 1974, p. 250); they confound the readers by pretending to offer them a mimetic representation of reality, and then they infiltrate fantastic elements.

Within this line of thought, the uncanny becomes paradigmatic for «the mystery of literary creation and the secret of this enviable power» (Cixous, 1976, p. 527). It expresses «the undecidable ambivalence, […] the endless exchange between the fantastic and the real, the "symbolized" and the "symbolizer"» (Derrida, 1981, p. 268). According to this postmodern view (see also: Kofman, 1991; Weber, 1973; Hertz, 1985), the uncanny results not as a particular effect generated by some literary works but as the essence of fiction. Fiction itself is ontologically ambivalent and, therefore, intrinsically uncanny as it doubles reality, creating

another phantasmatic and elusive one; it forces the readers into a zone of liminality where a clear distinction between reality and imagination is effaced. Through this conceptual development, the uncanny progressively loses its traits as a well-defined feeling and becomes a general synonym of the ambivalence characterizing fictionality and imaginative productions. Within the postmodern tradition, it is possible to track down a second way of interpreting the uncanny in an ethical-political sense. Twenty years after *The double session*, Derrida returns to Freud's essay in *Specters of Marx*, connecting the subverting feeling of estrangement typical of the Freudian uncanny with Marxist alienation and Heideggerian homelessness. Derrida aims at developing a hauntology, as opposed to classical ontology. Hauntology is intended as a philosophy of the return of the repressed, of spectral traces recurring from the past to haunt the present. «Everything comes back to haunt everything» (Derrida, 1994, p. 183); ghostly presences from the past are everywhere, producing an uncanny feeling, insinuating themselves in the familiar landscape and disturbing not only the conceptual discourse but «both the ethics and the politics» (Derrida, 1994, p. 174). Using the uncanny as a deconstructive tool represents the most influential novelty of Derrida's second face-to-face with Freud's essay. The French philosopher suggests not to exorcise the ghosts and chase away the uncanny feeling they generate but to welcome them and greet this affective state as an opportunity to question conventional ethical and political categories by recognizing their historical, and therefore contingent, nature.

A few years before *Specters of Marx*, Julia Kristeva also conducts an ethical-political reading of *Das Unheimliche*. She claims that Freud's essay «teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves» (Kristeva, 1994, p. 191), encouraging an approach to the stranger that fights the violence of nationalism and xenophobia. According to Kristeva, the uncanny implies a deconstruction of the subject. Even if the feeling is aroused by the encounter with an object, its real cause is not a menace originating from the outside, but rather the return of something repressed in the unconscious and thus the discovery of a disturbing otherness in the heart of the subject. Recognizing otherness as a constitutive part of the subject fosters an ethics of respect and hospitality and implies a new politics of cosmopolitanism. Such a line of interpretation has later given rise to the "postcolonial uncanny" (Bhabha, 1992; Nayar, 2010; Mukherjee, 2018), arguing that the feeling illustrates the experience of estrangement from the postcolonial subject, whose "home" is inhabited by unspoken marks of the colonial violence.

The aim of this brief genealogy is not to judge the legitimacy of such different ways of rereading Freud's text, but rather to show how both the association of the uncanny with the ambiguity of fiction and its ethical-political interpretation led to its dilatation. As observed by Mark Windsor in a recent article, the consequence is that the uncanny no longer even refers to a specific feeling but it «is rather used as an abstract critical tool which can, it seems, be applied to virtually anything» (Windsor, 2019, p. 54). Windsor also notices that the uncanny is hence connected with the methodology of deconstruction, both as a feeling resulting from this process and as an affective state that prompts to question the consistency of established categories. This approach can be found in Royle's *The uncanny*, the first monograph devoted to the topic, in which he claims: «another name for uncanny overflow might be deconstruction» (Royle, 2003, p. 24). Leaving the sphere of aesthetics, the uncanny begins to indicate a general way of thinking, a strategy to create conceptual displacement and to question epistemic, semantic, or even political coherence.

2. The uncanniness of the ordinary

Once established its conceptual explosion and thus generalization, it is necessary to reconstitute a more stable and precise essence of the feeling to move back the uncanny into the realm of aesthetics. This does not imply a complete rejection of all postmodern reinterpretations as misleading but a careful delimitation of such lectures. An interesting starting point to reaffirm the uncanny within the aesthetics and rediscover its conceptual core is the notion of the uncanniness of the ordinary (*Unheimlichkeit des Gewöhnlichen*) developed by the German philosopher Juliane Rebentisch. In this second part, the article will explain the notion, firstly by framing its origins and the context in which Rebentisch uses it, then illustrating it through concrete artistic examples, and thirdly making clear within which line of interpretation Rebentisch situates her reflections.

Rebentisch takes the notion of "uncanniness of the ordinary" from Stanley Cavell and moves it from the field of philosophy of language to aesthetics. With this expression, Cavell indicates how the receptivity towards everyday language, usually employed without reflection on the single words or linguistic structures, can perturb and dislocate ordinary reality, thus generating an uncanny feeling. If grammar constitutes the implicit *apriori* basis on which

language is based, becoming aware of its mechanism implies a rapture disarranging «the so-called ordinariness or everydayness of language» (Cavell, 1988, p. 83). The more we try to understand common language by observing it closely, the more it ceases to be obvious and familiar, becoming uncanny and surreal («the surrealism of the habitual»; Cavell, 1988, p. 83). Interestingly, Cavell does not describe the emotional reaction to this process as horrific or alarming but as an astonishment that enacts new attention toward our relationship with language and reality. It is a slight yet decisive difference from the postmodern uncanny on which also Rebentisch insists. Cavell's description seems to bring the uncanniness of the ordinary closer to the phenomenological method. As the uncanny overthrows our familiar expectations, the phenomenological approach aims to suspend the natural way of seeing the world and our pregiven understanding of it. By bracketing habits of thought and experience, the phenomenological *epoché* is a non-pathological and potentially productive way of defamiliarizing sedimented perception patterns and drawing attention to the strangeness of things in their facticity. It tears off the veil of familiarity, challenging us to rediscover the world "as if we were seeing it for the first time".

Translating those reflections into the field of aesthetics, Rebentisch shows how a similar uncanny reaction towards the ordinary can also be provoked by artworks calling attention to everyday objects. Her point of departure is an analysis of the challenges that the readymade poses to the philosophy of art, focusing on Danto's influential reflections on those questions. After having visited the first exhibition of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* at the Stable Gallery of New York in 1964, Danto asked himself: «What makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them?» (Danto, 1997, p. 35). Danto states the difficulty of explaining the categorical difference between art and non-art by recourse to specific perceptible features since it results impossible to distinguish Warhol's artworks from the standard Brillo soap boxes through sense perception. Therefore, he concludes that it is necessary «to turn from sense experience to thought» (Danto, 1997, p. 13), thus moving from the aesthetics, intended as the science of sense perception, to an ontology of art. According to Danto, the artworks have an ontological feature peculiar to them and lacking in ordinary objects: a metaphorical structure. An artwork always refers to an external meaning; consequently, Danto speaks of their aboutness (the semantic capacity of "being about something") and of their embodied meanings (the meanings embodied

in the material form of the artwork).

Rebentisch criticizes this explanatory model because it assumes a sharp contrast between sense experience and thought, thus leading to banishing the material and sensorial dimension from the artistic discourse. On the contrary, for Rebentisch «the materiality of the artwork, which emerges in its sensorial visualization (*Anschauung*), is rather an aspect of the specific aesthetic appearance» (Rebentisch, 2013b, p. 131), and it contributes to producing its meanings. Every detail of the artwork, which arises from its materiality and the modes of its perception, is significant. For example, Danto overlooks – or decides not to be significative – that the Brillo soup pads sold in supermarkets are made of cardboard, while Warhol's reproductions are made of silkscreened plywood (Herwitz, 1993). Warhol's works, therefore, own different optical and haptic qualities, as they are smoother and shinier. Rebentisch also considers other famous readymades, such as Duchamp's porcelain urinal with the title *Fountain*. The distorted orientation of the urinal (turned by 90 degrees), the signature R. Mutt (one of the pseudonyms of the artist) on the lower left corner, and the presentation with an ironical title alter the familiar sensory experience with this everyday object.

Rebentisch shows that such artistic interventions and displacements, even if minimal, are crucial to modify the identity of use-objects, moving them into the sphere of aesthetic experience. While everyday items usually lay unnoticed under the attention threshold, these artistic dislocations drive the spectators to confront their materiality and engage in a different, more careful sensory experience with them. In fact, once transformed into enigmatic objects of interpretation, «every element of their sensuous appearance, as well as every element of their staging, becomes potentially significant» (Rebentisch, 2013b, p. 133, my translation). By moving everyday objects out of their opaque familiarity, such an aesthetic experience evokes the feeling of uncanny. Whereas such items are usually «too commonplace, too banal, too close for us to notice their specific configuration» (Rebentisch, 2013b, p. 133), now they regain volume and form and appear in all their strange and fascinating thingness. As Cavell, also Rebentisch describes the uncanny as a disturbing and subverting feeling, yet not destructive or annihilating. It is unsettling because it challenges habitual and apparently self-evident mechanisms of experience, but thereby it also fosters a new attentiveness towards the ordinary.

Another artistic example of the uncanniness of the ordinary discussed by Rebentisch is the work of Dan Flavin. Such an example is particularly significant because it clarifies that, for

Rebentisch, the uncanny is not associated with a horrific situation but with a destabilizing sensorial experience. Flavin's installations with fluorescent light tubes have nothing shocking; they create an immersive space of dazzling color with a radiant and lyrical quality. Yet Rebentisch notices that, despite the overwhelming visual splendor of the light effects, Flavin also draws attention to the lamp as a material support of light. In addition to its fascinating optical quality, Flavin's work has a less evident but penetrating acoustic dimension. Neon lamps emit a steady electrical hum, which reminds us of their physical presence. Neon tubes, and more broadly, the physical medium generating light, typically slip in the background of daily perception, approximating invisibility. Such objects are present only in a technical and functional sense as "ready-to-hand", using the Heideggerian terminology to describe the forgetful and inattentive relationship with use-objects. Flavin instead let emerge the «abyssal presence of the light tubes» (Rebentisch, 2013a, p. 68), intended as an aesthetic manifestation through which those items step out of the shadows in which they were confined and appear in their material and sensorial "objectuality". The matter-of-factness of the lamp still shines through the gaseous fluorescent glow: «the physical fact of the tube as object in place prevailed» (Flavin, 1966, p. 28). Therefore, Rebentisch concludes that the aesthetic experience with these use-objects evokes a feeling of estrangement and disorientation but also of curiosity, a willingness to reappropriate the ordinary.

It is now possible to summarize the main aspects of Rebentisch's proposal to rethink the uncanny within aesthetics, starting with those features already present in Freud's essay and getting lost through its postmodern reinterpretations. a) The uncanny is not just a way of thinking and deconstructing reality – and, therefore, it is not a political, ethical, or epistemological tool – but a particular feeling. For this reason, at the very beginning of his essay Freud claims that the uncanny should be explained within aesthetics; «when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling» (Freud, 1974, p. 219). b) Such a feeling is caused by the encounter with specific artistic and aesthetic objects and not only by a menacing yet undetermined sense of ambiguity. Framing the uncanny as an object-directed feeling enables us to distinguish it clearly from its postmodern interpretation as a vague existential mood[52]. c) The conceptual core of the uncanny

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[52] Windsor also defines the uncanny as «an affective state directed toward particular objects in the world» (Windsor 2019, 55).

is not represented by the ambivalence and the undecidability but by the appearance of something familiar in a new, unfamiliar light.

Rebentisch also adds two other aspects to this classical conceptual core. d) The uncanny is a feeling due to a twist in how reality is sensorially perceived, revealing something hidden from the visual sphere. In this respect, Rebentisch follows Lacan's and Didi-Huberman's intuition to associate the uncanny with an alteration of the focal point that disturbs established regimes of visibility and allows something hitherto concealed to emerge. In Rebentisch's reading, this disturbing sensory appearance is strictly bounded to a break of the iterative structure of everyday life. This structure is stabilizing and reassuring, but it blends the contours of what lies before our eyes, turning the familiar into a nebulous background. Therefore, the experience of focusing on a detail of this hazy scenery in which everyday life is staged uncovers aspects hidden in plain sight with a disquieting effect. However, thanks to the influence of Cavell, Rebentisch introduces a radical novelty in comparison to the classical association of the uncanny with anxiety, central to Freud's account but also to Lacan's and Didi-Huberman's proposals. e) The uncanny is not only frightening and inherently threatening but this disturbing affective state is accompanied by a new attentiveness towards the obviousness of the everyday, enhancing new ways of sensory experiencing the well-known: «the return of the ordinary as uncanny demands an active, committed attitude towards it» (Rebentisch, 2013a, 67).

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Self-Referential Aesthetics in the Art of Leonard Cohen

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ABSTRACT. On the assumption that Cohen's best poetry comes in his literary middle period, specifically *The Energy of Slaves* (1972) and *Death of a Lady's Man* (1978), I hypothesize that it is self-reference broadly conceived that elevates these works above the rest of his poetry. This account is confirmed by noteworthy middle- and late-period Cohen songs. I offer a threefold typology of Cohenesque self-reference: (1) *intratextual* (reflexive self-reference within a work), (2) *intertextual* (reference to a particular other work in the oeuvre), (3) *supratextual* (reference to multiple works in the oeuvre). Such devices enhance those works in which they appear (or otherwise fall within their self-referential scope) by offering a higher-order perspective that fosters better integration of elements within and suggested by those works. Self-reference can be gimmicky and therefore not a mark of artistic success, but it nonetheless adds appreciable significance to works that are good enough in other respects. Rather than a primary artistic virtue, then, self-reference is a secondary (or perquisite) virtue, as well as a pairing (or sharing) virtue vis-à-vis other works.

1. Introduction

The work of poet and singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen has been examined from a philosophical perspective and furthermore appears to merit such analysis (see e.g., Holt, 2014; Babich, 2016). Here I take Cohen's work as a case study in the aesthetics of self-reference broadly conceived. I argue that much of Cohen's best poetry is distinguished by "going meta" in some form and that such self-reference is, all else being equal, an artistic virtue. Such devices enhance those works in which they appear (or otherwise fall in their self-referential scope) by providing a perspective that fosters better integration of elements within and suggested by those

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works. Although going meta can be gimmicky and therefore not a mark of artistic success (e.g., breaking the fourth wall in some comedies), it nonetheless adds appreciable significance to works that are good enough in other respects. Rather than a primary/foundational artistic virtue, then, self-reference seems to be a secondary (or perquisite) virtue, as well as a pairing (or sharing) virtue vis-à-vis other works.

My starting assumption is that the height of Cohen's poetry occurs in his literary middle period, specifically the volumes *The Energy of Slaves* (1972) and *Death of a Lady's Man* (1978). As I see it, Cohen's early literary period comprises his first four books of original poetry, 1956–1966,[54] with the late period comprising his last three books of original poetry, 1984–2018. This periodization excludes two books of selected poems, 1968 and 1993, respectively, and assumes a plausible if not necessarily standard view of Cohen's career in poetry. It is also worth noting that Cohen's career in music begins on the cusp between the early and middle literary periods, and the middle-to-late period literary shift coincides with a change in Cohen's musical sensibilities from folk to popular music (from the early to middle periods of his music career). Notable songs from the middle and late periods of Cohen's music career confirm that the self-referentiality of the middle-period poetry is, all else being equal, an artistic virtue. This proposal will be subject to qualification and refinement given possible objections raised toward the end.

2. Self-Referential Types

One observes through careful reading that what distinguishes Cohen's best poetry from his early and late literary work is a notable tendency to go meta. Roughly, an artwork goes meta when it exhibits self-awareness or adopts a higher-order perspective, which I frame here as self-reference in a broad sense. It is this tendency toward self-reference broadly conceived that sets this phase apart from, and also elevates it above, the rest of Cohen's poetry.[55]

What I mean by self-reference broadly conceived includes not only the narrow, reflexive sense (a work referring to itself), but also intertextual reference to other works within the artist's oeuvre. In particular, I note a threefold typology of self-referential devices in

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[54] Cohen's two novels also fall in this literary early period.
[55] Later I will discuss a focused objection to this view.

Cohen's work: (1) *intratextual* self-reference (where a work refers to itself), (2) *intertextual* self-reference (where a work refers to a particular other work in the oeuvre), and (3) *supratextual* self-reference (where a work refers to multiple works in the oeuvre). Each of these self-referential types is characteristic of much of Cohen's middle-period poetry.

Before looking at particular examples, I will note that this typology excludes intertextual connections to other artists' work (e.g., "And maybe I had miles to drive / And promises to keep": an allusion to Frost), along with Cohen namechecking himself (e.g., "Sincerely, L. Cohen"). It also excludes simple meta-language (e.g., "But my darling says, 'Leonard, just let it go by'…"), even though meta-language is a form of going meta, and a familiar one in poetry with the words attributed to someone or—as with Keats's "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty…'"—some*thing*. Such devices merit investigation, of course, but they lie afield of the types of work-specific self-reference that concern me here.

Intratextual examples tend to be relatively easy to spot, in part because they typically involve the straightforward self-referential use of indexical terms. Here are examples characteristic of Cohen's literary middle period:

> I threw open the shutters / light fell on this poem (1972, p. 2)
>
> If you ever read this / think of the man writing it (1972, p. 5)
>
> Poetry begun in this mood rarely succeeds (1972, p. 10)
>
> Leaning over his poem / from a standing position (1972, p. 46)
>
> This is a threat / Do you know what a threat is (1972, p. 54)
>
> I am punished when I do not work on this poem (1972, p. 87)
>
> The poet is drunk / he wonders what / he will write next / He has some notion of poetry (1972, p. 91)
>
> This is the poem we have been waiting for / …. / It is not inspired / It took days and days to write (1972, p. 106)
>
> Each man / has a way to betray / the revolution / This is mine (1972, p. 114)
>
> You can rip a heart out on this paragraph (1978, p. 50)
>
> You ask me how I write. This is how I write (1978, p. 74)
>
> This is the end of my life in art (1978, p. 190)[56]

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[56] Cohen's "Life in Art" is one of the more striking motifs in *Death of a Lady's Man*.

Although intertextual self-references appear elsewhere in Cohen's work, many of them occur in *Death of a Lady's Man*,[57] which largely consists of poems paired with "commentaries" as the book's central conceit. Several of the examples below, however, are found in the earlier book, *The Energy of Slaves*:

> I threw open the shutters: / light fell on these lines (1972, p. 3)[58]
>
> Marianne will remain / a beautiful and mysterious name (1972, p. 71)
>
> I blame it on me and Suzanne / the death of poetry (1972, p. 99)
>
> The violence of this paragraph is somewhat mitigated by the sense of nostalgia and loss in the last two lines (1978, p. 21, commenting on "Death to This Book", p. 20)[59]
>
> This is the work of a middle-class mind flirting with terrorism—not without a certain charm (1978, p. 25, commenting on "Our Government-in-Exile", p. 24)
>
> *This is the working of Mercy* (1978, p. 31, commenting on "The Window", p. 31; and p. 151, commenting on "The Sacrifice", p. 151)
>
> Who can go beyond the first four words? Who can hurry past the final six?... I consent to be profoundly touched by the exquisite accident of this paragraph (1978, p. 35, commenting on "My Wife and I", p. 34)
>
> In lines 15 and 16 he asks a question which he does not answer…. The poem begins to rot after the third line, maybe after the second… (1978, p. 39, commenting on "I Have Taken You", p. 38)
>
> *Did he 'jump literature ahead a few years'?* (1978, p. 43, commenting on "I Decided" ["I decided to jump literature ahead a few years"], p. 42)
>
> Is there a modern reader that can measure up to this page? (1978, p. 45, commenting on "The Beetle", p. 44)
>
> *Exposure to this page can induce a suffocating attack...* (1978, p. 65, commenting on "The Asthmatic", pp. 64–65)
>
> [H]e loosened these shining lines from a long dull confession… (1978, p. 163, commenting on "The Rebellion", p. 162)

Many of Cohen's supratextual self-references in the middle-period poetry comment on past works or contemporaneous poems contained in the same volume:

> Welcome to these lines (1972, p. 1)

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[57] The title *Death of a Lady's Man* playfully alludes to Cohen's similarly titled 1977 album *Death of a Ladies' Man*.

[58] These intratextually self-referential lines allude as variorum to the preceding poem en face.

[59] The "commentaries" in *Death of a Lady's Man* are given in italics, so preserved here.

You are a much finer person than I am / Your poetry is better too (1972, p. 29)

It turned out / that I was only a scribbler (1972, p. 33)

There is no one to show these poems to (1972, p. 43)

Thighs from my old poems / would help (1972, p. 44)

Perhaps it is because my music / does not sing for me (1972, p. 66)

when I am only print (1972, p. 75)

The poems don't love us anymore… they don't want to be poems (1972, p. 109)

Death to this book (1978, p. 20)

written in the margins of this and other pages (1978, p. 33, commenting on "Death of a Lady's Man", pp. 30–32)

There is no death in this book and therefore it is a lie (1978, p. 113, commenting on She Has Given Me the Bullet", p. 112)

I had high hopes for this book. I used to be thin, too (1978, p. 168)

Two standout examples illustrate just how rich self-referentiality can be. "Welcome to these lines" is the first line of the first poem of *The Energy of Slaves*. It is thus interpretable as welcoming the reader inter/supratextually to the rest of the book. But as the first line of a poem, it also welcomes the reader intratextually to the poem itself. Furthermore, much of the rest of the poem can be read, not just as poetic lines but also as pickup lines apropos of Cohen's ladies' man persona. This self-reference richly condenses a lot of meaning into a rather short space. Similarly rich is *Death of a Lady Man*'s "I had high hopes for this book. I used to be thin, too", occurring on page 168, far past what one would expect of a typical book of poetry. The suggested conceit here is that the book has become unwieldy, has "put on weight" like the then middle-aged Cohen himself, a hard "problem" in both cases—weight loss as editing, editing as weight loss.

2. Hypothesis and Qualifications

Above I have limited myself to middle-period examples. But admittedly there are examples from the late early and early late periods as well. Cohen's last early-period book, *Parasites of Heaven* (1966), begins with the intertextual reference, "So you're the kind of vegetarian / that only eats roses / Is that what you mean / with your Beautiful Losers?" (p. 1). Similarly, we notice in *Book of Mercy* (1984) one or two supratextual psalms, as in "once again I am a singer

in the lower choirs, born fifty years ago to raise my voice this high, and no higher" (Psalm 1).[60] However, such exceptions are exceedingly rare and occur on the cusps of the middle period, thus foreshadowing and recalling, respectively, the chiefly middle-period self-referential tendency.

So qualified, my proposal is that what distinguishes Cohen's middle-period poetry in both the descriptive and the prescriptive sense—namely self-referentiality as discussed above—is, all else being equal, an artistic virtue. These types of self-reference are by no means unique to Cohen's work,[61] but that work nonetheless serves as a useful and suggestive case study. Such devices enhance the works in which they appear by providing a perspective that fosters better integration of elements within and suggested by those works. As a metaphor for this, take drawing in one-point perspective, which helps coordinate the appearance of different objects in the display so that they appear as a coherent set. In the same way, the self-referential devices (intra-, inter-, and supratextual) used by Cohen in his poetry, give a higher(-order) point of perspective on the lower elements, which become coordinated within the perspective's implicit framework. The line "This is mine" invites us to see the poem as a betrayal; "when I am only print" suggests that the work is less a product than the constituent substance of the poet himself; "I used to be thin, too" prompts us to consider the entire 216-page poetry book as flouting the minimalist cliché of the slim volume. Such added perspective helps to both integrate the work and enhance our aesthetic appreciation of it. If nothing else, an added perspective *on* the work in the case of self-reference is also an added element *of* the work and so correspondingly tends to enrich whatever appreciation we may have.

Let me be clear that my account does not imply that self-reference is a necessary virtue, that an artwork lacking self-referentiality is somehow flawed for that reason. There are, indeed, many effective poems in Cohen's own oeuvre, expressive and muted by turns, that do not employ the kind of device that typifies his middle-period work. It is, however, that very feature that serves to distinguish that work from the rest.

3. Examples from Cohen's Songs

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[60] This work is not paginated, thus the reference to psalm rather than page number.
[61] See various examples, for instance, throughout Holt (2017).

This account is confirmed by notable songs from the middle and late periods of Cohen's music career. Such self-reference will be less obvious because the musical elements of these artworks render them comparatively rich and thus facilitate appreciation without listeners needing to be as alert to any self-referential devices.

To begin with intratextual cases, "Take This Waltz" is a waltz (i.e., has a 3/4 time signature). More subtly, in "Ballad of the Absent Mare", just before the music fades out, we hear the lines "and they're gone like the smoke / and they're gone like this song" (Cohen, 2009, p. 23). The well-known "Hallelujah" lyrically describes its own underlying chord progression (in C, "the fourth [F], the fifth [G], the minor fall [Am], the major lift [F]").[62] Similarly, the repetition of "Hallelujah" in the chorus has at least a double meaning in both *depicting* and *affirming* the specific "Hallelujah" ending each verse (e.g., "from your lips she drew the Hallelujah" [Cohen 2009, p. 56]). No less remarkably, the later song "Almost Like the Blues" has a chord progression resembling but distinct from standard 12-bar blues (in the key of Dm, we get an Am instead of the expected A7). The song also repeats a short line at the end of each verse (the titular "It's almost like the blues") in contrast to the blues convention of repeating a long line at the beginning. Furthermore, this refrain is prefigured by backup singers vocalizing, somberly, "Woo-hoo", an interjection usually of joy rather than lament. In terms of content, throughout the song Cohen airs complaints either more or less tragic and depressing than those of conventional blues (with, for example, genocide at one extreme and bad reviews at the other). Thus, there are at least *four* respects in which "Almost Like the Blues" is almost like the blues.

Intertextual self-reference is comparatively rare in Cohen's songs, though there are a few noteworthy examples. The late-period "That Don't Make It Junk" includes the line "So I closed the Book of Longing", an apparent allusion to Cohen's *Book of Longing*. Similarly, "You Want It Darker" includes the refrain, "You want it darker / We kill the flame", an allusion to Cohen's last book, *The Flame*. What is particularly striking about these examples is that in contrast to typical cases they allude to *future* rather than past works: 2001's "That Don't Make It Junk" alludes to a 2006 book, 2016's "You Want It Darker" to a book published two years

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[62] This observation is hardly original. Compare with Babich (2016, p. 111), which gives the chord progression in G.

later. I call these *ex ante* allusions (Holt, 2015), that is, allusions before the fact.[63] One ineffective intertextual case comes in "You Got Me Singing", where a reference to "Hallelujah" comes off as more boastful and self-aggrandizing than subtle and self-referential, probably because it puts the spotlight on Cohen himself (as songwriter) rather than the song. To be effective, such devices must be used with greater skill and sensitivity, highlighting the art itself rather than the artist.

Some of Cohen's songs make supratextual self-reference across much of his earlier work and "life in art". In "A Singer Must Die" he apologizes ironically, "I'm sorry for smudging the air with my song" (2009, p. 10), where 'song' is meant with unique and multiple reference both literally and figuratively. In "Going Home" he refers to himself as a "lazy bastard", a purposefully lazy piece of writing evoking Cohen's use of lazy rhymes in many songs, as indeed almost all the rhymes are in that song. In "Tower of Song" he refers to future encounters with his work: "I'll be speaking to you sweetly from a window in the Tower of Song" (2009, p. 162). Indeed, his relationship to the song's central metaphor is an elaborate supratextual self-reference to Cohen's long musical career.

On that same album (*I'm Your Man*), not only does the first song, "First We Take Manhattan", announce its track position ("First…" is first), it begins with the lines "They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom / For trying to change the system from within" (2009, p. 53). As I read it, this is an elegant supratextual self-reference to Cohen's earlier music career. The twenty years of boredom begin in 1967 with *Songs of Leonard Cohen*; then, after those twenty years, he sings in 1988, "I'm coming now, I'm coming to reward them" (2009, p.53), as if *I'm Your Man* is the payoff. "[T]rying to change the system from within" suggests an attempt to make a different—a poet's—kind of music, the twenty-year sentence for this "crime" recalling the judicial imagery of "A Singer Must Die".

4. Objections and Replies

A number of objections to my account suggest themselves, and in response I will further develop that account in what seem to me several useful ways. Among various possible

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[63] The key assumption here is that the titles were not inspired *post facto* by the preceding works and that an artist can allude to their own envisioned or not-yet-finished works.

objections, I will address the following: (1) that my starting assumption is false, (2) that my examples are cherry-picked, (3) that my view implies an untenable hybrid view of songs, (4) that self-referentiality unduly limits interpretation, and (5) that self-reference is sometimes an artistic flaw rather than a virtue. I will tackle objection each in turn with corresponding responses.

First, one could reject my account by denying the assumption as to which poetry ranks as Cohen's best or my judgment about what distinguishes it. One could dismiss my judgment as mere personal preference rather than transpersonal taste, noting that it was Cohen's early-period work that secured his reputation as a poet, and that in my youth I myself judged this phase of Cohen's poetic output superior. Of course, the fact that Cohen's early accolades (e.g., winning Canada's Governor General's Award for his second book of poetry) hardly implies that that is his best work. There may be room for a notion of age-appropriate aesthetics here, but because in my more mature view it is the middle-period work that is best, this judgment would be more informed and better justified than that from the comparatively limited perspective of my youth.

Second, one could object that my examples are cherry-picked and therefore exemplary in neither sense—neither representative nor the best—of those works in which they appear. Indeed, self-reference appears in approximately 15% of the poems in *The Energy of Slaves*, and less than 50% of the poems in *Death of a Lady's Man*. However, self-reference can be overdone, and so it should not be expected to be too frequently employed. A close and considered reading of both these books should, I believe, convince the skeptic that self-referentiality occurs in many, though of course not all, of the best poems in these volumes. Most important, though, is the suggestion that self-referentiality is a *pairing* virtue, that a self-referential poem will often aesthetically enhance itself along with such other poems, if any, falling within its referential scope (in intertextual and supratextual self-reference). Likewise, it seems plausible that self-referentiality is also what may be called a *sharing* virtue, where self-referential poems collected in the same volume with non-self-referential poems may enhance the latter as a matter of contextual variety. Thus, one of the commentary poems in *Death of a Lady's Man* will enhance its object poem, and the variety of self-referential poems scattered throughout *The Energy of Slaves* will enhance the interpretive atmosphere of reading the rest of the book.

Third, in trying to confirm my hypothesis about Cohen's poetry by examining his songs, I seem to be smuggling in an illicit hybrid account of songs whereby they are conceived in terms of a simplistic "Music + Lyrics" formula, ignoring that it is how the two function together, not as a simple aggregate, that accounts for the aesthetics of song (e.g., Bicknell 2015, pp. 16–20). My analysis, in other words, seems to imply a misguided ontology of songs. However, even if a hybrid model fails as an ontological account of songs, there are compelling reasons for embracing critical and creative song hybridity. We can account for the failure of some songs to work in terms of poor lyrics that undermine the melody or, in other cases, clumsy melody that undermines the lyrics. Likewise, the critical/creative hybrid view respects the fact that in much song writing, music are lyrics are created by different artists. Great singer-songwriter that he was, Cohen himself sometimes collaborated in this way, even on some of his signature songs.[64] Such hybridity does not imply that a song's aesthetic value is somehow reducible to that of the music and lyrics considered separately.

Fourth, one concern about the aesthetic rewards of the higher-order perspective afforded by self-reference broadly conceived is that it appears to lock one's interpretation in step with the artist's intentions, which limits interpretive freedom. To return to an earlier example, "So you're the kind of vegetarian / that only eats roses" appears to enjoin us to view *Beautiful Losers* from that perspective—and no other, even if other readings help us better integrate and appreciate the diverse and difficult elements of this experimental novel. However, where such self-reference frames a work from an artist's comparatively "narrow" perspective, this need not imply that we are beholden to that perspective.[65] In other words, through self-reference we are not enjoined but rather *invited* to see a work not exclusively but *inclusively* from a certain meta-perspective. This opens up rather than closing off interpretive possibilities. In terms of the metaphor mentioned earlier, whereas self-reference invites us to view the elements within and suggested by a poem from a "one-point perspective", this does not rule out also or alternatively viewing it from, as it were, a "zero-point perspective" without such constraints. This tension between interpretive closure and interpretive openness as aesthetic desiderata implies at worst competing virtues, at best complementary ones.

Fifth, it might seem that self-referentiality cannot be an artistic virtue as I champion it

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[64] The signature song "Everybody Knows", for instance, was cowritten with Sharon Robinson.
[65] For critical discussion of intentionalist interpretation, see Holt (2002).

because sometimes such devices are gimmicky and can detract from a work, in silly comedies that break the fourth wall, for instance (as in *Top Secret* when the leads turn to the audience after the line, "It all sounds like some bad movie"). When self-reference does aesthetically enhance a work, therefore, it seemingly must be in virtue of something other than simple self-reference. However, what may appear to be silly self-reference in such cases might also be perfectly genre-appropriate, with corresponding negative judgments indicative of little more than genre or style prejudice. Either way, this objection motivates a distinction between primary and secondary artistic virtues, where primary virtues stand on their own and secondary virtues rely on primary virtues. (Primary artistic virtues might include skillful execution, expressiveness, etc.) Self-referentiality in an artwork is, all else being equal, a secondary or perquisite artistic virtue, insofar as the work must also exhibit other artistic virtues if self-referentiality is to rank as a virtue rather than a gimmick. Self-reference alone cannot carry a poem.

5. Conclusion

I began by assuming the truth of my considered judgment that Leonard Cohen's poetry peaks in his literary middle period, observing that this work is distinguished by certain kinds of self-reference: intratextual, intertextual, and supratextual. Such devices aesthetically enhance the works in which they appear by providing a meta-perspective fostering better integration of elements within and suggested by those works. This hypothesis was confirmed by notable songs from Cohen's middle and late music career, subject to refinement and qualification in light of several possible objections. Self-referentiality is an artistic virtue, though neither a necessary nor a sufficient one. As this case study of Cohen's work suggests, self-reference is a secondary or perquisite artistic virtue in works that are of sufficient quality in other respects as well, along with being a pairing or sharing virtue vis-à-vis other works. Further examination of other artworks, especially in other artforms, would help determine whether this as-yet tentative generalization can be sufficiently strengthened.

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An Alien Phenomenology of Object Oriented Aesthetics and Genderqueer Representations in Julia Ducournau's Titane (2021)

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ABSTRACT. Julia Ducournau's film, *Titane* (2021), has received considerable critical acclaim while rousing and repulsing audiences with its provocative appropriation of the body horror genre. A critical discursive examination of *Titane* and related paratexts serves to present an "alien phenomenology" that enables a wider consideration of the relations between subject and objects. The analysis is organized in three movements. In the first move, a brief overview of the film is woven together with a consideration of recent philosophical innovations associated with object-oriented ontology (OOO). In addition to the summative analysis of the film, this first section draws on a number of interviews with Durcournau to ground thematic findings associated with OOO using the director's own words. The second move shifts toward a consideration of the audience reception and examines responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau's object-oriented approach appropriates characterizations of gender fluidity. In the closing motion, the analysis turns to examine the way that object characterizations of gender fluidity and identity may remain complacent with hegemonic discourses of post-feminism.

1. Introduction

Julia Ducournau's film, *Titane* (2021), has received considerable critical acclaim while rousing and repulsing audiences with its provocative appropriation of the body-horror genre and object-oriented aesthetic. *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw (2021) referred to the film as a "gonzo

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genderqueer body-horror shocker" (para. 3). An article in *Variety* (2021) drew connections to Ducournau's 2016 film *Raw* and praised the director for "changing the vocabulary of cinema with her heart-stopping imagery and boundary-blurring approach to genre" (para. 1). The widespread reception of the French language film has been propelled by its critical success. *Titane* earned Durcournau the Palme d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival, making her only the second woman to have won the prestigious award after Jane Campion's, 1993 film *The Piano*. Reporting on the film's critical reception at the Cannes Film Festival, Justin Chang's (2021) *Los Angeles Times* review noted that showings, "generated walkouts, hoots of laughter, and waves of social media shock and awe, plus scattered reports of fainting and vomiting" (para. 6). With less praise, Ann Hornaday (2021) lampooned the film in a *Washington Post* review that found the film, "so self-consciously transgressive and weird, that it's difficult to discern who it's for, besides fetishists, freak-flag fliers, and fans of auteurism at its most hermetic and solipsistic" (para. 4). I argue that the affectively charged responses elicited by the film are a result of Ducournau's divisive object-oriented approach to the genderqueer representations in the film. In this chapter, I offer a critical analysis of relevant texts to problematize the film's use of corporeality and examine its representation of gender fluidity. The analysis is organized in three movements. In the first move, a brief overview of the film is woven together with a consideration of recent philosophical innovations associated with object-oriented ontology (OOO). In addition to the summative analysis of the film, this first section draws on a number of interviews with Durcournau to ground thematic findings associated with OOO using the director's own words. The second move shifts toward a consideration of the audience reception and examines responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau's object-oriented approach appropriates characterizations of gender fluidity. In the closing motion, the analysis turns to examine the way that object characterizations of gender fluidity and identity may remain complacent with hegemonic discourses of post-feminism.

2. An Object-Oriented Overview of the Film

OOO evolves from work in new materialism introduced by Levi Bryant, Graham Haraman, Jane Bennet and others. These innovative philosophical frameworks aspire to open space for

an understanding of relations between non-human others. Following Bryant, this analysis emphasizes an *"alien phenomenology"* that withholds the tendency to examine machine objects based on their human use value and instead, in Bryant's (2014) words, "opens the possibility of more compassionate ways of relating" and facilitates the "possibility of better ways of living together" (p. 70). With attention to the changing influences that machines, algorithms, and material objects have exhibited on human subject relations, scholars have characterized OOO as a counter-method that avoids collapsing all readings into an examination of cultural elements or subject centered ideological critiques. An "alien phenomenology" of *Titane* serves to more clearly discern the features of an object-oriented critique of gender and sexuality using the film text, director interviews, and examples of audience reception.

As a reaction to modes of textual analysis centered around the dissolution of a film's story into subjective and cultural elements of meaning making, Harman (2012) emphasizes the critical need to show "how the literary object cannot be fully identified with its surroundings or even its manifest properties" and explains that such criticism enables scholars to examine the "tension between objects and their sensual traits" (p. 202). In the context of Ducournau's *Titane,* this object tension is explicitly materialized by the affective compulsions of physical identification and sexual pleasure associated with the protagonist's attraction to automobiles. Following a serious car accident, a young Alexia receives a titanium plate in her head and the doctors encourage her father to look for changes in motor skills and cognitive behavior. Despite the initial warning, her neglectful father ignores any concerns and the film jumps forward in time to Alexia performing as an erotic dancer at car shows. Navigating the hypermasculine space she is pursued by creepy men and has become adept at defending herself. Within the first few scenes of the film, she uses a metal hairpin to brutally murder a fan who confessed his love for her before forcibly attempting to kiss her. Following the murder, she hears something backstage and approaches the stage area to find a Cadillac with its headlights lit toward the stage. Inside the car, the hydraulics trigger and bounce Alexia up and down as she climaxes in response to the car's undulations. Later, when Alexia begins to leak motor oil from her breasts, she realizes she is pregnant and attempts to use the hairpin to terminate the pregnancy. She murders her girlfriend after she becomes aware of the pregnancy, and goes on a killing spree that necessitates attempting to conceal her gender identity as she transitions from Alexia to Aiden. Posing as Aiden, the missing son of a fire chief, her gender transformation is

confounded by efforts to conceal the pregnancy and adopt to the normative masculine conventions of life in the firehouse with her "adoptive" father Vincent.

Explicating the object ontology of the film, and addressing the aesthetic influence of metal in the film, Ducournau explains, "Metal is cold, heavy, dead, it doesn't react to our eyes. I wanted to try to make it something alive" and adds, "The metal in her head makes her dead inside, so I wanted to intertwine all these thoughts between humans and dead metal and reverse the way they react" (2021, para. 19). In doing so, Ducournau's configurations of the monstrous confronts gender binaries and destabilizes configurations of heterosexual normativity and gender-fluidity. In the film, Ducournau's representations of pregnancy further manifest the affective tensions between subjects and objects that are integral to audiences' inferences of meaning. Addressing the expectant nature of the subject-object gestation, Ducournau notes, "The idea was to create a new humanity that is strong because it's monstrous — and not the other way around" (in Kohn, 2021, para. 9). A critical discursive examination of *Titane* (2021) and related paratexts serves to present an "alien phenomenology" that enables a wider consideration of the relations between humans and non-human others with attention to how these subject-object tensions limit social possibilities and enable new genderqueer imaginaries.

Examining the gendered representations of the film, it is helpful to take up Katherine Behar's (2016) work on Object Oriented Feminism (OOF) which acknowledges that while feminism's object has been principally subjective and political, it also arises from an outward orientation that recognizes the tendency for women to be exploited as objects and calls for a solidarity that, as she notes "should rally around objects, not subjects" (Behar, 2016, p. 7). Importantly, the film's gender relations are not only imbricated in Alexia/Aiden's transition – but also in the film's characterization of Vincent, the fire captain whose chemical addiction to steroids is depicted throughout the film in ways that further links the subject and object relations together. Justin Chang (2021) writes:

> If Alexia's plight reveals the toll of trying to escape that prison, Vincent shows us the dangers of succumbing to it. Injecting steroids daily into his ridiculously bulked-up frame, he's like a hulking parody of hyper-masculinity, even as he subverts that parody by showering Alexia/Adrien with an unfashionable and unconditional tenderness. (para. 12).

In one scene that confirms Vincent's acceptance of Alexia/Aiden, he enters while she is

changing and affirms her identity, "I don't care who you are. You're my son. You'll always be my son. Whoever you are. Is that clear?" She nods. And they hug. Her towel falls down and he is unable to ignore her breasts but continues on without acknowledgement. In the final scene, Vincent helps Alexia/Aiden deliver her child – and she confesses, "my names Alexia" and he responds, "push hard Alexia" as she grimaces and her abdomen breaks open and the plate in her head begins to protrude. A crying sound is heard, and she asks – "how is it?" before collapsing. Vincent attempts to resuscitate her but her body appears lifeless, when he pulls the baby up and wraps it in a sheet viewers can see that the baby has a titanium spinal cord and metal plate. In effort to sooth the child, Vincent assures the newborn, "I'm here" and the film closes.

It is unclear if Alexia survives and viewers are left to wonder about the health of the baby and Vincent's future role in raising the child. Acknowledging the divergent audience reception, Durcournau exclaims, "I hope people are in for the ride and watch it to the end and debate; that is what art is for, to create new debate and new questions" (2021, para. 15). The interplay between Alexia, Aiden, Vincent, and the rest of the firehouse crew each serve to problematize the stability of gender conventions and examine the objective relations that constitute the boundaries of sexuality and the binaries associated with masculinity and femininity. Following this brief overview of the film and introduction to the postulates of OOO, it is analytically productive to consider the audience reception and examine some of the responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau's object-oriented approach challenges existing configurations of gender fluidity. Toward that end, a critical analysis of paratexts that circulated to evaluate the film's genre crossing aesthetic categorization serves to problematize the films representations of gender fluidity.

3. Appropriating Gender Fluidity

An article in *Variety* (2021) exclaims, "don't call her a horror director: She works in the European tradition of visceral cineastes like Pier Paulo Pasolini and Carlos Saura" noting her body horror stylings similarity to David Cronenberg, the reviewer writes, "her work defies categorization" (para. 3). Writing in *Indie Wire,* Eric Kohn (2021) calls the film, "a complex exploration of gender fluidity unlike any seen before" (para. 2). However, notably in his

interview with Durcournau, she herself asserts: "Gender fluidity is *and is not* a topic for me. It's one of the main themes of the film, but it's not a theme that I had a plan for. It's pretty natural for me to think like that" She continues, "I see the world as it should be – fluid, and more fluid every day, in so many ways" (para. 7). However, I argue that these characterizations of fluidity recreate patterns of hegemonic exclusion and illustrate a social process that Lisa Duggan (2004) labels – homonormativity. Duggan (2004) defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest the dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 179). In other words, even when aspiring toward a critical project of emancipation, the very effort to position alternative sexual identities along a binary matrix remains flawed. By projecting the x, y, z axes of hetero/homo and masculine/feminine over the genderqueer and mechanophilic subject, the film diminishes it rich explanatory potential through an appropriation of fluidity that inadvertently blurs the necessary object focus within a seemingly endless matrix of subject positionalities.

The epistemological provocation at the heart of post-structuralism gives momentum to a critical theory of genderqueer film studies. Post-structuralist theorists have sought to critique, collapse, and transcend existing binaries. A critical theory of object-oriented gender and sexuality provokes tensions between universality and particularity. Rejecting the assertion of universality, Judith Butler argues that efforts to claim particular identity positions are contingent on the exclusion of others. Butler (1994) argues, "to establish a set of norms that are beyond power or force is itself a powerful and forceful conceptual practice that sublimates, disguises and extends its own power play through recourse to tropes of normative universality" (p. 7). In later work, she writes "universality belongs to an open-ended hegemonic struggle" and argues that the constitutive exclusion of particular identities forms the fundamental antagonism of all identity politics and is the genesis representative demands, (as cited in Butler, Laclau, & Zizek, 2000, p. 38). By analyzing the performative contradiction inherent within a disenfranchised groups claims to universality she suggests we can identify those antagonisms which move us closer to radical political alliance than to a universally emergent identity. Her argument, in other words, is that the constitution of normality is a resource that is often disguised and ignored in ways that contributes to subjects' complicity and complacency. The

concealments of hegemonic tendencies and the ready acceptance of ruling convention function as a form of discursive power. In this sense, Butler argues that normative universality is a manifest expression of power that is disguised in plain sight as "the way it is", in such a way that attention to alterity is preempted and prevented. For this reason, an alien phenomenology informed by the postulates of OOO may be uniquely able to introduce an alternative framework of criticism that circumvents the limitations of the subject-centric ideological critiques of gender and sexuality.

Notably, critical considerations of bisexuality have refused gender binaries and pushed queer theory to reconsider the object of sexual relations. As Maria Guervich, Helen Bailey, and Jo Bower (2009) write "Bisexuality unsettles… It disturbs existing sexed and gendered categories, refusing obstinately to settle as a fixed gendered or sexed subject or upon a singular gendered or sexed *object*" (p. 236). The increasing scholarly attention to "fluidity" as it relates to subjective gender identity and genderqueer attraction aspires to problematize binary representations that locate themselves vis-à-vis the universal formation of what is accepted as normal. Characterizations of fluidity attempt to transcend the identity matrix approaches of intersectionality by enabling and valuing the constancy of change. Although, intersectionality originated as a theoretical response to rigid standpoint identity positions, applications of intersectionality have continued to articulate coalitions from amongst distinct identity axes and differential subject positions. In her foundational piece, Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) wrote, "Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics" (p. 1299). However, too often intersectional positions are expressed along binaries that dichotomize identity markers (i.e., male–female, white–non-white, able-bodied–disabled, and hetero–homo). Perhaps the only exception to these binaries is socio-economic class, where subjects are positioned on a continuum that ranges from poor–working–middle-class–and wealthy.

Given these longstanding hegemonic binaries, the consideration of genderqueer fluidity is an important place to begin an effort to inspire resistant readings. Fluidity subtly includes a challenge to definitions that essentialize, temporalize, or pathologize genderqueer and transexual identities and promotes a recognition of "transgender, intersect, and nonbinary people as desiring subjects" (Engelberg, 2018, p. 111). Notably, genderqueer readings are not

"alternative" readings that present what could be in a utopian world, instead they function to articulate what already exists in the world as it is reflected or problematized by a film text and the relevant paratexts that circulate around it. Alexander Doty (1993) suggests that it is possible to offer queer readings of classic horror films like Dracula, arguing that it is "important to consider how the central conventions of horror and melodrama actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of the heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry" (p. 15). Post-structuralist, feminist, and queer readings have taken up a range of popular cultural media artifacts to provide dynamic contributions that serve to explain how media contribute to (or alternatively resist) hegemonic ideologies.

The post-structuralist assumptions of identity corroborate the hydro-analogy of fluidity that Durcournau emphasizes in her interviews. Like liquid, identity can be co-located and diffused with changing depths that remain unrecognizable at the surface. However, as I argue here, while post-structuralism and feminist approaches to understanding intersectionality have proven their theoretical use value in naming the systems and structures of hegemonic dominance, their characterizations of fluidity have demonstrated considerably less imaginative and transformative potential. Consequently, Durcournau's representations of fluidity prove to be too shallow for the deep complexities of object entanglements that condition hegemonic relations. Rather than understand gender identity as if it were fluid – capable of swashing back and forth -, it is more analytically productive to understand gender and sexuality as dynamic and integral forces, object energies that permeate expressions of subject identity. The coming together of diverse subject identities into a coalition requires acknowledging diverse object orientations and valuing the differences of nonhuman perspectives. This necessitates both an orientation toward subjective empowerment and an epistemological challenge to identify the *objectives* of systems and structures we are already embedded into.

4. Problematizing Post-Feminist Fluidity

The representations of genderqueer fluidity in *Titane* seem all too willing to tokenize alterity in ways that reinforce homonormativity. While the promotion of queer representations remains a righteous crusade, in the context of *Titane*, binary representations remain predicated on modes of passing that concretize existing sex and gender polemics. The films depiction of

fluidity capitulates to a post-feminist framework that attempts to articulate a universal subject position than has surpassed categorizations of sex and gender. In such a limited framework, queer theory continues to police the boundaries that govern normality with an effort to adjudicate identity according to subject centric binaries. *Titane's* "fluid" approach to gender and sexuality presents unclear channel markers that erase the objects of criticism and emphasize subject boundaries that remain complacent with existing hegemonic logics that represent alterity as the site of the monstrous. Angela McRobbie (2008) has described how post-feminism undermines the analytical work of feminism and falsely gives the impression that equality has been achieved in ways that misdirects the focus of critical efforts to problematize hegemonic patriarchal structures. In interviews, Ducournau echoes post-feminist sentiments. Speaking with Eric Kohn (2021), she explains her post-feminist directorial position in relation to the character development choices made in *Titane*:

> When people say I'm a woman director — I mean, that's always a bit annoying, because I'm a person. I'm a director. I make movies because I'm me, not because I'm a woman. I'm me. So in this respect, Alexia's character comes from my will to show that femininity is so much more flexible and blurry than what people think it is. That's why we start with a sequence shot in a car show. I made it seem as though the cars and the girls are essentially the same at the start. They're equally objectified. (para. 7)

Although this shifts the subject focus toward an important object-orientation, it circumvents any critical object of analytical attention and ignores the considerable burdens that women continue to face in the film industry. Further, this explanation ignores Alexia's sexual attraction to cars.

As Ian Bogost explains, "the familiar refrain of 'becoming-whatever' (it doesn't matter what!) suggests comfort and compatibility in relations between units" however, an "alien phenomenology assumes the opposite: incompatibility…. no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens" (p. 40). Rather than just assume *Titane* is transformative because it problematizes gender passing and presents an object-oriented sexuality it is necessary to critically analyze the objects that mark Alexia/Aiden as a subject of horror.

An object-oriented approach to genderqueer film criticism is needed to problematize

analogical associations with intersectionality and fluidity by conceptualizing the object of sexuality as a dynamic prerequisite energy and not merely a provocative or ambiguous subject positionality. Instead of representing sexuality through single acts of erotic expression (whether with a same-sex partner or automobile), an object-oriented critical approach to genderqueer sexual expression should recognize the potential for objects to exceed acts of intimacy and emphasize the objective commitments that make their togetherness possible. Instead of asking "what does a fluid gender or sexuality look like," film makers and scholars of horror films might meditate on the question, "what is the *object* of horror?" This shifts the focus toward an alien phenomenology predicted not on the subject identity but on the object relations that enable collectivity, mutuality, and trust in the face of that which is represented as monstrous.

Mateja Meded's (2021) review in Die Welt, acknowledges the vehicular connection to Cronenberg's *Crash,* observing that, in both films, the "car accident is not destructive, but a fertilizing experience of liberation" (para. 9). The titanium plate implanted in Alexia's head distinguishes her distinct object relationship, marking her as a unique hybrid-subject. However, her efforts to conceal her femininity and pass as Aiden showcase her monstrous corporeal form. The analogy of "passing" is apt for genderqueer identities moving through an intersectional positionality; passing falsely subjects nonbinary identities into a liminal event that erases their sexuality based on their present partnership or attraction. Instead, a genderfluid sexuality should be considered as temporally located in the past, present, and future of subjective meaning making. In the context of bisexuality, Lingel (2009) argues, "the act of passing, which here means to be able to assume (either actively or passively) membership within multiple communities, contradicts figuring of bisexuality as centerless and fluid and underscores theoretical intersections between bodies, sexualities and community" (p. 382). Anna Camaiti Hostert (2007) suggested that at an intersection passing signifies a "site of constant transition… a desire to withhold information, reminiscent of a poker game, when a player passes his/her hand without stating his/her position and the next move is left to other players" (p. 79). Similarly, Randall Kennedy's (2001) problematizes passing in its racial context as "a deception that enables a person to adopt certain roles or identities from which he would be barred by prevailing social standards in the absence of his misleading conduct" (p. 1). Understood in the context of passing, the lived experiences of genderqueer and transexual people are obfuscated by intersectional frameworks that maintain the dominant tendency to pathologize

representations and polemically position identities. Moreover, these associations suggest that genderqueer and transexual people are deceitful or otherwise incapable of commitment or fidelity to marked social positions. In these iterations, genderqueer and transexual individuals remain masked; represented as a deviant manipulator whose persuasion is unrestrained by normative laws of attraction, too often characterized as a nymphomaniac whose on-screen contributions are limited to sexual tension and erotic expression.

The frameworks of intersectionality encourage genderqueer individuals to name their identity position, following its analogy, as if identity were an address. However, identity is organic and nomadic. The effort to pinpoint sex or gender identity at a single intersection dismisses the way temporality informs sex and gender and ignores the dualistic conventions that govern interpersonal conduct and social expression. Farrimond (2012) describes how the temporal focus on a person's current sexual partner functions as a hegemonic tendency that erases sexual histories and future potentialities. As a counter-hegemonic tactic to this erasure, Jennifer Baumgardner (2007) detailed efforts to "constantly crowd every conversation with sign-posts ('ex-girlfriend,' 'ex-boyfriend,' 'baby's father') to indicate the whole person I am" as one, "commonly used technique of avoiding the erasure of bisexuality" (p. 193). The discursive erasure of non-monosexualities is thus not only indicative of bi-phobia, but more importantly it signals the dominance of ideologies associated with monosexism, in both heteronormative and LGBTQ+ communities. Kenji Yoshino (1999) has argued that monosexuals (hetero and homo) "have an 'epistemic contract', tacitly agreed upon due to their shared interest in maintaining an immutable identity, leading them to strategically erase bisexual identities" (p. 353). The effort to contain binary representations of gender and sexuality originates from a hegemonic effort to present heteronormativity and homonormativity as the dominant frameworks of attraction. As a cultural apparatus, media and film representations police the boundaries of normality and identify the archetypes of appropriate aspiration. The strategic absence or explicit derogation of on-screen representations of genderqueerness and transsexuality has prompted audiences to pathologize nonbinary characterizations. As if acting for an audience of armchair psychologists, the genderqueer character is presented as "monstrous" and marked as "abnormal" or "unstable" in ways that exacerbates falsehoods and perpetuates stigmatizing tropes that have real life consequences for transexual and nonbinary audiences.

5. Conclusion

As a universal energy, the concern for non-human others, over and above those that resemble the self, is the most radical counter-hegemonic reading strategy imaginable. As an affective postulate, an object orientation to sex and gender problematizes the hetero-homo and masculine-feminine binaries while enabling the loving recognition of plural expression as itself a universal norm. Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2011) exclaims that, "the origin of sex is in the symbiosis of bacteria" and concludes that "allowing the energy of love to circulate is what infuses matter with life" (p. 189). For scholars of critical media studies attuned to OOO, the objective of love is a call to conscience in the construction of coalitional identities with nonhuman agencies of alterity. Alain Badiou (2009) has argued that love creates a framework in which we experience, develop, and live from "the point of view of difference and not identity" (p. 22). The resulting coalitional solidarity is not a mere feature of a particular identity politics in the broader LGBTQ+ movement. Its solidarity does not endorse identarian appeals of essentialism or exceptionalism. Instead, an object-oriented solidarity frames an internally reflective, communicative, and inclusive "we" that is presented as already within the normal operating system of life's universal conditions. Such an approach serves to expands the "we" at the heart of feminist, post-structuralist, and queer projects of liberation and would emphasize a version of identity based, "not only relations of subjection and subjugation but also relations of recognition and identification, of flourishing, of meaning, of love, of empowerment, of solidarity" (Weir, 2013, p. 18). The coming together of diverse identities into a coalition requires acknowledging genderqueerness and necessitates valuing sex and gendered differences that exceed hegemonic binaries. A transformative representation of genderqueer solidarity would prioritize "the possibility of an inclusive understanding of 'we' whereby the strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else" (Dean, 1996, p. 31). To begin imaging genderqueer film representations, resistive readings might postulate a relation of love in which the manifestations of gender and sexuality are so diverse as to preclude the formulation of conventions based on the presentation of gender or representations of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and compulsory monogamy. Critical and genderqueer representations might attend to how love

becomes particularized following its universal genesis rather than beginning from the origin point of its alterity or particularity.

Instead of capitulating to the overly determined "pinned location" of feminist intersectionality or the wishy-washy proclivities of post-structuralist and queer conceptualizations of fluidity, we might seek to develop an object-oriented approach to gender and sexuality as always emerging from the universalizing genesis of difference, an inherent symbiosis between radically distinct others, and a natural proclivity to explore the objects that provoke an abject sense of horror. Such a position enables us to extend film and culture studies considerations of the auteur and audiences' power to discern hermeneutic meaning through negotiated and resistant counter-hegemonic interpretations, even in the face of post-feminist reading positions. Taking up Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, we might see cultural texts through a variety of negotiated identities and ideologies, "a patchwork quilt," that informs culture studies (Radway, 1986). A truly fluid project would require scholars to emphasize those "ideological seams" and interrogate the places where contrasting or disparate ideologies are sutured together by dominant, negotiated, or resistant readings. John Fiske (1989) describes excorporation as a process whereby subordinated audiences are able to "make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system" (p. 15). For contemporary critical studies scholars, an alien phenomenology that poaches along the perimeter of existing binaries and utilizes the tactic of excorporation to facilitate object oriented resistive readings may serve to problematize and subvert the appropriation of post-feminist representations of fluidity marked by an intersectional address that locates a static and singular identity.

In the context of evolving theories of identity, a genderqueer reading operates as a counter-hegemonic framework, providing a way to represent a distinct agency without fetishizing or erasing difference. By developing and extending a novel authentically genderqueer critique other existing ideological apparatuses are illuminated and new configurations of solidarity and collectivity are imagined. A genderqueer approach to film studies asks us to engage a differential consciousness, "a political revision that denie[s] any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 59). A better representation of genderqueerness as a dynamic identity would reveal the potential for

collective subjectivities and agential ethics and norms. A critical approach to genderqueer film representations should recognize the potential for bi-normativity and queer identifications illustrated not only through acts of intimacy but also through shared passion and interpersonal commitments. Film studies scholarship needs to attend to genderqueer subjectivities in ways that exceed the hegemonic tropes that necessitate passing in their pursuit of love. A critique of mediated representations of genderqueer love aspires to displace biphobic dualities (of hetero, homo, and monogamous) to instantiate a vision of love that exceeds duality and ferments an activated mix of queer bisexualities that critically redefines the presentation of normality. The hope is that an organic formulation of genderqueerness can begin to erode the foundations of bi-erasure and transphobia that have precluded the ethical and effective representation of genderqueer subjects lived experiences in media and film.

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From Ethics to Aesthetics
On an Aesthetic Sense in Kant's Philosophy of Religion

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ABSTRACT. In this essay, I take my starting point from Kant's *Religionsschrift* (1793) and the related essay "The End of All Things" (1794). In both texts, Kant takes ethics as his primary starting point and develops a specific view of religion under the auspices of practical philosophy. Inevitably, however, aesthetically relevant categories appear, as Kant had previously developed them in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790): the two basic motifs of aesthetic judgment, the beautiful and the sublime, and the activity of imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) that is no longer conceptually regulated. The purpose of this contribution is to show that while the ideal of a purely rational religion can never be fully reconciled with the course of historical religions, Kant applies aesthetic categories in approaching this ideal. In other words, Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* contains potentialities for an understanding of religion that he hints at – without pursuing them further – in his writing on religion, which remains more oriented towards his practical philosophy. This unusual reconstruction of Kant's ethically coded philosophy of religion from the standpoint of aesthetics reveals how lines of connection between aesthetics and religion can be seen in Kant's work. These lines of connection can be further pondered with Kant and beyond Kant. In a spectacular shift from ethics to aesthetics, the authors of the *Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* (1796/97) – among them Hölderlin – determine the highest act of reason to be an aesthetic act. This means entrusting aesthetics with a greater significance of its own, which is able to illuminate a dimension of religion that eludes both a theoretical and a practical approach.

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1. Introduction

Given that this paper was a contribution to the panel discussion on "aesthetic approaches to religion"[68] at the annual conference of the European Society for Aesthetics, the reference to Immanuel Kant might not be obvious. Kant is the author of one of the most influential philosophies of aesthetics – presented in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*[69] from 1790. Additionally, Kant is well known for his philosophy of religion, developed in his writings on *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*[70] from 1793/4. However, Kant's approach to religion is first and foremost an ethical approach rather than an aesthetic approach. Kant critiques religion by referring to practical reason, practical principles and the moral law. The question of God is expelled from the realms of theoretical reason and relocated within the boundaries of practical reason alone. Kant's aesthetics, in contrast, deals with the beautiful, the sublime, aesthetic judgment and related issues, but religion is not an important topic in his philosophy of aesthetics: As far as the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is concerned, the question of God remains a question of ethicotheology, but not a question of aesthetics.[71] Therefore, the question arises as to whether an aesthetic approach to religion can be found in Kant at all.

In the following remarks, I will not try to put forth the thesis that Kant, against all evidence, developed an aesthetic theory of religion. However, I want to demonstrate that Kant's

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[68] This paper is thematically related to the contribution within this volume by Jakob Deibl: "From infinite rapprochement to the open. From Kant to Hölderlin". The first paper on Kant is meant to uncover a train of thought that is continued by Deibl's contribution on Hölderlin.

[69] Immanuel Kant (2000), *Critique of the power of judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Hereinafter referred to as Kant (2000), §, original page number.

[70] Immanuel Kant (1996a), "Religion within the boundaries of mere reason", in: Immanuel Kant, Religion and Rational Theology, translated and edited by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 55-215. Hereinafter referred to as Kant (1996a), original page number.

[71] Clearly, Kant's aesthetics is also relevant for his dealing with religious concepts such as God and the highest good, insofar as his aesthetics, respectively his concept of beauty, allow for a perception of the world as purposive. Therefore, his aesthetics, together with the *Critique of Teleological Power of Judgment*, plays a key role in bridging the gap between the realms of theoretical and practical reason, as argued by Appelqvist. Cf. Hanne Appelqvist, "Kant on Religious Faith and Beauty", in: Henrik Rydenfeld, Heikki J. Koskinen, Mats Bergman (eds.), *Limits of Pragmatism and Challenges to Theodicy*, Acta Philosophica Fennica vol. 95 (2019), pp. 203-211. However, aesthetics and religion are *only* connected through ethicotheology. Religion is foremost an ethical and not an aesthetical topic for Kant. Therefore, religious concepts hardly play any role in the text of the *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment*.

philosophy of religion contains fragments of an aesthetic approach to religion. Kant faces the problem of the relation between the enlightened ideal of a purely rational religion and concrete historical religions, and his approach to religion is determined by the question of how to approach the ideal of a rational religion. In this approach to religion, Kant does not so much introduce as almost stumble upon the most important categories of his aesthetics – the beautiful and the sublime – and he recognizes their explanatory power with regard to the relation between religion and reason. However, these transitory appearances of aesthetic categories within religion remain fragments or traces of a possible aesthetic approach to religion, which Kant does not pursue further. Consequently, religion remains a topic of practical philosophy for Kant. In what follows, I suggest that Kant's aesthetics in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – even if it was written before his philosophy of religion – points beyond Kant and his practical philosophy.[72] Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment introduces a third way between theoretical and practical reason. Aesthetic judgment is neither guided by the quest for knowledge about the objective world nor by the inner duty to realize objective moral principles. In contrast, it relates to the "feeling of pleasure and displeasure, by means of which nothing at all in the object is designated, but in which the subject feels itself as it is affected by the representation."[73] It is neither the relation of knowledge to an object nor the pure self-relation of the subject, but rather the way in which the subject *as* being affected by something else, by a representation, feels itself.[74] This self-relation of the affected subject can neither be fully grasped by theoretical nor by practical concepts, inasmuch as it exceeds our purely conceptual regulation of the world. Reducible neither to theoretical nor to practical reason, this third dimension of our relation to the world influenced the successors of Kant, who worked their own way through and beyond Kant's primacy of practical philosophy. As I will argue at the end of this talk, for the authors of the *Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* aesthetic categories will play a much

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[72] In this respect, I follow a thesis put forth by Johann Kreuzer, who argues that Kant's third critique is not simply the mediation of his theoretical and practical critiques, but also goes beyond some of the restrictions of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy. Cf. Johann Kreuzer (2001), "Ästhetik als Ethik. Überlegungen im Anschluss an die ‚Kritik der Urteilskraft'", in: Valérie Lawitschka (ed.), *Turm-Vorträge 5 (1992-1998). Hölderlin: Philosophie und Dichtung*, Tübingen – Eggingen 2001, pp. 7-23.

[73] Kant, 2000, §1, p. 204.

[74] For a corresponding interpretation of Kant's aesthetics and the impact this thought had on Hölderlin see: Jakob Deibl (2019), "Ästhetik – Poesie – Religion. Eine Verhältnisbestimmung im Ausgang von Hölderlins theoretischen Schriften mit einem Ausblick auf die Elegie ‚Heimkunft'", in: Wolfgang Braungart / Joachim Jacob / Jan-Heiner Tück (eds.), *Literatur/Religion. Bilanz und Perspektiven eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebietes* (Studien zu Literatur und Religion, Bd. 1 / Studies on Literature and Religion, Vol. 1), J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart 2019, pp. 57-84.

more important role in approaching religion. In the context of the 21st century, a vast number of people in increasingly secular societies are no longer interested in religious traditions as objective knowledge about the world or as the main resource for ethical guidance, that can be based on secular reason alone. At the same time, religious traditions invented aesthetic programs that are still part of an artistic heritages. Religions can be recovered as aesthetic phenomena not only in the sense of being works of art, but also in the sense of the aesthetic forms which allow the subject to feel itself as being affected by the world. For this purpose, Kant's thought contains possibilities for approaching religion by means of aesthetic categories.

Following this introduction, I will proceed in three steps. In the first step, I will interpret a passage from the third part of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in which the motif of the beautiful appears. In the second step, I will add a reading of a passage in Kant's related text, *The End of All Things*[75], in which the sublime occurs in relation to apocalyptic themes. In the third and last step, I will refer to Kant's *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment* in order to show that Kant's aesthetics contains potentials that point beyond the restrictions of Kant's own practical philosophy and therefore his own perspective on religion. This can be exemplified best in Kant's concept of aesthetic ideas, in which the hierarchy of reason and imagination is almost turned upside down. My conclusion will be that Kant opens up the possibility of a redefinition of the relation of aesthetics and religion for his successors.

2. A "beautiful ideal" to be found in historical religion

A large part of the third section of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* is dedicated to the relation between a philosophical ideal of religion, on the one hand, and concrete historical religions, on the other hand. A purely rational religion, based on reason alone, would have to be a universal faith including all humankind and built upon moral principles alone instead of contingent historical content. Historical faith, in contrast, is always incomplete, particulate and based on contingent revelations instead of reason. This tension

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[75] Immanuel Kant (1996b), „The end of all things", in: Immanuel Kant, Religion and Rational Theology, translated and edited by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 221-231. Hereinafter referred to as Kant (1996b), original page number.

between an ideal and a historical reality is also a tension between reason and the sensible world. Whereas no historical faith can live up to the ideal of a universal religion, Kant nonetheless states the following in a passage I consider important:

> [Y]et, because of the natural need of all human beings to demand for even the highest concepts and grounds of reason something that *the senses can hold on to* [Sinnlichhaltbares], some confirmation from experience or the like (a need which must also be seriously taken into account when the intention is to *introduce* a faith universally) some historical ecclesiastical faith or other, usually already at hand, must be used.[76]

In this passage, Kant acknowledges a fundamental human need to demand something that the senses can hold on to, even for the highest concepts of reason, even if - which Kant makes very clear on every occasion – there can be no sensual representation of a concept of reason.[77] Still, in this passage, Kant states that this need has to be taken very seriously when approaching the ideal of a rational, that is a universal, faith. Because of this need to have something for the senses to hold on to, a historical faith has to be employed. The ideal is in need of a deficient historical religion as its vehicle in order to approach the religion of reason within history. Therefore, in the sensory world, a universal faith can never be introduced immediately. Kant supposes that within history the pure ideal can never fully be reached; there can only be a continuous approximation towards this ideal. Even if Kant suggests that there is a continuous approximation in time, it only leads to infinite progress. The ideal of a rational religion can never be reached in time because it is based on freedom, which is a concept of reason that transcends the chronological causality of time. Therefore, even in approaching this ideal, it remains "still infinitely removed from us"[78], as Kant points out. The rational religion of reason and historical faith can never be fully reconciled.

However, this still leaves one dimension of the historical representation of the progress of religions untouched. Kant turns to that dimension at the very end of the third section of his philosophy of religion, where he is dealing with eschatological ideas. In eschatological (and apocalyptic) narratives, the historical representation of religion itself transcends time and

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[76] Kant, 1996a, p.110.

[77] As an example, concerning the idea of freedom, Kant writes in his *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment*: "For the *inscrutability of the idea of freedom* entirely precludes any positive presentation [...]." See: Kant, 2000, § 29, p. 275.

[78] Kant, 1996a, p.132.

history. This leads to a slight shift in the constellation between the faith of reason and historical faith because historical faith itself contains the idea of an end of history. In reconstructing this eschatological narrative (Kant thinks of the Christian narrative here), the overall critical tone of Kant regarding historical faith changes for a moment and makes room for appreciation. In the following passage Kant even speaks of this narrative as a *beautiful idea*:

> This representation in a historical narrative of the future world, which is not in itself history, is a beautiful ideal of the moral world-epoch brought about by the introduction of the true universal religion and *foreseen* [*vorausgesehen*] in faith in its completion – one we do not *see directly* [*absehen*] in the manner of an empirical completion but *have a glimpse of* [*hinaussehen*] in the continuous advance and approximation toward the highest possible good on earth (in this there is nothing mystical but everything proceeds naturally in a moral way), i.e. we can make preparation for it. The appearance of the antichrist, the millennium, the announcement of the proximity of the end of the world, all take on their proper [*gute*] symbolic meaning before reason. And at the last of them, represented (like the end of life whether far or near) as an event which we cannot see in advance, expresses very well the necessity for us always to be ready for it, yet (if we ascribe to this symbol its intellectual meaning) in fact always to consider ourselves as actually the chosen citizens of a divine (ethical) state.[79]

The eschatological, narrative of the completion of history, which is not in itself history, is appreciated by Kant in this passage. Certainly, reason does not depend on such mysticism since, for reason, everything on earth proceeds naturally and since belief in the end of the world it is by no means necessary for moral action. But still, this representation of the end of the world has a proper (in the original Kant writes "good") symbolic meaning before reason, because it presents an unforeseeable end which expresses the timeless necessity of reason to act morally at all times. Although there can never be a direct sensual representation of concepts of reason, there can be symbols that are an analogy for reason. The end of the world, the completion of history and the dawn of the kingdom of God are not objective realities, but they are – as Kant states earlier – "a symbolic representation aimed merely at stimulating hope and courage and effort in achieving it […]."[80] These symbols are aimed at stimulating or animating those faculties of the subject that are also affected by moral ideas. It is not accidental that Kant speaks

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[79] Kant, 1996a, pp. 135f.
[80] Kant, 1996a, p. 133.

of a *beautiful* ideal in this context when we consider that in his aesthetics he wrote that "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good"[81]. The beauty of this ideal of the end of history lies in the fact that it animates those forces of the subject that are not themselves necessary for morality, but which necessarily accompany every act of morality. The end of the world is not objective knowledge, not a theoretical truth, but it is not necessary for practical reason either. *Therefore, Kant applies aesthetic categories to grasp the rational potential of religious representations*. Like the beautiful in the critique of the judgment of taste, the ideal of the completion of history is not objective knowledge referring to an empirical reality. Empirically we can neither foresee an end of history nor can there be an objective divine providence in history. Rather, the subject's gaze is turned away from empirical objects, and in the *unforeseeable it sees something* that has to do with its own moral nature. This contains a *glimpse* (*hinaussehen*), rather than a direct view, of the completion which the subject can only realize by its own action. That this is a beautiful ideal means that it is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure in the subject when affected by the representation of the completion of the highest good, even if this feeling is neither objective knowledge nor a practical necessity.

3. A frighteningly sublime thought

It seems that Kant was interested in the eschatological (respectively apocalyptic) idea of the end of the world also after completing his philosophy of religion. In the short text entitled *The End of All Things,* published by Kant in 1794 only a few months after the first edition of his philosophy of religion, Kant again investigates the idea of the end of time. In this case, Kant engages with the darker (this time, more apocalyptic than eschatological) side which this idea, beginning by describing the end of all time in reference to the sublime:

> This thought has something horrifying about it because it leads us as it were to the edge of an abyss: for anyone who sinks into it ("But in that earnest place/ him who holds nothing back/ Eternity holds fast in its strong arms." Haller); and yet there is something attractive there too: for one cannot cease turning his terrified gaze back to it again and again (*nequeunt expleri corda tuendo.* Vergil). It is frighteningly *sublime* partly because it is obscure, for the imagination [Einbildungskraft] works

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[81] Kant, 2000, § 59, p. 353.

harder [wirkt mächtiger] in darkness than it does in bright light. Yet in the end it must also be woven in a wondrous way into universal human reason, because it is encountered among all reasoning peoples at all times, clothed in one way or another.[82]

The fact that for Kant this thought has an aesthetic dimension is manifest not only in his quotation of two poets within one sentence, but also in his reference to the sublime. This thought is sublime because it confronts us with a frightening abyss and at the same time attracts us so that we cannot turn our gaze from it. However, what to me seems even more important is Kant's description of the role of imagination in this context. The thought of an absolute end, in which all time has disappeared and with it all empirical content, confronts us with a darkness in which imagination works harder – or, closer to the German original, in which it becomes more powerful – than in bright light. In the abyssal darkness of this thought, imagination gains more power and works more freely than it would when being regulated by a concept, as for example the concept of the highest good. This power of imagination very much resembles one of the central thoughts of Kant's analysis of the aesthetic power of judgment: the freedom of imagination that is not determined by a concept.[83] Kant even suggests that this idea of an end of all things is woven into universal human reason, and he presumes that it can be found in one form or another in all reasoning peoples at all times - not only in the Christian narrative, but also in other religions or even in non-religious narratives. Even if a reader of the 21st century cannot so easily affirm this last assumption, nevertheless Kant is explaining something that he takes to be a universal characteristic of human reason by using the category of the sublime. *He is trying to grasp the rational content of apocalypticism by encoding it with aesthetic categories*. In Kant's view, however, this aesthetic content is only connected to practical reason because of its analogy to morality. The idea of an end of time is neither of any theoretical value nor is it a direct, sensuous representation of practical reason. Rather it is only an analogous symbol that demonstrates in a negative manner that the final purpose of practical reason can never be achieved in an infinite progress of time.[84] It is only a negative symbol for the non-chronological logic of reason, but not a necessary dimension of reason itself.

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[82] Kant, 1996b, p. 327. Vergil, Aeneid: 8,265: "They cannot satisfy their hearts with gazing." Albrecht von Haller, Unvollkommene Ode über die Ewigkeit.
[83] See for example: "[…] since the freedom of the imagination consists precisely in the fact that it schematizes without a concept […]". Kant, 2000, § 35, p. 287.
[84] Cf. Kant, 1996b, p. 334.

So far, I have reflected on two exemplary cases in which Kant applied aesthetic categories, the beautiful and the sublime, in order to determine the relation between religion and reason and to verbalize the rational content of religious motifs. In the final chapter, I want to prepare a shift of perspective. This shift of perspective is a shift from ethics to aesthetics, which will lead beyond Kant.

4. From Ethics to Aesthetics

As seen above in his philosophy of religion, Kant acknowledges a human need to "demand for even the highest concepts and grounds of reason something the senses can hold on to". However, this stands in unresolved tension with the fact that no concepts of reason, and least of all of freedom, can have a sensuous representation. This is why aesthetics in Kant can at best contain analogies for practical reason, but these must be carefully differentiated from practical reason at all times. Probably nowhere else does Kant claim this more definitely than in his critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, when he writes: "For the *inscrutability* [*Unerforschlichkeit*] *of the idea of freedom* entirely precludes any positive presentation [...]."[85] Here Kant claims that there can never be any representation of the idea of freedom. In this context, freedom means nothing else than the fact that the moral law determines our will immediately without need of any representation of freedom. While this may be perfectly consistent with Kant's practical philosophy, I want to highlight now that within the same text, the *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment*, Kant also speaks about another kind of freedom. This freedom is something other than the freedom that is only the counterpart of the moral law; it is not freedom understood as a concept of reason but as a certain free movement of the faculties of the subject in the absence of a concept.

This sense of freedom first appears in the analysis of the beautiful when Kant explains that in the judgment of taste the faculties of cognition – imagination and understanding – enter into a free play that is not restricted by a determinate concept.[86] In a different but related manner, the analysis of the sublime demonstrates how the imagination produces a representation of a magnitude that is beyond any empirical measure, giving us not a sensual

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[85] Kant (2000), General remarks on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgments, p. 275.
[86] Cf. Kant, 2000, § 9, p. 217.

representation of ideas but instead letting us feel our own "receptivity to ideas"[87]. The sublime is not a sensuous representation of reason, but it is an animation or a stimulation of our sensitivity to reason. *From this, we can deduce that aesthetic modes, such as the beautiful and the sublime, are not representations of freedom, but rather a free way of representing the world.* In aesthetics the subject is affected by something with which the subject resonates, without immediately turning it into an object of cognition or of practical purpose. This absence of a theoretical or a practical concept does not mean the absence of rules. As Kant makes clear in the dialectics of the aesthetic power of judgment, in aesthetics the power of judgment gives itself its law instead of applying the law of a given concept.[88] This means that the freedom of imagination is in itself in accordance with the lawfulness of the faculty of understanding. As a result, in aesthetics a transition is possible from the sensible to the moral, that is to freedom, without a leap that is too violent[89], through freedom of imagination. While Kant's aesthetics makes possible such a transition from the sensible to morality, I assume that this transition is still defined by a hierarchy that puts morality and practical philosophy in the center and differentiates these from everything else - even if in some passages of Kant's aesthetics this hierarchy between the sensible and reason is almost turned upside down. This can be observed in Kant's reflections on aesthetic ideas:

> [B]y an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that 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, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.[90]

In passages like this, the field of aesthetics gains more and more autonomy. It is as if aesthetics almost produces its own freedom and even its own idea as a counterpart to the idea of reason. Aesthetic ideas confront us with a representation of imagination that animates our conceptual thought while that representation can never be fully grasped by a concept. When Kant connects aesthetic ideas above all with poetry in the following passage, he may have also had in mind some religious, especially eschatological motifs:

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[87] Kant, 2000, § 29, p. 265.
[88] Cf. Kant, 2000, § 59, p. 353.
[89] Cf. Kant, 2000, § 59, p. 354.
[90] Kant, 2000, § 49, p. 314.

> The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc., as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts if vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum; and it is really the art of poetry in which the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure.[91]

With regards to this passage, religious ideals could be best described as a form of poetry or as aesthetic ideas, instead of being described in ethical terms. However, in Kant aesthetics is still embedded in a hierarchical architecture of thought in which practical reason has the highest and ultimate position. In this way, in Kant a transition from aesthetics to ethics does not mean that a transition from ethics to aesthetics is possible. Practical reason remains the horizon of Kant's aesthetics. It is only in the successors of Kant that a shift from ethics to aesthetics can be observed. I suggest that the *Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, written in 1797, three years after Kant's philosophy of religion with Hölderlin[92] as one of its presumed authors, entails such a transition from ethics to aesthetics.[93] The beginning of this fragment is still situated entirely in Kant's practical philosophy, but after a few paragraphs it claims that the "highest act of reason" is an "aesthetic act"[94]. Moreover, it claims that not only the multitude, but also the philosopher, needs a "*sensual religion*"[95].

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[91] Kant, 2000, § 49, p. 314.

[92] Deibl demonstrates that Hölderlin, who at least contributed to the *Oldest Systematic Program* in terms of ideas, had already been familiar with Kant's aesthetics before. Cf. Jakob Deibl (2018), *Fehl und Wiederkehr der heiligen Namen. Anachronistische Zeitgenossenschaft Hölderlins* (ratio fidei, 63) Regensburg, Friedrich Pustet, p. 71.

[93] Besides Hölderlin, Hegel is also considered one of the authors of the *Oldest Systematic Program*. Appel demonstrates that Kant's analysis of the sublime was taken up by Hegel his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the chapter on *religion*. Cf. Kurt Appel (2022), "Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel and Musil", in: Kurt Appel (ed.), In Praise of Mortality. Christianity and New Humanism. Translated by Alex Skinner, Natalie Eder, Rachel Thomas, and Carl Raschke (Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society – Supplementa, Vol. 1), Paderborn, Brill Schöningh, pp. 1-33, here: p. 19. Hegel applies the notion of the sublime in his Phenomenology of Spirit in order to describe the first form of religion, which he names "The Luminous Essence". Cf. G. W. F. Hegel (2018), *Phenomenology of Spirit*, edited and translated by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, p. 399.

[94] Daniel Fidel Ferrer (ed.) (2021), *Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism: Translation and Notes*, Kuhn von Verde Verlag 2021, p. 23.

[95] Ferrer (ed.) (2021), *Oldest Systematic Program*, p. 23.

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European Society for Aesthetics

Can Poems do Philosophy?: the Philosopher as a Sportsman of the Mind

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ABSTRACT. My paper is a humble tribute to the life and work of the recently deceased († 9/15/21) French philosopher Jacques Bouveresse. He leans on the work of Paul Valéry (in short, on the philosophical poetry by an anti-philosopher) in order to claim the idea of the philosopher as a kind of sportsman of the intellect. The goals of this paper are: 1) to present Valéry's answer (from Bouveresse's interpretation) to the question "Can poems do philosophy?", 2) to compare Carroll's solution to the (parallel) problem of the existence or not of a philosophy through motion pictures, 3) to assess Bouveresse's -Valéry's solution from a complex twofold conception of philosophy (as a corpus of knowledge and as a *momentum* of thinking). Valéry's poetic style of writing is, thus, a kind of resistance to do philosophy and, at the same time, an attempt to care for and save philosophy. And maybe Bouveresse, in turn, with his essayistic style, has contributed valuably to dismantling the analytical vice of insisting on answering in a narrow way questions such as "Is it possible to do philosophy in cinema?" or "Is it possible to do philosophy in poetry?"

My paper is a humble tribute to the life and work of the recently deceased († 9/15/21) French philosopher Jacques Bouveresse, one of the most "analytic" French philosophers. In his book *De la philosophie considérée comme un sport* (2015), Bouveresse leans on the work of Paul Valéry (in short, on the work of an anti-philosopher) in order to claim the idea that the philosopher is a kind of sportsman or athlete of the intellect, and includes the examples of both the swimmer and the dancer.

The goals of this paper are to: 1) present Valéry's answer (based on Bouveresse's interpretation) to the question "Can poems do philosophy?"; 2) compare Noël Carroll's solution to the (parallel) problem of the existence or not of a philosophy through motion pictures; 3) assess Bouveresse's / Valéry's solution from a complex twofold conception of philosophy (as a corpus of knowledge and as a *momentum* of thinking),; and 4) illustrate Bouveresse's - Valéry's thesis with some examples of Valéry's work.

Thierry Discepolo, in his previous note to Bouveresse's book, points out that a very French tradition wants philosophy to be literary. In contrast,

> Turning his back on that program of fusion-confusion between philosophy and literature, Jacques Bouveresse, who takes the side of exact, argumentative philosophy, inscribed in the space of reason, never goes so far in his fight against the pitfalls of philosophical language and some of the redhibitory vices that philosophy suffers, as in his dialogue with the writers who have always made a clear distinction between philosophy and literature; writers (Musil, Kraus, etc. - here Valéry) who, aware of the powers of language, masters of the art of words and obsessed with accuracy, have often written against mystifications, verbiage, and 'phrases' which are used by intellectuals of all kinds and also frequently by philosophers themselves. (Bouveresse, 2015, pp. vii-viii)[97]

All the same, Bouveresse, relying on Valéry, tries to resolve the difficult balance between the philosopher, the artist and the sage (or scientist) through the image of the philosopher as a "sportsman of the intellect" which Valéry applies to himself, and to his philosophical (or anti-philosophical) work. In the end, this is the subterfuge through which Valéry claims himself as, in a certain way, a philosopher, while at the same time moving the armchair of traditional philosophy.

The main aim of my paper is to give a new approach to the question "Can poems do philosophy?" or, in other words, "Is it possible to do philosophy through poetry?" I start from Bouveresse's thesis according to which poetry was for Valéry an instrument (and never a goal) in his pursuit of "purity and precision" and in this sense he never did anything other than philosophy, even in his poetic work. Bouveresse thinks that "it is on this side and this one only that we must look to in order to qualify his [Valéry's] poetry as philosophical" (Bouveresse, 2015, pp. 8-9). But at the same time, Bouveresse highlights the tension (a contradictory tension,

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[97] My translation.

even) in Valéry's position in order to try to take care of philosophy. Valéry wants to "save philosophy" by making it independent of the sciences and mysticism, but also of the arts.

> For him the serious real thing surely does not reside on the side of the philosophers, but rather on the side of wise men [scientists] and artists. Nevertheless, turning himself into a wise man [a scientist] is something that the philosopher cannot do, and turning himself into an artist is something he could do in principle, but he does not want to do and probably cannot want to do. (Bouveresse 2015, p. 75)

Valéry would precisely like philosophy, in order to be able to be taken seriously again, to agree to impose on itself constraints and resistances at least as rigorous as those of poetry. Philosophy does not seek the truth, but cultivates the forces and organizations which serve to seek or make the truth. Here is the reason why Valéry claims there is a "sporting" philosopher without any illusions - the swimmer, the dancer, who goes nowhere-, and philosophy is just a man's work about himself.

The question "Can poems do philosophy?" looks a lot like the question "Can motion pictures do philosophy?" which has been considered by Noël Carroll (2006). By "doing philosophy through film" and not just illustrating a philosophical question or philosophical authors, a movie must have been made really "*by means of* the art of the moving image" (Carroll, 2006, p. 174). The conclusion for Carroll in this paper is that there is at least one film —*Serene Velocity* (1970) by Ernie Gehr— that may be said, unequivocally, to be an example of doing philosophy through film, even if he does not think that this is the only example. In my opinion[98], Carroll's solution can be relativized by distinguishing between philosophy as a body of knowledge and philosophy as a *momentum* of thinking in a very large and varied range of activities.

Of course, on the one hand, the *momentum* of philosophy (philosophy as *momentum*) is not exclusive to professional philosophers. It arrives when we momentarily need to stop the current working of our language in order to see it (so to speak) from the outside, namely, in order to make a leap from one comprehensive level (or dimension) to another. Briefly, the

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[98] See my RUBIO MARCO, Salvador: "Philosophizing through moving-image artworks: an alternative way out", Dorsch, F. & Ratiu, D-E. (eds.) *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 7, 2015, pp. 428-438, (Open Access Journal, Swiss ISSN Centre of the Swiss National Library, ISSN number: 1664 – 5278). http://www.eurosa.org/volumes/7/ESA-Proc-7-2015-Rubio-Marco.pdf

answer to the question 'can we do philosophy through poems?' would be similar to the answer to the question 'can we do philosophy through moving-images?' Obviously 'yes', for we can do activities of conceptual clearing up, of viewing (or making a view of) a thing in a new comprehensive dimension, an *übersichlichte Darstellung* (in Wittgensteinian terms) where the previous perplexity loses its itching effect, through films, pieces of film or kinetic experiments, words (in prose or poetry), still images (such as photos, paintings or drawings) or sounds (music or a particular voice inflection). And actually, "philosophy" refers to an activity rather than to an object.

On the other hand, in his attempt to answer the question 'can motion pictures do philosophy, and not only illustrate philosophical ideas?', Carroll appeals to a very restricted notion of philosophy when he stipulates that, in order to be a piece of "*original* philosophizing" (Carroll, 2006, p. 179), something has to be *philosophical* "in the strong sense of being an original addition to the fund of philosophical knowledge" (Carroll, 2006,174). If we accept that restricted notion, we have enough academic criteria (reviews, books, conferences, syllabuses, etc.) to look into it. But in the case of poems, we have some additional difficulties in being able to know when they "would be worthy of the sobriquet of 'philosophy'" (Carroll, 2006, p. 182). For historically, the corpus of philosophical contributions includes several texts which may be classified, if not strictly as poems, at least as something that is not strictly prose. Think, for example, of Heraclitus, Lucretius, Friedrich Nietzsche or María Zambrano.

But, coming back to Valéry, unlike Carroll with *Serene Velocity* (philosophy through cinema), Valéry does not pretend (in general) that his poetry is philosophy through poetry. Additionally, there is a sense in which Valéry can accept that the poet has "his philosophy", but this does not mean, for him, that poetry is assessed as philosophy through poetry, and consequently Valéry does not try to make philosophy through his poetry. I quote Valéry:

> Every true poet is much more capable than is generally known of right reasoning and abstract thought.
>
> But one must no look for his real philosophy in his more or less philosophical utterances. In my opinion, the most authentic philosophy lies no so much in the objects of our reflection as in the very act of thought and in its handling. Take from metaphysics all its pet or special terms, all its traditional vocabulary, and you may realize that you have not impoverished the thought. Indeed, you may perhaps have eased and freshened it, and you will have got rid of other people's problems, so as to

deal only with your own difficulties, your surprises that owe nothing to anyone, and whose intellectual spur you feel actually and directly. (Valéry 2007, p. 65)

In explaining and interpreting Valéry, Bouveresse seems to describe his ideal of philosophy, stripped of its metaphysical excrescences and its scientific pretensions, which would finally know what it is itself and he would be content to excel at it: a sport of the mind. Precisely, the idea of philosophy as a sport is a way of expressing that tension, but not without raising new questions: Is philosophical poetry that is not philosophy possible? Is the work of Valéry an example of philosophical poetry which avoids being properly philosophy?

In order to answer these questions, we have to look closer at Valéry's work. Certainly, it includes a big range of very different formal styles of writing, from the pure philosophical essay (for example: from his very well-known lecture at the University of Oxford in 1939 on poetry and abstract thought), to pure poetry (as for example his celebrated poem *Le cimetière marin*, *The Graveyard by the Sea*), having room, in the middle, for more hybrid and complex examples, namely the *Dialogue de l'arbre* (*Dialogue of the Tree*). Valéry has translated Virgil's *Book of Bucolics* into French, originally written in Latin in dactylic hexameter. In the *Dialogue of the Tree*, Valéry borrows the ambience and the character of Tityrus from Virgil's *Bucolics*, and he retakes the Greek formula of the dialogue (between Tityrus and Lucretius), but in this case the dialogue is written in French by means of blank verses, it is, words without rhyme, but with a very elaborated rhythm and sound, made to be heard, rather than read. Tityrus is the shepherd poet, sensitive and spontaneous. Lucretius is the thinker, the wise-man, the philosopher-scientist looking for knowledge. The dialogue becomes an insoluble (and unresolved) struggle addressing the Tree (a huge beech that is above them). Tityrus declares his immediate devotion to the spectacle and the delights of nature. By contrast, Lucretius gives priority to the intellectual approach by means of biology and abstract thought.

Let us see a brief excerpt, first in original French (read by the actor Louis Latourre [99]), in order to hear and appreciate the style in blank verses, and secondly translated into English:

Says Tityre (Tityrus):

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[99] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbeKe3MSaO8 (accessed 2/11/2022).

Mais pour toi, grand Lucrèce et ta secrète soif, qu'est-ce que la parole, une fois qu'elle chante? Elle y perd le pouvoir de porsuivre le vrai… Oui, je sais ce que vaut ce que m'enseigne l'Arbre. Il me dit ce qu'il veut que je veuille sentir. Je change ce que j'aime en délices secondes, et j'abandone à l'air ce qui me vient des Cieux. Rien de plus, rien de moins... (Valéry, 2019, p. 136)

But great Lucretius, you –you with your secret thirst—what is the *word*, O what, when it begins to sing? It loses in that act the power to follow truth… Yes, I know well the worth of what the Tree imparts. It tells me what it would that I should wish to feel. I change that which I love into yet further joys, abandoning to air what comes to me from Heaven. Nothing more, nothing less… (Valéry, 1977, p. 330)

and (Lucrèce) Lucretius replies that way to Tityre (Tytirus), a few lines further:

Tu n'aimes que ton hymne et tu me plais ainsi. Au Hêtre solennel, tu prends de quoi chanter les remous de sa forme et ses oiseaux sonores [...]. (Valéry, 2019, p. 136)

You love only your hymn –and so please me the more. From the majestic Beech you take wherewith to sing the eddies of its form and its sonorous birds […]. (Valéry, 1977, p. 330)

The very end of the *Dialogue of the Tree* is a poetic testimony of that end in a tie:

Tityre: Mais tu deviens toi-même un arbre de paroles…
Lucrèce: Oui... La méditation rayonnante m'enivre... et je sens tous les mots dans mon âme frémir.
Tityre: Je te laisse dans cet état admirable. Il me faut à present ressembler mon troupeau. Prends garde à la fraîcher du soir qui vient si vite. (Valéry, 2019, p. 155)

Tityrus: But you become yourself a very tree of words...
Lucretius: Yes… Radiant meditation fills me with rapture… And in my soul I feel all words atremble.
Tityrus: I leave you in that admirable state. But I must now gather my flock again. Mind the cool of the evening –it comes so quickly. (Valéry 1977, p. 348)

At this point, perhaps we are tempted to say that all of our problems would disappear once it is admitted that there are some texts in Valéry's work which can be classified as "philosophical

poetry", or even, complementarily, that some of them could be classified as "poetic philosophy". But, as we have seen when we pay attention not just to the form but also the content (the topic) of those texts, that classificatory solution will not exhaust the power of the tension between poetry and philosophy in Valery's thought. In fact, the poetic characteristics of the *Dialogue of the Tree* would satisfy in some way Carroll's exigence of being made *by means of* the art of poetry in order to doing philosophy through poetry. Nevertheless, at the same time, the poetic form serves as an escape from philosophy for Valéry.

Bouveresse admires the exercise of being a tightrope walker in Valéry's work. Of course, the mind does not work in an idle condition: the resistance to things is indispensable to it, as is water for the swimmer, gravity for the dancer or for the tightrope walker. Philosophy should never be free from this resistance: it takes knowledge to exercise intelligence, and reality to soften the mind. The *Dialogue of the Tree* is pervaded by that tension. The physical presence of the Tree (a big beech) plays a central role in the text, as a kind of heart or engine which moves the dialogue, but is ultimately nothing more than a role (a character) in this "tree of words" that turns out to be the *Dialogue of the Tree*. The sensual sonority which constitutes one of the main characteristics of the poetic side of the *Dialogue of the Tree* becomes a symbol of the sensitive (and fictional, at the same time) relationship with the Tree. And the pairing of *sensibility / intellectual understanding* may unfold for the reader inside the symbolic world of the dialogue. The philosopher, but also the scientist and the poet, must accept the challenge of confronting their peculiar way of managing their relationship with real world and language. Valéry is especially pessimistic in the case of the philosopher, whose misbalance between pretentions and instruments becomes, for him, disappointing.

Bouveresse (2004, p. 278) remarks on a patent parallelism between Valéry and Wittgenstein: both share the idea that the philosophical problems are essentially of linguistic origin, but they disagree concerning the conviction of their interest and their importance. Wittgenstein seems to reserve a high task for the philosopher. Valéry cannot avoid the image of the philosopher as a kind of caged thinker. He is attached to the use of the ordinary language (unlike the poet) and at the same time he aspires to an appearance of accuracy and precision (unlike the scientist), even if most philosophical problems are in fact false problems resulting from a metaphysical forcing of ordinary language. Nevertheless, the philosopher is also like the athlete, "who makes unnecessary movements, but his muscles can be used on occasion"

(Valéry quoted in Bouveresse, 2015, p. 31).

Valéry compares words with "light planks which one throws across a ditch or a mountain crevasse". When we use such words as "time" or "life" in everyday speech, they are "utterly limpid, precise, honest, and faithful", but when they become "isolated, caught on the wing", being "the object of a terrible philosophical desire", "it turns into an enigma, an abyss, a torment of thought". (Valéry 2007, p. 61)

> Each and every word that enables us to leap so rapidly across the chasm of thought, and to follow the prompting of an idea that constructs its own expression, appears to me like one of those light planks which one throws across a ditch or a mountain crevasse and which will bear a man crossing it rapidly. But he must pass without weighing on it, without stopping –above all, he must not take it into his head to dance on the slender plank to test its resistance!... Otherwise the fragile bridge tips or breaks immediately, and all is hurled into the depths. (Valéry, 2007, p. 61)

A famous Cartier-Bresson's photo, (*Derrière la gare Saint-Lazare*, 1932[100]) comes to mind illustrating Valéry's metaphor.

But provisionality also implies a danger. And the thinking must fight against that provisionality by means of looking for some precision. Not just the philosopher, but the poet also looks for precision, even if he does it in another way and for a different purpose in order to be able to make the words *his own words* and to liberate them for the readers once they have been reenergised. Now Valéry says that words are like banknotes or checks:

> But how are we to think […] if we hold language to be something essentially provisional, as a banknote or a check is provisional, what we call its "value" requiring us to forget its true nature, which is that of a piece of paper, generally dirty? The paper has passed through so many hands... But words have passed through so many mouths, so many phrases, so many uses and abuses, that the most delicate precautions must be taken to avoid too much confusion in our minds between what we think and are trying to think, and what dictionaries, authors, and, for that matter, the whole human race since the beginning of language, want us to think…   (Valéry, 2007, p. 61)

As a response to Valéry, I want to propose that we play at thinking of the philosopher as someone who practices the exercise of walking, up and down, on the light planks of words

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[100] See https://www.centrepompidou.fr/es/ressources/oeuvre/cByr4z (accessed 2/11/2022).

without crossing them quickly, but avoiding stopping and, therefore, sinking them with his weight, being aware at the same time that his effort has no other goal than himself. In order to do this, he has to measure his movements very precisely, he has to be in good shape, to take care of his weight and his effort, knowing well the areas and surfaces of the plank that he steps on. Perhaps that is the image of the only possible philosopher, for Valéry. There, the philosopher would be much more like a dancer, a tightrope walker, an athlete or a gymnast doing their exercises, than a traditional philosopher (Rodin's *Thinker*, for example). A guy who, it must be said, seen from the outside, would have seemed curious, apparently useless, maybe even comical, and a bit ridiculous, in his behavior.

To conclude, the relationship between Valéry himself and philosophy seems to have been marked both by his desire to preserve it while ridding it of its illusions. One of the suggestions he makes (and sometimes applies to literature as well) about the way in which it can hope to survive is to conceive and practice it now essentially as a sport. Valéry's poetic style of writing is, thus, a kind of resistance to do philosophy and, at the same time, an attempt to care for and save philosophy. And maybe Bouveresse, in turn, with his essayistic style, has contributed valuably to dismantling the analytical vice of insisting on answering in a narrow way questions such as "Is it possible to do philosophy in cinema?" or "Is it possible to do philosophy in poetry?"

In other words: Bouveresse's legacy has a therapeutic value which consists of solving conceptual misunderstandings (just as his admired Wittgenstein has claimed), but at the same time Bouveresse has the courage to provide an alternative counter balance to the tendency (a typically analytic tendency) in traying to answer philosophical questions by means of taking a stance on one side or the other of the debate, and very often by means of looking for too simplistic and "definitive" answers. And all that from the perspective of a very "unFrench" philosopher, who is really close to the analytic stream, and paradoxically (or maybe not so paradoxically) one of the most valuable French philosophers of recent decades.

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Wanting Austin Inside Out: Viral Poetics and Queer Theory

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ABSTRACT. My aim in this paper is to investigate how some elements from queer theory—insofar as it investigates the disruption of social norms—can provide key insights into thinking the virality of language. This virality of language, that describes how some linguistic practices contaminate performative from within, is especially visible in poetic practices and what I call viral poetics. More specifically, by focusing on works that have been categorized as autotheory, I explore how the performative force of poetry affects language and the constitution of the subject. My paper is divided in three parts focusing each on an author and highlighting one specific notion related to viral poetics: Paul Preciado with the notion of performativity, Maggie Nelson with the notion of identity, and Kae Tempest with the idea of creativity.

1. Introduction

> We must know whether we want to change the world to experience it with the same sensorial system as the one we already possess, or whether we'd rather modify our body, the somatic filter through which it passes. Which is preferable: changing my personality and keeping my body, or changing my body and keeping my current manner of experiencing reality? A fake dilemma. Our personalities arise from this very gap between body and reality. (Preciado, 2013, p. 237)

"Always, I wanted marriage inside out" (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 34) says Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in one of her poems. And marriage is, as we know since J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, exemplary of the performativity of language. To want marriage inside out would mean

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to want Austin inside out, to uncover an alternative that lies dormant behind his normative performative that excludes, silences, oppresses those who do not conform. To want the performative inside out would therefore mean to include what Austin decides to exclude, namely what he (in)famously calls parasitic utterances. This alternative has been explored by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler among others, and I aim to pursue their reflection by focusing on the virality of language that is at play in poetic practices. This virality is helpful to understand how some creative uses of language can contaminate the dominant performative from within. A viral performative brings to the fore the disruptive force of language which is especially visible in poetic uses of language. I use the term poetic in a broad way, not focusing especially on poetry as a genre, but rather as creative practices that are at play in language. This virality of poetic uses of language poses a challenge to Austin's conservative picture of language and might explain why he excludes them from his consideration and casts them aside as parasitic (Austin, 1975, p. 22). However, if we follow Derrida's interpretation of Austin, the origin of parasitism lies in the very iterative nature of the performative (Derrida, 1988, pp. 13–19). Indeed, if the performative gains force only through the reiteration of utterances and if there is no way of distinguishing parasitic utterances from ordinary ones at first glance, the parasite is a possibility that is always already there in our uses of language. In this sense, poetic phenomena function as silent viruses contaminating the performative from within. In the iterations necessary for the performative to exist lies the possibility for the virus to replicate. This viral replication and contamination of ordinary language challenges the traditional categories of thought, and especially, following Butler's initiative, the notions of subject, gender and identity (Butler, 1997b, p. 144).

In contemporary literary theory, the challenge of these notions has been a central objective of feminist and queer theory. Against the dominant performative, queer theory can be seen, following Sedgwick, as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.' (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8) While the dominant performative establishes an order that supposedly cannot be moved, queer theory aims to see the world as open possibilities. Meaning is no longer monolithic, it is no longer established once and for all, but is constituted through these possibilities. Language moves from a tool of oppression to one of creation. Although queer

theory seems to focus on that which refuses to be performative, on that which refuses to produce and reproduce, it does not necessarily mean that it must be opposed to the performativity of viral poetics. Indeed, this opposition is only apparent as the performativity of viral poetics moves away from the Austinian focus on the illocutionary (the conventional) and towards the perlocutionary (the unconventional).

My aim in this paper is to explore how some features of queer theory provide key insights in wanting Austin inside out. My paper is divided in three parts, each focusing on a writer who highlights the disruptive and transformative force of poetry in a specific way. The first part recasts the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction in order to highlight the disruptive force of language in Paul Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus*. This intertwining of disruption and performativity leads me, in the second part, to consider the generation of significance related to subject identity in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. The third and final part explores the notion of creativity that is central to this generation of significance in Kae Tempest's *On Connection*.

2. Paul Preciado on the Performativity of Language

In a chapter intitled 'The Attractive Force of a Break-Up,' Preciado explores how the performativity of language establishes institutions and becomes a tool for oppression: 'Performative force is the result of the violent imposition of a norm that we prefer to call nature to avoid confronting the reorganization of the social relationships of power that any change in conventions would bring about.'(Preciado, 2019, p. 98) In order to acquire its dominant position, the performative must disguise itself. This disguise takes the name 'nature.' By passing as natural, the dominant performative becomes a universal truth, an objective matter of fact. Preciado challenges the traditional opposition between nature and culture by showing that nature is already a cultural phenomenon.

In this sense, it is through a disguise (*nature*) that dominant performatives (*culture*) act upon and regulate social norms. Following Butler, Preciado considers this disguise in linguistic terms:

Butler would go even further in her thinking about utterances on identity (gender identity, but also sexual and racial identity, 'man', 'woman', 'homosexual', 'black', etc.) as performative utterances that pass as constative, perlocutionary acts that pass as illocutionary acts, words that produce what they are supposed to describe, questions that take the form of scientific statements, or commands that are presented as ethnographic portrayals. (Preciado, 2019, p. 99)

The disguise is elaborate: dominant performatives present themselves as constatives, as if they were matters of fact rather than interpretations. They are perlocutionary acts that present themselves as illocutionary acts. While illocutionary acts are conventional and as it were automatic (the illocutionary force is active as soon as the utterance is spoken), perlocutionary acts are extralinguistic effects of language that are not totally controllable. By disguising themselves as illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts become immediately effective. The dominant performative controls perlocutionary effects by making them pass as illocutionary. One way to undermine the dominant performative is therefore to reveal its perlocutionary— and hence purely cultural—nature.

The word 'break-up' translates the French *rupture* which includes the broader meaning of rupture. In this idea of rupture lies the disruptive force of language and the attraction of break-up becomes the attraction of the disruptive. If the reiteration of performative utterances establishes social norms and if the possibility of parasitism lies within this reiteration, then it might be possible to modify, affect, infect the dominant performative. There is an attraction of disruption that brings to resist the normativity of ordinary language. It is in this resistance that lies the possibility of creating something different, as Preciado argues:

For the subaltern, speaking implies not simply resisting the violence of the hegemonic performative, but above all imagining dissident theatres where the production of a different performative force can be possible. Inventing a new scene of enunciation, as Jacques Rancière would say. Disidentifying oneself in order to reconstruct the subjectivity damaged by the dominant performative language. (Preciado, 2019, p. 99)

Preciado uses the term 'subaltern' to name the oppressed, silenced minority following Gayatri Spivak's famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak, 1999) And he argues that the only way for the subaltern to escape the domination of the performative is to invent a different stage, a stage in which the dominant performative will appear as it is and lose its performative force.

Poetic and artistic works are ways of creating such alternative stages by bringing to the fore the disruptive force of language.

To focus on an alternative performative force means moving from the illocutionary to the perlocutionary. Although Austin acknowledges the difficulty of the perlocutionary in his theory, the "likeliest to give trouble," (Austin, 1975, p. 109) he casts it aside rather rapidly. This notion has however received renewed attention, especially since Stanley Cavell's essay 'Performative and Passionate Utterance.' Cavell contrasts the performative *qua* illocutionary with the passionate *qua* perlocutionary: "A performative utterance is an offer of participation in the order of law. And perhaps we can say: A passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire." (Cavell, 2008, p. 185) To move away from the convention of the dominant performative and include parasitic uses of language, we must move towards the perlocutionary.

Sedgwick further challenges this conventionality of the performative: "The fascinating and powerful class of negative performatives—disavowal, demur, renunciation, deprecation, repudiation, "count me out," giving the lie—is marked, in almost every instance, by the asymmetrical property of being much less prone to becoming conventional than the positive performatives." (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 70) This idea of negative performatives moves away from the conventionality of illocution and towards the unconventionality and unpredictability of perlocution. It is important to note that a negative performative does not negate the existence of the performative but rather disrupts or displaces it. As Julie Rak argues, it is "a refusal that does not negate the original statement." (Rak, 2021) To avoid the confusion between refusal and negation, Sedgwick coins the term periperformative: 'By contrast to the performative, the periperformative is the mode in which people may invoke illocutionary acts in the explicit context of other illocutionary acts. Thus, it can also accomplish something toward undoing that fateful reliance of explicit performativity on *the exemplary*, on the single example—which so often has meant, for instance, in the contingency of philosophical and literary practice, the exemplarity of the marriage act itself. (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 79) The periperformative highlights how an illocutionary act can contaminate another illocutionary act. But more than that, it means that the illocutionary is not set once and for all, that it can be changed and, with this changeable nature, the illocutionary becomes closer to the perlocutionary. The periperformative moves in the vicinity of the performative but highlights a different point. While Austin's performative

remains stuck in the exemplary, the periperformative opens the possibility to escape this exemplarity and to understand how contamination can occur between performatives, how it is possible to turn the performative inside out.

Preciado considers that there are two steps to overcome the dominant performative:

> On the one hand, it is imperative to distinguish ourselves from the dominant scientific, technological, commercial, legal languages that comprise the cognitive skeleton of the epistemology of sexual difference and techno-patriarchal capitalism. On the other, it is urgent to invent a new grammar that allows us to imagine another social organization of forms of life. (Preciado, 2019, p. 50)

First, as we have seen, we must move away from the dominant language, the one that disguises its performativity in factuality, its cultural contingency in a natural necessity. Against the institutionalized *illocutionary* force around which Austin centres his analysis (marriage, christening, etc.), poetic uses of language disrupt these linguistic institutions: the *perlocutionary* force of the poetic disrupts the *illocutionary* force at play in our ordinary uses of language. To operate such a revolution requires a certain rupture which breaks with the dominant system, as Preciado argues: 'any revolution, subjective or social, demands an exile of the voice, a suspension of gesture, a rupture of utterance, the reconnection with the etymological lines that had been closed, or else an outright cut into living language in order to introduce a difference to it (differ*a*nce), a spacing (*espacement*), or as Derrida would say, "an improvised anarchy."' (Preciado, 2021, p. 168) As language is historically and performatively construed and constantly changes, the only way to operate a revolution is to act on this language, to create a difference and a *differance*.

Second, to create this *differance*, we must invent new forms of life. This invention is the task of poetry according to Henri Meschonnic as he considers that "a poem exists only if a form of life transforms a form of language and reciprocally if a form of language transforms a form of life.[102]" (Meschonnic, 2001, p. 292) Poetic utterances have the effect of transforming forms of language and forms of life to escape the dominant discourse. This conception connects

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[102] My translation: 'il y a poème seulement si une forme de vie transforme une forme de langage et si réciproquement une forme de langage transforme une forme de vie.'

the poetic to the world, and one of the ways in which poetry affects the world is through the notion of subject. Meschonnic claims that "There is no subject without the subject of a poem.[103]" (Meschonnic, 2001, p. 292) It is through the performative (or passionate in Cavell's terms) language of the poem that subjects can shape themselves and constitute themselves as subjects. The notion of poem must be understood here in a broad way, as a use of language that affects the reader and the world.

3. Linguistic Constitution of Identity

With the performative, the position of the speaker (subject) becomes of central significance. As Sedgwick argues: "[Discussions of linguistic performativity] also deal with how powerfully language positions: does it change the way we understand meaning, for instance, if the semantic force of a word like "queer" is so different in a first-person from what it is in a second- or third-person sentence?" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 11) If meaning is no longer construed in terms of 'objective' reference but in terms of 'subjective' performance, it cannot be separated from the position of the speaker. Language is not something neutral but is dependent on the speaking subject and the context of utterance. A queer theory of language therefore shows that the social norms and conventions embedded in language can be overturned, can be modified, that language is not an obstacle to change but a place of endless possibilities.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler comments on Nietzsche's idea that "there is no doer behind the deed" in order to show that gender is a doing rather than a given: "within the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed." (Butler, 1990, p. 34) Against the idea that the there is a doer that does something, a performative conception of the subject considers that the deed constitutes the subject, in the same way language acts upon the world rather than merely representing it. There is no subject before language because language performatively constitutes the subject.

This constitution of the subject is at the core of Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. Following the famous thought experiment of Theseus' ship, Argo, Nelson questions whether

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[103] My translation: 'Pas de sujet sans sujet du poème.'

there is some constancy to our identity. Indeed, the thought experiment goes as follows: imagine that over the course of its various travels, the pieces of wood that constitute Argo have all been replaces by new ones. Is the ship still the same ship even though none of its original pieces of wood remain? The underlying question is: what constitutes the identity of this ship? And by extension what constitutes the identity of the human subject?

Nelson translates this question in the field of language: can two utterances be identical? Are the iterations of the performative always the same? She relates these questions to Roland Barthes's reflection on the utterance 'I love you:'

> A day or two after my love pronouncement, now feral with vulnerability, I sent you the passage from Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes in which Barthes describes how the subject who utters the phrase 'I love you' is like 'the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name.' Just as the Argo's parts may be replaced over time but the boat is still called the Argo, whenever the lover utters the phrase 'I love you,' its meaning must be renewed by each use, as 'the very task of love and of language is to give to one and the same phrase inflections which will be forever new.' (Nelson, 2016, p. 5)

To what does (if it does) the utterance 'I love you' owe its constancy? As the 'I' and the 'you' can differ and are perhaps always imperfect linguistic constructs and as the notion of love can vary according to subjects and time, what makes 'I love you' meaningful? This utterance that seems universal, insofar as it is constantly reproduced in our lives and in cultural phenomena such as films, TV shows, songs, literature, poetry, etc., might in fact mean something different for each of us. By saying 'I love you,' I am always saying (and hence doing) something new.

The problem that Nelson raises is that of the performativity of language and how language comes to meaning something. It is the poetic question of the generation of significance. As she further suggests:

> Words change depending on who speaks them; there is no cure. The answer isn't just to introduce new words (boi, cisgendered, andro-fag) and then set out to reify their meanings (though obviously there is power and pragmatism here). One must also become alert to the multitude of possible uses, possible contexts, the wings with which each word can fly. Like when you whisper, you're just a hole, letting me fill you up. Like when I say husband. (Nelson, 2016, 9)

Creating new words and meanings is not sufficient to change the world. Following what we explored with Preciado, if we want the dominant performative inside out, we need to create new uses of words, new scenes of enunciation. Words are nothing in themselves, but only acquire a force once they are used. Opening new possibilities for words, giving them new wings to use Nelson's image, is the only way to change the world. As long as we remain within the framework of the metaphysics of substance in which words have reified meanings that point out towards things in the world, we cannot hope to act upon the world.

As Nelson further suggests, we need to move away from a language of assertion, away from the 'totalizing language' of the dominant performative:

> Afraid of assertion. Always trying to get out of 'totalizing' language, i.e., language that rides roughshod over specificity; realizing this is another form of paranoia. Barthes found the exit to this merry-go-round by reminding himself that 'it is language which is assertive, not he.' It is absurd, Barthes says, to try to flee from language's assertive nature by 'add[ing] to each sentence some little phrase of uncertainty, as if anything that came out of language could make language tremble.' (Nelson, 2016, p. 122)

The danger of language is its propensity towards generality and totality. One of the problems of the metaphysics of language is, as Wittgenstein puts it, its 'craving for generality.' (Wittgenstein, 2008, p. 17) Or in Nietzschean terms its 'equating unequal things.' (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 83) It is the process of totalization that is problematic as it hides and minorizes the subject's experiences. By refusing the social order imposed by language, queer theory becomes a parasite, but one that inverts Austin's evaluation of parasitism. The parasite is not that which passively feeds onto the social order (abuses it rather than uses it), but that which actively transforms it from within. It refuses to play the game of the dominant performative in order to play an alternative game; it breaks down totalizing language to express new potentialities and intensities.

This move away from totalizing language modifies the dominant performative. Not by imposing another normativity, but by undermining the question of normativity. Without normativity there is just a range of possibilities. Tyler Bradway considers this point to be where Nelson's work joins queer theory: "Nelson decenters sexual transgression from queerness, but her goal is not to enshrine another mode of relationality in its place. Rather, she wants to narrate

queerness in a way that does not presume one set of practices or relations has the monopoly "on the so-called radical, or the so-called normative."" (Bradway, 2021, p. 718) By avoiding to replace one normativity by another, Nelson aims at keeping the subject in this fluidity that can never be fixed.

Following Sedgwick, Nelson places this reflection within the framework of queer theory:

> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wanted to make way for 'queer' to hold all kinds of resistances and fracturings and mismatches that have little or nothing to do with sexual orientation. 'Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant' she wrote. 'Keenly, it is relational, and strange.' She wanted the term to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of placeholder—a nominative, like Argo, willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. That is what reclaimed terms do—they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive. (Nelson, 2016, p. 35)

The question of identity (gender, sexual orientation, but to a broader extent 'all kinds of resistances and fracturings and mismatches') is central to Sedgwick's understanding of the notion of 'queer.' And it is in this sense that queer theory can provide tools to understand viral poetics. According to Annamarie Jagose, queer theory is based on the theory of performativity: "Like the theory of performativity, which to a large extent underwrites its project, queer opts for denaturalisation as its primary strategy." (Jagose, 1996, p. 98) As we have seen with Preciado and Butler, there is a process of denaturalization, i.e., of showing that what the dominant performative imposes as natural is in fact socio-culturally constituted. As Jagose further argues:

> While the concept of performativity includes these and other self-reflexive instances, equally—if less obviously—it explains those everyday productions of gender and sexual identity which seem most to evade explanation. For gender is performative, not because it is something that the subject deliberately and playfully assumes, but because, through reiteration, it consolidates the subject. In this respect, performativity is the precondition of the subject. (Jagose, 1996, p. 86)

The subject is performatively constituted, and we can understand Meschonnic's idea that 'There is no subject without the subject of a poem' as a claim that it is through poetic means

that the subject reaches the understanding of its own performativity. The subject is performatively constituted, and usually follows the norms of the dominant performative that reiterates itself constantly.

However, as we have seen, in the idea that performances repeat themselves also lies the possibility of disruption. In the multiple iterations lie the possibility for viral action. As Butler argues in her essay 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination:' "If every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity, then every repetition requires an interval between the acts, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted." (Fuss, 1991, p. 28) In this sense, poetic uses of language are ways of affecting identity in its iterations, to performatively act upon the categories of thought and socio-cultural norms. As Donald Hall argues: "In its emphasis upon the disruptive, the constructed, the tactical, and performative, queer analysis reveals some of the ways in which many late-modern individuals experience the fractured and contingent nature of human existence in the twenty-first century." (Hall, 2003, p. 5) Queer theory therefore invites us to reconsider the notion of the subject by showing how it is performatively constituted. It further suggests that the metaphysical dualisms that pervade our conceptual scheme are less natural than cultural. As social constructs, Sedgwick considers that "a deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are peculiarly densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind." (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 10) The deconstruction of these metaphysical dualisms opens a space for 'powerful manipulation.' It is this space of manipulation that poetry aims to create, in order to offer an alternative to the traditional categories of thought.

4. Kae Tempest and the Creative Connection of Poetry

We have seen that the performativity of language constitutes the subject and that we need new uses of words in order to overcome the dominant performative. In her comment of Nietzsche's idea that there is no doer behind the deed, Butler insists on one specific word: "Nietzsche's own language elides this problem by claiming that the "der Täter ist zum Tun bloß hinzugedichtet." This passive verb formation, "hinzugedichtet," poetically or fictively added on to, appended, or applied, leaves unclear who or what executes this fairly consequential

formation." (Butler, 1997a, p. 46) The question is: who poetically adds the doer to the deed? And how is it done? The word '*hinzugedichtet*' is of central significance as it contains the idea of '*dichten*,' the idea of poetry.

This idea is what can be seen in Kae Tempest saying that "Telling poems levels the room." (Tempest, 2020, p. 21) In telling poems, language ceases to be a tool of oppression to become a creative and transformative one. As Tempest further argues: "Naked language has a humanising effect; listening to someone tell their story, people noticeably opened up, became more vulnerable, and let their defences down; the rooms got less frosty, less confrontational." (Tempest, 2020, p. 22) The force of telling poems resides in this idea that they change the way of relating to language and the world. These poems open a space in which language is not used for confrontation or judgment, but as a means to overcome them: "Each time I have walked into strange rooms with poems to tell, I have had to confront my own insecurities and judgements about who I was talking to and why, and each time I was taught something about what connects us being more powerful than what divides." (Tempest, 2020, p. 23) Poetry creates a space for connection rather than division, inclusion rather than exclusion.

This idea is what Tempest calls 'creative connection:' 'Creative connection is the use of creativity to access and feel connection and get yourself and those with you in the moment into a more connected space.' (Tempest, 2020, pp. 5–6) Creativity opens the possibility for a connection and poetry is one way to express this creativity. But this creativity also refers to other ways of making, to a broader understanding of poetics in the etymological sense of *poiesis*: "creativity is any act of love. Any act of making. It is usually applied to art-making, but it can also be applied to anything you do that requires your focus, skill and ingenuity. It takes creativity to dress well, for example. To parent. To paint a windowsill. To give someone you love your full attention." (Tempest, 2020, p. 5) To be creative one does not need to be engaged in what are usually called creative practices such as artmaking or writing. To be creative means to act with intention and full attention. Thus, to be creative is something that concerns everyone in their everyday life.

And this is one point where the ordinary gains central significance. Against the idea that the ordinary is something lesser and that we should strive for the extraordinary, being creative means remaining within the ordinary and discovering the endless possibilities that lie within it. Following Guillaume Apollinaire: "It is that poetry and creation are one and the same;

only that man can be called poet who invents, who creates insofar as man can create. The poet is who discovers new joys, even if they are hard to bear. One can be a poet in any field: it is enough that one be adventuresome and pursue new discovery." (Cook, 2004, p. 80) Or Nietzsche: 'For with [artists] this subtle power usually comes to an end where art and life begins; but we want to be poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.' (Nietzsche, 1974, para. 299)

In this sense, creativity offers guidance to navigate in the ordinary. As Tempest argues: "Somehow, creativity reached through the fog when nothing else could. It gave me guidance, offered me purpose and connected me to all other creative people. It was transformative." (Tempest, 2020, p. 32) Creativity offers guidance to escape the normativity of discourse and make sense of the world. Meaning is not found but created. We place meaning in things and people. To be creative is to become active in engaging with the world, and thus refusing passive submission to social codes. It is in this sense that 'telling poems levels the room:'

> This is why poetry levels the room. Because it speaks to the psychic facts which are hidden.
> To be judged by others is part of social life. We may tell ourselves that we don't care what others think of us but we evolved the ability to enjoy a good gossip in order to encourage certain traits and discourage others: selfishness was dangerous in prehistoric society, because if someone ate all the food then the others would starve. So, gossiping became a way of keeping a check on any undesirable behaviour. The difficult feelings that arise from transgressing social codes, from being 'talked about' by those you don't want to upset have been knitted into the fabric of our moralities for many hundreds of generations. (Tempest, 2020, p. 64)

Poetry and other poetic practices are ways of engaging with these hidden psychic facts, with what has 'been knitted into the fabric of our moralities for many hundreds of generations.' As they have been guiding us for so long, it is obviously difficult to digress and transgress these moralities. But creativity precisely helps overcoming these moralities, revealing and making apparent what is usually hidden. Not necessarily to dispose of them, but to create a space in which we can deal with them without enduring them. A space in which we can act and mean.

Transgressing social codes, disrupting social norms, overcoming these moralities that naturalize socio-cultural aspects of life, are some of the effects of poetry. Poetry should not be considered here as an object or an essence, but as an activity that performatively transforms

our forms of language and our forms of life. It is in this sense that poetry can be compared to a virus infecting the iterations of the performative in order to change it from within. A viral poetics joins here the aims of queer theory: it refuses the dominant performative and opens new possibilities. Not to establish a different, alternative order, but to undermine the idea of order: to move from oppression to creation, from illocution to perlocution, from exclusion to inclusion. Viral poetics reveals how the poetic generation of significance can turn the dominant performative inside out.

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"A Real Fact is a Fact of Aesthetic Experience." On the Actuality of Whitehead's Aisthetics.

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ABSTRACT. Although the British-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead did not formulate an explicit aesthetics, his basic conceptualization opens up many points of contact with contemporary debates on aesthetic questions. His process ontology has rightly been called cosmopsychology because it recognizes feelings and perceptions as a central dimension of reality. This emphasis on the cosmological significance of the aesthetic in general and of the qualitative experience of value in particular makes him an aesthetician of substance, because he understands all that is real as bound to value and sense perception. My paper will address the relevance of Whitehead's thought with respect to contemporary art. I will demonstrate the relevance of his key concepts to some lines of development in the history of modern art, which I argue is increasingly concerned with the realization of the qualitative experience of presence.

1. Introduction

Although Alfred North Whitehead did not formulate an explicit aesthetic theory throughout his life, the basic conceptuality of his thought with its focus on actual experiences is profoundly aesthetic. Consider, for example, statements such as, "an actual fact is a fact of aesthetic experience." (RM, 101 f) or: "all order is ... aesthetic order" (RM, 91 f). Focusing on activities of prehension and feeling, his process ontology has also been called a "cosmopsychology"[105] because it recognizes in sensations and perceptions the central determination of everything real.

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[104] Email: eva.schuermann@ovgu.de
[105] Wiehl, 2005, pp. 124-157.

In this respect, his theory is aesthetic primarily in the etymological sense of aisthetic: sensations and experiences are the essential capacities of actual entities that can become conscious perceptual reality in varying degrees.

Crucial to the aesthetic dimension, however, is that these qualities of sensation and apprehension are realizations of worth: "'Value' is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event" (SMW, 89). Perceptual activities are such, by virtue of which reality is indeed actualized. Thus, the aisthetic-aesthetic gets its central status within Whiteheadian thinking. The cosmological significance of sensory experience in general and of the qualitative apprehension of a value in particular make his theory an aesthetic one, because everything real is bound to sensory perception and value.

In the first part of my paper, I will show that Whitehead's unwritten aesthetics is an aisthetic theory of the qualitative experience of concrete and sensuously realized contrasts. For this purpose, I deliberately pick out some core ideas from various works that can be found in different phases of his work, whereby I am not concerned with their context in detail, but rather with the leitmotif continuity of central basic provisions of his thought. These include the terms "concrete", "contrast", and the concept of exemplification.

In the second step, the reconstruction of these basic concepts enables me to establish connections to modern art, in particular to the history of modern painting up to Concrete Art. It will become apparent that Whitehead's concepts of creative contrasts and exemplifying actualization correspond to a central line of development in modernist painting, which is increasingly concerned with the realization of presence rather than with symbolic representation.

Finally, in the third part, we will see how Whitehead's thought construct is also connectable to contemporary performance art. Methodically exemplifying this, I will deal with an artistic work by Marina Abramović, which thematizes the sensual and social experience of looking and being looked at. According to my thesis, this is a further development of the above-mentioned tendency towards the present realization of aesthetic experiences. Increasingly, art urges to actualization, (i.e., intersubjective realization) and insists on offering actual experiences of real events rather than symbolic stand-ins that pretend to be something they are not. This emphasis on real presence can be conceptualized with Whitehead's understanding of reality, which conceives of a sense of reality as a 'gift of aesthetic signification': "the sense of

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being one actuality in a world of actualities" (MT, 120). Reality according to Whitehead is actualized self-realization.

2. Why Whitehead's thinking is aesthetic

Let us recall that "'Feeling' is used as a synonym for 'actuality'" (RM, 91), and such actuality is originally value: "Value is inherent in actuality itself" (RM, 87); both thoughts are intertwined. Feeling is neither identical with 'sensation', nor with 'emotion', it is rather the realization of a sensing that refers to causal efficacy of an actual occasion and is of value for an actual entity. In Whitehead's thinking, activities such as sensing, perceiving, and experiencing are understood from the outset neither as purely sensory grasping nor as cognitive conceptualizing, but as gradations in between or as transitional forms of psychophysical bipolarity. Reality does not simply exist in the form of substances identical with itself, but only as a constantly changing process of unfolding and interweaving of possible forms (eternal objects) and realized events (actual entities and societies of them).

The activities of feeling or prehending are not thought of as conceptless sensing, but as actualization of real presence. When I feel the velvety of the cloth, I am doing something other than remembering or expecting its qualities, although past experiences or the orientation towards the future may have something to contribute. But, the point of feeling is the realization of the present moment in its particular quality, independent of ideas or concepts. There is thus an existential meaning of the aesthetic that is not something that is added ornamentally or optionally, but something that realises values and actuality.

Although his process ontology takes into account the scientific biological and physicochemical insights by never fading out that in the 'simultaneous universe' every reality consists of innumerable simultaneously running and interacting events on atomic and molecular, biochemical and electromagnetic level, he is under no circumstances willing to disregard the first-personal and qualitative experiential reality. Not only do experiential facts belong to reality as well as facts of any other kind, we know about all facts only by means of experiences, from which we consequently should never make abstractions.[106] It is such

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[106] Whitehead goes so far as to say "that apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing" (PR, 252). This

abstractions that Whitehead criticizes above all others, both in the natural sciences and in the history of philosophy.

Consequently, reality does not only consist of objectively measurable facts, which would have secondary qualities besides, as for example in Locke. Rather, the whole distinction between primary and secondary qualities is misguided by the fallacy of spatiotemporal localization and fixation of qualities. It is a fallacy that prioritizes qualities such as mass or weight of a body, for example, over other qualities such as color or smell, so that the latter become suspiciously doubted and supposedly merely subjective perceptual impressions. Such conception of being, however, abstracts from any concrete experience and individual realization of what is ontologically the case.

Only this creates an explanatory gap between our widespread scientistic-naturalistic worldview on the one hand and our human self-understanding as rational, historical and socio-cultural living beings on the other hand, which Whitehead criticizes as bifurcation of nature.

> This theory which I am arguing against is to bifurcate nature into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of this awareness. The nature which is apprehended in the fact hold within it the greenness of trees, the song of the birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature. The meeting point of these two natures is the mind, the causal nature being influent and the apparent nature being effluent (CM, 30 f).

The philosophy of the organic[107], on the other hand, opens up a completely different theoretical framework. In this, there exist real individuals and events, which possess psycho-physical poles and which stand with each other in internally-determined and externally-creative relations. They can prehend each other and experience, feel and perceive each other in different gradations. "I [...] use the word 'prehension' for uncognitive apprehension: by this I mean apprehension which may or may not be cognitive" (SMW, 86). Prehension with consciousness, meanwhile, is perception: "Perception is simply the cognition of prehensive unification, or

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obviously sounds a lot like Berkeley, but I do not want to discuss this relation here, because in the present context it is sufficient to focus on the central importance of the experiential dimension as addressed in prehending, perceiving, and feeling.

[107] Cf. Koutroufinis, 2019.

more shortly, perception is cognition of prehension" (SMW, 69 f).

> The actual world is a manifold of prehensions; and a 'prehension' is a 'prehensive occasion'; and a prehensive occasion is the most concrete finite entity, conceived as what it is in itself and for itself, and not as from its aspect in the essence of another such occasion (SMW, 105).

The essential capacity of actual entities consists in being able to make or have experiences that can become cognitively conscious to varying degrees, but which are already realizing qualities of feeling and sensing at the elementary level.

At each moment, a sensory perception encounters a different 'region' of reality that can be prehended according to the presuppositions of their respective organisms.

Instead of opening an inexplicable gap between the subjective and the objective, it has to be asked and clarified how and why an organism and its environment can be attuned to each other in such a way that its perception corresponds to reality: "the animal body and the external regions are [...] attuned together, so that under normal circumstances, the appearances conform to natures within the regions" (AI, 251).

Sensory perceptions are able to realize specifically differential realities. They are determined to a large extent by what an organism can grasp of what takes place in the simultaneous present reality region. For example, bats, according to their organic abilities to navigate by means of ultrasound, can perceive completely different aspects of a given environment than, for instance, dogs, whose sense of smell makes all possible information accessible to them. Consequently, what is 'objectively given' in an environment depends on the realization abilities of prehended living beings.

With such emphasis on the ineluctably realizing constituent power of apprehension and perception for all that exists, Whitehead's thought is thus, as I hope I have made plausible, profoundly aisthetic. All reality exists only in the mode of the possibility of an act of apprehension. Therefore, one cannot abstract from its relation to the prehended without arriving at a false, namely inconcrete, concept of reality.

Let us now turn to these dimensions of the possible and the concrete in more detail.

An important basic feature of Whitehead's ontology consists in the existential status it assigns to the possible. Reality is not par excellence everything that 'exists', but the respective, temporary actualization of possibilities. Beside the real individual beings there exist timeless

objects (eternal objects), eternal forms or indeterminate possibilities of what is actualized in a respectively determined and individuated way. Eternal objects are not, like Plato's ideas, hierarchically superior, but a dimension of possibility of which it is open in which way it is actualized. "The realm of forms is the realm of potentiality" (MT, 69). Eternal objects are manifold potentialities of realization, comparable therein to variables in mathematics, which stand in for general, but also quite definite possibilities.

Indeterminate possibilities become concrete realities only when and because they are perceptively realized by certain individualities. Possibilities belong ontologically to existence as much as physical things do; they exist, but they become real only by concretization. They exist insofar as they can be realized by actual entities. Eternal objects or general forms are like transcendental possibilities that become real only through concretion. Concretion, in this respect, is a process by which things first actually become what they are because of the way they are realized in an actual act of experience. Reality consists in the actualization of universal forms through concrete particulars. This concept of the concrete is etymologically derived from the Latin 'concrescere', which means 'to grow together', but also to condense, to emerge, to form. Concretus, the past participle of concrescere, literally means that which has been condensed, that which has grown together.

Hence the central meaning of the term "contrast"[108]. What grows together in concrete contrasts is the sensual experience of a sensually perceptible phenomenon. Actual perceptual and sensory experience is real only by virtue of its realization in concrete patterns of eternal objects – that is, universal forms as well as possibilities – and actual occasions here and now. Contrasts combine universal and particular qualities in embedded situations. In each case, only the actualized patterns into which contrast experiences coalesce from the stream of potentialities are concrete.

Concretization thus means a process of taking shape or actively shaping, through which inexhaustible possibilities of variation become certain realities of experience. Such experiencing is not value-neutral: "Our enjoyment of actuality is a realization of worth, good or bad. It is a value experience. Its basic expression is - Have a care, here is something that

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[108] Wiehl distinguishes in detail: "contrasts between processes," "contrasts as processes", and "processes as contrasts," cf. Wiehl, 2005. pp. 124-157, here 146.

matters!" (MT, 116).[109] A specific quality of value experience is conveyed by beauty.[110] Among other things, it has a synthesizing, unifying power. "Aesthetic experience is feeling arising out of the realization of contrast under identity" (RM, 111).

All degrees of prehensions take place in the mode of contrast formation. By contrast, Whitehead does not mean color contrasts or figure-ground relations, but syntheses and pattern formation: "modes of synthesis of entities in one prehension, or patterned entities" (PR, 22). Contrasts are a category of existence because everything that exists – and this includes possibilities – can combine with everything else in a pattern-forming way. Complementary poles intertwine in contrasts and combine to form something new.[111] One of the most important contrasts is between 'affirmation' and 'negation'. In cosmic interrelations, all individual beings arrange themselves in this way with others in a concise manner, so that new, specifically individuated patterns always arise and pass away. In certain contrasts manifold possibilities concretize to actual realities, differentiated parts combine to a new pattern in the sense of contrasting unity formation.

Two characteristics of contrasts understood in this way are what must concern us more closely: first, the actualizations of possibilities, and second, the concretization of a general. Both are constitutively related without being congruent. The general is a conceptual quality, the possible a modal. The eternal objects are at the same time possibilities and forms. They relate to actual entities like general to particular and like indeterminate possibilities to determinate realities. In finite individuals, infinite possibilities of variation realize themselves by coalescing into definite contrasts.

Whitehead also refers to these processes by the term 'exemplification'. Exemplification is the process of realization of timeless forms by actual entities, i.e., the concretization of a general form. It takes place when a general principle is actualized as a concrete reality.

Unlike Nelson Goodman after him, he understands exemplification primarily as the realization of an indeterminate possibility through a specific particular case. In the concrete, possibilities also become real. Exemplification is concretion and concretion is realization.

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[109] Cf. also (SMW): "Realization is in itself the attainment of value" (SMW, 116).

[110] Whitehead distinguishes beauty as a cosmic quality of harmony from beautiful as a quality of a concreta.

[111] This is not coincidentally reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty, who speaks of 'entrelacement' in such cases.

Goodman was concerned with his famous fabric sample to explain his concept of denotation. The swatch possesses properties to which it simultaneously refers[112], that is, it not only refers conventionally to something quite different from itself as conventional signs do, but it itself possesses the properties to which it refers. It only exhibits other properties, such as jagged edges, but does not denote them. A work of art is gray in a different way than it is sad; its expressive power is no longer on a denotative level; its expressive power does not consist at all in a designation, but precisely in an exemplification, i.e., in making visible something that would not be perceptible at all without it.

Whiteheadian exemplification, meanwhile, is more concerned with the modal and ontological differences between the possible and the real, or the general and the particular, which coalesce in exemplifying contrasts. Exemplification is the individualized realization of a universal form. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead writes that the terms 'universals' and 'particulars' correspond to eternal objects and actual entities (cf. PR, 48). Universal here has the sense of generalisable, individual that of a particular individual case, both are thought in connection with the modal distinction between possible and real.

For example, the universal form of the color red can be individualized differently by Rubens than by Josef Albers, or differently by a tomato than by a strawberry. The concrete experience of red is thus the realization of something that is a mere possibility outside of that experience. Indeterminate possibilities become determinate individualities only when they are realized in concrete patterns of aesthetic experience. The generality of the color red is, in form, only possibility; it becomes real only when and because this possibility is actualized by someone and something, and this actualization always grows out of converging contrasts, such as this particular strawberry in the morning light for the one who sees it. In increasing degrees of determinateness, infinite possibilities become a finite present, or in other words, the actual is infinite but only in form and potential, the realization finite: "the infinitude of actuality, hidden in its finitude of realization" (MT, 113).

The individual realization of general forms through actual experiences means the concretization of a contrast. Forms are the possibilities of a particular realization. Exemplification is the chiastic interweaving of the general in the particular through which a

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[112] Exemplification is possession plus "reference." Goodman, 1968, p. 53.

concept becomes vivid.

Whitehead's unwritten aesthetics, with its core concepts of contrast, concretion, and exemplification, is, as I have wanted to show, an aisthetic theory of prehension and perceptual experience. It recognizes in perceptual and sentient experience a key dimension of all that is real. With this cosmological meaning of the aesthetic in general and of the qualitative experience of value in particular, Whitehead is an aesthete in substance.

3. Self-presence of the aesthetic means and concrete experience

In an admittedly drastic and brief recourse to some milestones in the history of European painting, I will now trace a line of development that consists in an increasing distance from the mimetic reproduction of objects, but aims all the more at the development of that which can be currently visualized by genuine artistic means. We will see, that gradually the paradigm of vicarious representation of the representational world recedes behind that of the presentation of aesthetic realities. The present paradigm consequently extends to the sounding out of aesthetic experience, for it is in this that the reality of the work is actually actualized. This has a great deal to do with Whitehead, who conceives of reality in the manner described above as everything that concretizes itself in actual experience. What one might call the paradigm of self-presence leads, as I will now show, into our present.

This already begins to become recognizable in the 19th century in some of J.M.W. Turner's paintings, in which the painter devotes himself to the subject of the sea storm. Let's compare Figure 1, entitled *Shipwreck*[113] of 1805, with Figure 2, *Snow Storm*[114] of 1842. The anecdote has it that Turner painted this picture after he had himself tied to the mast of the ship in order to see what it really looked like in such a sea storm, so that he could later reproduce what he experienced. This may be true or just well invented, what is decisive is that the picture no longer represents how one imagines a sea storm with identifiable objects and events as the earlier one did, but evokes dizzying effects with the genuinely pictorial means of color. The dramatic chiaroscuro swirls of the painting make it one of the early non-objective works in the

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[113] For image see: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-the-shipwreck-n00476
[114] For image see: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530

history of painting, long before the abstractions of classical modernism.[115] In any case, one no longer recognizes objects and people in it as in the 1805 painting; instead, the light and color contrasts evoke the sensual impression of foaming spray and roaring sea. The viewer stands in front of the painting like Turner in front of reality; instead of represented objects, the focus is on present experience. The recipient's aesthetic experience is analogous to the producer's experience of reality. The representation aims at mimesis of the real experience Turner had of the natural whirlwind, which is transferred into the suction-like effect of the color vortex. In this sense, the painting is a concrete realization of presence.

An even more programmatic departure from the imitation ideal of the arts takes place in the early 20th century in non-representational painting, when the avant-garde of the Cubists and Fauvists no longer place colour and form in the picture merely as properties of recognisable objects, but give them an autonomous presence. The point of the autonomy of the representational means consists precisely in the creation of a genuinely painterly presence. When protagonists such as Malevich or Kandinsky turn to non-objective painting, abstraction is admittedly not what Whitehead criticizes. This art is called abstract because of its non-objectivity; it abstracts from the recognizable world of tables and chairs, trees and people, and instead shows black squares or yellow triangles, blue circles and contrasting shapes. In this, however, it is actually concrete art, for it shows what it is, and is what it shows - namely color and form on paper and canvas. The term Concrete Art was introduced by Theo van Doesburg in 1924 and programmatically defined in a manifesto in 1930 at the founding of the group Art Concret for an art movement ideally based on mathematical-geometric foundations, because it recognized in them the best presentation formats for color perceptions.

Josef Albers follows on almost seamlessly from this with his 'hommages to the square' (Figure 3)[116]. In continuously new variations his pictures sound out the 'interaction of colors'. The fact that a color only becomes a real fact of perception in contrast to its surroundings is shown by pictures on the back of which the tubes of color used by Albers are noted. Thus, for example, a lime green appears different in a dark green neighborhood than in a red one, and so on. It is therefore not correct, according to the painter, to say that he paints squares, because he

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[115] Even earlier, to be sure, but also only almost non-representational, are, for instance, C.D. Friedrich's 'Monk by the Sea (1810) or F. d. Goya's 'Perro semihundido' (1820/23). Dog and monk are equally the no longer further reducible remnants of recognizable representationalism, without which both works would be pure abstract art.
[116] For image see: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/481031

rather paints color relationships. The square is, as it were, the form of presentation, the color relation the presented. The aesthetic experience consists in an actual perception of color, embedded in a concrete context of a moment present here and now, the light situation, etc.

One could also recall Magritte's problematization of the representation paradigm (Figure 4)[117] to reconstruct the development to be sketched here. Magritte's famous pipe painting is titled 'Trahison des images' (1929), because the representational role of images can be thematized as a betrayal of the represented reality: what images do when they show what they show is just an as-if, just oil on canvas, just the representative sign of a pipe, just as representative as the word pipe, just a deceptive image with which one can do nothing in reality. The discomfort with this leads in consequence (admittedly no longer within Magritte's oeuvre) to a revaluation of aesthetic experience as the mode of realization of a work of art.

Figure 5[118] with the title 'La clef des champs' from 1936 thematizes the two authoritative topoi in which we think of pictures, namely as a transparent window or as a reflecting mirror. Ever since Narcissus fell in love with his reflection, we have confused pictures with images. And since the finestra aperta paradigm in the Renaissance has been pictures with framed sections that reveal the world behind them, we overestimate their transparency, for the view is not quite so transparent that the frame of the pictorial possible has marked out. Magritte takes both to absurdity by asking what representation does to reality when it transfers its heaviness into the weightlessness of aesthetic appearance. Magritte's entire Œuvre points to such differences and limitations.

Against this background, Barnett Newman's 'Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV' (figure 6 from 1969/70)[119], for example, is to be understood as a realization of aesthetic experience. The painting, which belongs to American color field painting and works in various versions with large-scale monochrome color fields, aims at a self-presence of color that is supposed to overwhelm the recipients in the sublime tradition. The exceedingly large-format painting fills the field of vision of the viewer, who is supposed to approach the picture field very closely, in such a way that her entire visual field is color perception. Here again we see that the so-called abstract expressionism is in fact concrete, because color is no longer a

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[117] For image see: https://collections.lacma.org/node/239578
[118] For image see: https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/magritte-rene/key-fields-clef-des-champs
[119] For image see: https://freunde-der-nationalgalerie.de/erwerbung/barnett-newman/

property of represented objects, but is monumentally present as them. Representation and represented fall into one.

From here it is not far to Jackson Pollock's action paintings (Figure 7, 1950)[120], in which the image becomes the trace of the real act of painting. The physical movement above the canvas - again, usually monumentally large - creates a painting in which neither color nor contour appear as properties of an object pretending to be a still life or a landscape or a body. Rather, it is the color itself, the line itself, the act of painting itself. One can see in this a further step toward real presence, for the painting as the trace of a real action over the surface of a canvas no longer has anything in common with the painting as window or the painting as mirror that Magritte problematized.

I break off here, because, as I admitted, I was not concerned with any of these positions in detail, but with motifs of a development on the whole. My brief reconstruction was intended to make the consistent motifs recognizable, which consist in the tendency toward the self-presence of artistic means for the purpose of genuinely aesthetic experience. Apart from Magritte, whose place in the development I see rather in the counteracting of the ideal of representation, the works mentioned have in common that they increasingly aim at the presentation of the artistic means that are no longer representational as well as at realized and actualizing aesthetic experiences.

A further development of these goals can then - as art history has shown - only consist in problematizing or even abandoning the material work character of art, in order to shift the boundary between art and reality ever further. This is the case, for example, when Josef Beuys plants 7000 oak trees in the city of Kassel as a contribution to the Documenta, so that the work of art no longer exists as an individual work, but rather consists in changing the physical and social reality in the city in a way that is as incisive as it is lasting.

According to my thesis, this has a great deal to do with Whitehead in that this presence-emphasis and concretization tendency corresponds precisely to what is aesthetic about his edifice of thought. What Whitehead denounces as a confusion of the abstract with the concrete – "an error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete" (SMW, 69) – is an error of thinking that consists in taking something abstracted, namely the result of an abstraction, for concrete. But

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[120] For image see: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jackson-Pollock

concrete, as all thinking teaches, is something only in the way we experience it. If we refrain from this and detach things from their contexts, we erroneously make the abstract a concrete datum. Instead, we must take seriously the concrete existence of an actual entity so as not to miss the real moment.

So much for my reconstruction of a line of development in modernity, with which I wanted to show the connectivity of an aisthetic theory that relies as much on the actualization of present sensory experience and individual oppositions as Whitehead's.

4. Aesthetic Presence Experience as Exemplification

If, as we have seen, art as a whole insists on social and physical realization in such a way that color perception itself can be declared a work of art, there is a certain consistency in making the experience of looking as such the object of an artistic work a well. In a final step, I would now like to turn the attention to a single work by a contemporary artist, which in a way fits exemplificatory to the preceding considerations.

Marina Abramović (born 1946) is a Serbian performance artist with an international reputation, who stands in the tradition of Beuys. While Beuys' project of 'social sculpture' was about pushing the real presence of the artwork to the point of indistinguishability of artistic and extra-artistic reality, Abramović's performances explore both production-aesthetic and reception-aesthetic experiences to the limit of the bearable. However, I will not discuss her earlier works, but rather focus on one of her most recent works.

In 2010, with the performance 'The artist is present' (Figure 8)[121], she realized a work at the MoMA based on the artist's physical presence in the museum. For three months, six days a week, eight hours a day, the artist sat in a chair in the museum space while exhibition visitors came and went, taking seats across from her at a table (which was removed after a few weeks for greater immediacy) and gazing steadfastly into each other's eyes. At first it was quite open whether the work would be able to succeed. Since it was part of a larger retrospective show of works, the exhibition was well attended from the beginning, but as time went on, there was a veritable run on the work, long queues, and streams of visitors camped outside the MoMA. For

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[121] For images see: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/ [Accessed 9/5/2022].

it became apparent that engaging in a direct, not to say indiscreet, gaze relationship was of some explosive power for the recipients.

One could remain seated for as long as one wanted, security forces were of course present, but rarely had to intervene. Usually, people simply took the opportunity to experience presence aesthetically and to get involved in how it feels quite concretely in the here and now to expose oneself to a gaze relationship. The title, a semi-ironic quote often found on the invitation cards to an opening when an artist is present, here literally becomes the artwork itself.

Visitors described sitting with Marina Abramović as an intensely emotional experience, many were very affected, some downright emphatic, they experienced the aesthetic experience as a 'threshold experience'[122]: "a transforming experience – it's luminous, it's uplifting, it has many layers, but it always comes back to being present, breathing, maintaining eye contact. It's an amazing journey to be able to experience and participate in the piece."[123]

The work consists of the qualitative moments of an eye contact, realized differently by each and everyone. The theatrical staging is of course part of the performance, but it is also an important framing to experience the reciprocity of seeing and being seen differently than in everyday life. It is precisely the artificiality of the situation, the attentively concentrated attention to one another as an end in itself, which enables an altered perception. Outside of the specially designed museum space, it would be a break with social norms to look at someone else so directly, not to say confrontationally. It would not only be irritating, it would no longer be integrable into the usual forms of sociality. But the museum's experimental space makes possible a suspension of the socially familiar. The physical presence of the artist makes the experience of being looked at a powerful moment. In the here and now of real presence, the gaze becomes a powerful experience.

Since everything that happens is real, concretely felt and really experienced, it is methodologically and systematically suitable to exemplify my reflections. In what I have traced here as a paradigm shift of present experience, we found at the same time core ideas and basic motifs of Whitehead.

What Abramović's work does can certainly be described with Whiteheadian

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[122] Cf. Fischer-Lichte, 2003.
[123]   https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/ [Accessed 9/5/2022].

vocabulary, perhaps even better opened up, if one understands the respective relations of gaze as individual contrastations that concretize indeterminate possibility to certain events. It is an exemplification insofar as the possible and the real, as well as the universal, grow together. The universal here is the gaze that Abramović directs at all recipients equally, but which is experienced differently in each case. The philosophical understanding of reality, which, according to Whitehead, exists in every eventful self-realization every moment anew and differently, can be experienced aesthetically in the work of art: "an actuality is self-realizing, and whatever is self-realizing is an actuality" (PR, 222).

To understand this work as an exemplification in the Whiteheadian sense is to recognize in it the concretion of a general. Both, philosophy and art, mutually open up in it. We 'see' more of Whitehead with Abramović, and more in Abramović with Whitehead.

Elsewhere[124] I have described this as philosophizing with art. When a work of art is an exemplification, more is gained and accomplished than exemplification or illustration. An exemplification realizes something that without it would remain at least unexpressed, if not inexpressible. What is realized is a particular case through which a general principle becomes visible.

Exemplification is a procedure of saying and, simultaneously, showing, a synthetic achievement of making visible that makes possible both conceptual and intuitive insight, that is as generally exemplary as it is individually applicable.

To understand a work of art as exemplification is to read it as an individuated actualization of a general form that creates new patterns. A particular becomes recognizable as exemplary of something general. That is why each individual work can be both an incomparable singularity and of general expressiveness. That is why we are always interested anew (namely in ever new productions or film adaptations) in the problems of a theatre or novel character from the 16th or 19th century. It is because, unlike illustrative examples, they are a peculiar interweaving of general expressiveness and singular incomparability.

Undoubtedly, works of art grow historically with us and are infinitely open, so that they can always be received anew and questioned in each new contrast. But at the same time, the individual work stands paradigmatically for something generally characteristic. Therefore, the

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[124] Cf. Schürmann, 2017.

concretizing achievements of literature or painting do not consist in arbitrary illustrations of what could just as well be said and shown differently, but rather in their ability to visualize something in an exemplary, revealing individual case and in a specific-individual way. But how it is represented depends on the style of an artist as well as of an epoch. For the question of what a piece of art is paradigmatic or characteristic of is a task that confronts reflexive aesthetic experience. The synthesis of concept and view, which a work represents according to its potential, must first be accomplished and unfolded. This happens when the reception takes a work as exemplary by questioning it in very specific respects. In this way, a second-order exemplification is carried out, so to speak, and realized as a procedure of comprehended contemplation.

Works of art are inexhaustible because they realize something unseen (AI, 207; 349), which every time can discover anew. Although Whitehead also wrote a little-noticed book on the symbolic articulation of meaning[125], he is an aesthetician not because he understands art in the conceptual framework of a symbolic system, but rather because he does not want aesthetic experience of value to be limited to art in any way. Aesthetic experience is just as well realized in everyday life, in metaphysical and spiritual questions or in view of individual experience of the beauty of nature.

Art, however, is an ontologically distinct sphere, it is a creative creation through which something is realized that exists precisely not on the basis of expectable causal chains, but is the result of a creative effort.

My account aimed, first, to show that Whitehead's unwritten aesthetics is a philosophy of the qualitative experience of sensuously realized opposites. And second, I wanted to show the relevance of this concept to the history of modern art, which, I hope to have made plausible, is increasingly concerned with the realization of the qualitative experience of presence. In this history, images are less and less representations of an extra-image reality, and rather more presentations of something that cannot otherwise be seen. This concreteness will be better understood if we reread Whitehead.

Increasingly, art pushes for realization, that is, social, physical reality, insisting on offering actual experiences of actual events rather than pretending to be something other than

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[125] But symbols are also realized in concrete sensations, cf. Whitehead, 1928 (S).

itself. Artistic forms that articulate a feeling, whether in the fundamental sense of a colour sensation, or in the emotional sense of an interpersonal encounter, each actualize new infinitely-finite pattern.

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Designing Worlds: Explorations of the Possible Structures of the Aesthetic in Jacques Rancière

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ABSTRACT. The idea of design can be seen in a new light when it comes to configurations of the senses, distributions of the sensible, shared spaces and aspirations for essential and abbreviated forms as well as forms for restoring and re-creating the aesthetic fabric of the world. My analysis aspires to reflect on the actual levels for capturing the aesthetics of design, following the thought and the respecting contributions of Jacques Rancière. Starting from the consideration of the ontological features of art within a space of possibilities, we can move towards ideas of designing a world, experimenting with possible structures of the aesthetic and the construction of new senses of seeing, working, acting, feeling, that is, new forms of life based on new conceptions of a common, shared space. Aesthetics are interrelated with ethics and politics. As spectators, as parts of a broader whole, we are implicated in changing regimes of relatedness, attention, solidarity, compassion. Thus, designing a world could also mean designing new ways for perceiving reality and exploring possible aesthetic structures for inhabiting in a different way the sensible world we share.

1. Introduction

In this paper I would like to explore the idea of design in the thought of Jacques Rancière. Although there is only one text dedicated exclusively to the practice of design, namely, *The Surface of Design*, we could isolate aspects and derive several insights for the design process with regard to the aesthetic domain and the contemporary artistic practices. One of my hypotheses is the working idea that design can be approached by means of a conceptual

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analysis, that is, by the delineation of a community of concepts, practices, images, words and artistic references. On these grounds, I hold the additional hypothesis that the aesthetic can be approached in terms of structure. I will use the notion of topology in order to capture not only an actual structure but the idea of possible structures. Thus, the aesthetic, in general can take the form of a topology for re-configuring constructions and communities of shared things.

In this context, my interest is twofold, focusing on (a). the creative and expressive aspects of art, those processes and tools implicated in contemporary artistic practices, (b). the conceptual and theoretical grounding developed by Rancière, through the mobilization of notions such as *emancipation*, *aesthetic revolution*, *partition of the sensible* and *dissensus*.

2. Aesthetics of design and ontology of art in Rancière

The aspect of design in Rancière can be traced in a family of formulations such as *constructing*, *inventing*, *producing*, *creating*, *making, composing, assembling* along with the axes that serve as the primal material for the design process: *temporalities*, *places*, *rationalities*, *fictions*, *mechanisms of expositions*.

To speak of design, one should specify an appropriate scale for the matter which is not always a straightforward task due to art's undecidability. I am speaking of a *world* and this could be the world of an artwork, an artist or the world of a spectator. So, it is more convenient to speak of the aesthetic fabric that participates in the design of a world. For Rancière, *art* is a regime of experience, a regime of identification of objects and performances that stems from the same thread of experience. What does belong to that thread? Institutions such as places of performance or exposition, forms of circulation and modes of reproduction as well as modes of perception and affection, concepts, narratives, judgements of identification and processes for attributing a meaning (Rancière, 2018, p. 50). In addition, art, according to Rancière:

> constructs effective forms of community: communities between objects and images, images and voices, between faces and speeches that weave the relations between the past and the present, between distant spaces and the place of an exhibition.

Art invites the spectators "to enter into the ongoing process of creating these communities of senses" (Rancière, 2010a, p. 21).

The design and re-design potential inherently in the artistic and aesthetic domain are becoming evident following the way Rancière describes the *aesthetic regime of the arts* as being characterized by "its multi-temporality, the unlimitedness of the representable and the metamorphic character of its elements". In addition, an essential feature of the aesthetic regime is what Rancière calls *exceptional sensible*, that is "a self-differing sensible weave that is inhabited by a self-differing thought" (Rancière, 2010b, p. 218). Following Kant, Rancière supports the idea of possible architectures of the sensible: the existence of various kinds of the sensible, various configurations between sense and sense. Specifications of this idea pertaining to art are the *distribution of the sensible* and the *dissensual function of art*.

From this point of view, we could establish, following Rancière, a framework for considering the *ontology of art* under the aesthetic regime as a process of designing and re-designing sensible worlds by instituting the dissensuses weaved by the inventions of art, by "placing one sensible world in another" (Rancière, 2010b, p. 219). We could say that there is a platform for aesthetic weaving, a *topology of possibles* (Rancière 2010b, p. 225), offering itself to design processes that lead to world-making, to aesthetic structures that construct new ways of seeing.

In the *Emancipated Spectator* Rancière argues in favor of an emancipated community, "a community that has more to do with a world of words and stories, of available things and images, out of which its member can produce their own stories, their own intellectual adventures" (Rancière, 2017a, p. 250). The spectator act as the designer of its proper path, refusing to comply with an ascribed place designed in advance and without the interweaving of the different strands of the sensible at play, without the displacement operated by a discursive aesthetic fabric, by the different configurations and possibilities within a community of senses.

The encounter between artists and spectators is an encounter between creators, between designers of worlds within a given set of worlds: "Works exist in and through their world-making and that world-making depends on us, spectators, to constitute a space in which works meet and mutually displace, disfigure and transfigure one another" (Rancière, 2017a, 251). In a similar vein, emancipation has also a creative aspect open to world-making possibilities, since it has been always, according to Rancière, a way to create another time within the normal order of time, "a different way of inhabiting the sensible world we share" (Rancière, 2017b, p. 32).

In his discussion with Mark Foster Gage, Rancière iterates the idea that the aesthetic

problem is about "the experience of a common world and who is able to share this experience" (Rancière, 2019, p. 10), whereas he dissociates the aesthetic from the artistic: "The aesthetic is not same as the artistic. The artistic is about the implementation of an idea […] Instead the aesthetic means that you don't exactly know what will be the effect of what you are doing" (Rancière, 2019, p. 17). What is of interest in this discussion is the conceptualization of architecture in aesthetic terms: "Architecture is not only supposed to construct units for inhabiting, but really constructing new senses of seeing, working, acting, feeling" (Rancière, 2019, p. 18). Engaging with these formulations, it is of interest to ponder on the distinction between *life* and *use* made by Rancière and to reflect on the questions posed by him: "How you define life? How you think about the relationship between intentions incorporated in designing and the way it will be used, the form of life that it produces" (Rancière, 2019, p. 20).

On these grounds, the constellation of the aesthetic, architecture and design in Rancière could provide a path for reflecting what it means to design a world along with the exploration of aesthetics as (1). an inventory of metamorphic structures, processes and objects that has the capacity "to create the need to inhabit an infinitely richer sensible world" (Rancière, 2017a, p. 301) and (2). the actualization of a capacity to produce changes in perception, new feelings and to design new forms of life by constructing new ways for dealing with the actual state of things.

3. Designing world-events, world-schemes, abbreviated forms

In *The Surface of Design,* we have a paradox comparison and at the end, a convergence, between the French poet Stephan Mallarmé (1842 – 1898) and the German architect, engineer and designer, Peter Behrens (1868 – 1940). From the beginning of the text there is that connection between the *act of design* and the impact on the *communal space*: "by drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space". And subsequently, Rancière implicates his well-known formula of the *distribution of the sensible*:

> By assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world. These configurations, which are at once symbolic and material, cross the boundaries between arts, genres and epochs (Rancière, 2009a, p. 91).

Here, we could put forth the question *how do we move from the new divisions of the communal space to a new world*, which narrows down to the question, *how can we go from an abstract idea of common space to a more concrete idea of a common world*. I suggest here as a transitional path, the idea or the experience, even a constituted one, of a *shared space*. *Sharing* means that there is an agreement already, there is a contribution that arranges the relations between individual and groups on the one hand, functions and spatial parts on the other. Here of course, we have to be clear about the distinction between aesthetic politics and institutional politics. Politics from an aesthetic point of view simply means the existence of dissensual forces, the act, material and symbolic, of disagreeing with a given order. Politics from an institutional point of view, on the other hand, means that there are processes and institutions leading to concrete policies along with a reflection on the effectivity of the processes and institution themselves. So, from this second point of view, a new form of community would be that around "certain exemplary institutions, practices or facilities" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 91).

Here, referring to Peter Behrens, Rancière summarizes a functionalist approach to design, a unified approach, which means that everything should be submitted in the same "principle of unity", "the application of a single principle" and the designed objects to be produced according to "a certain number of typical forms", that is, "essential forms, geometrical motifs, streamlined curves" that the design of objects should "approximate as closely as possible to their function" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 93).

What comes to mind here, is the idea of a *type*, standardization and of course, the notion of a meta-line, which is the *assembly line*. I am speaking of a *meta-line* taking as a ground the classical conception of the line, the drawing line. Then we have, the *product line*, which mainly includes manufacturing processes. And then, the assembly line, which is, a production line that performs the task of assembling parts and components.

Rancière turns to the French poet Stephan Mallarmé, who, like Behrens, proposes also *types*:

> The object of his poetics is not the assemblage of precious words and rare pearls, but the layout of a design. For him every poem is a layout that abstracts a basic scheme from the spectacles of nature or of accessories of life, thereby transforming them into essential forms. It is no longer spectacles that are seen or stories that are told, but world-events, world-schemes (Rancière, 2009a, p. 94).

World is associated with life. World in its essential form, is not the decorum of objects or stories. And poems, the forms of poems, "like those of the objects, are also forms of life». Both for Behrens and for Mallarmé "types outline the image of a certain physical community» (Rancière, 2009a, p. 95). Behrens follows the axioms of the *Werkbund* as he aims at the restoration of a singular style instead of having plurals, which is to have one form corresponding to its content. In other words, to have a *type*, to have forms that convey the internal principle makes a society exists:

> Types are the formative principles of a new communal life, where the material forms of existence are informed by a shared spiritual principle. In the type, industrial form and artistic form are conjoined. The form of objects is the formative principle of life forms (Rancière, 2009a, p. 96).

On the other hand, Mallarmé speaks of the "meaningless gesture of writing", that is: "recreating everything with reminiscences so as to prove that one is indeed where one should be". For Rancière *recreating everything with reminiscences* "is the principle of the quintessential poem" since,

> poetic labour for Mallarmé is a labour of simplification. Like engineers, he dreams of an alphabet of essential forms, taken from the ordinary forms of nature and the social world. These reminiscences, these creations of abridged forms answer to the need to construct an abode where man is at home (Rancière, 2009a, p. 96).

Rancière concludes that "between Mallarmé and Behrens […] exists this singular link: the same idea of streamlined forms and the same function attributed to these forms – to define a new texture of communal existence" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 97), here, the idea of texture that has a strong aesthetic undertone.

Another form of community, mentioned by Rancière, is "the community of principle between the form of art and the forms of everyday objects" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 103). This suggested form of community introduces the respective question of the relationship between art forms and life forms. Again, as a methodological investigation we could look for a common ground, still in the form of shared space, a surface, *a shared surface*. For, Rancière, "surface is

to be understood in two senses", (a). communication and (b). arrangement, outlining a space. Surface, establishing connection with art, assures: (a). the function of conversion "where words, forms and things exchange roles" and, (b). the function of equivalence among different levels of schematization, such as *abbreviated forms*: "*Abbreviated forms* are, in their very principle, an aesthetic and political division of a shared world: they outline the shape of a world without hierarchy where functions slide into one another" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 107), which equals the working towards new forms of life.

4. Politics of design: communities of senses, structures of intensities and solidarity

Today, there are many examples of artists or artistic groups who intervene directly in the public space, in the space that is set as common within the community, creating an opening, a gap, a possibility of escaping or of temporarily withdrawal, an emancipation from the dense urban tissue or even vice versa, activating urban gaps, intervening in what already exists. In fact, what an artist does, according to Rancière, is the weaving of a new sensory fabric. Weaving this new fabric means "creating a form of common expression, or a form of expression of the community" (Rancière, 2008, p. 4). There is an inevitable political dimension associated with the concept of the public. And if we want to understand this political dimension in its aesthetic significance, we can suggest that this form of expression of the community is linked to a certain distribution of the sensible. The design of a new world can emerge through a new structure of the aesthetic, through the transformation of the existing sensory fabric.

Transformation basically means connections and disconnections, a particular dialectic between these two, transformative actions concerning the lives of human beings in a community and the relationships between them. What has to be changed? In other words, what do these connections perform? Since it is about a redesign of the space and the relationships between human beings in a community, we can reasonably argue that the force that pushes into these transformations is the figuration and integration into the community of those who are missing.

This is also an aesthetic community, namely a *community of sense*, or a *sensus communis*. In this context, Rancière explains in three complementary ways the concept of the

aesthetic community. First of all, the aesthetic community is a sense community. That is, "a community of sense first is a certain combination of sense data. This also means a combination of different senses of sense". With reference to Mallarmé and his prose poem *The White Water Lily*, Rancière argues that the words of the poet are sensory realities suggesting other sensory realities and this relationship can be seen as a more general metaphor of a poetic work. There is a displacement, a disagreement, even if it is about the same words, there is an aesthetic processing of a new space-time where they are inserted:

> The words of the poet are first used as neutral tools to frame a certain sensorium. They describe us a movement of the arms oriented towards a certain aim: reaching a place which could be visualized on a space. But they superimpose to that sensorium another sensorium organized around that which is specific to their own power, sound and absence. They stage a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds. This is what dissensus means (Rancière, 2008, p. 4).

Dissensus does not mean the disappearance or definitive imposition of one world or the other. The displacements are material as well as symbolic. In *Aesthetics and its discontent* Rancière advocates that:

> what the term 'art' designates in its singularity is the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such. And what links the practice of art to the question of the common is the constitution, at once material and symbolic, of a specific space-time, of a suspension with respect to the ordinary forms of sensory experience (Rancière, 2009b, p. 23).

What emerges in terms of design is a temporary, fragile architecture that provides a receptive framework for the dissensual configuration of the two different words in question, to the dissensual aspect in the relation of two different worlds, and distributions of the sensible. The task of the philosopher in this case is to provide a conceptual framework for the tension between these two sensory words. This is the second way of approaching the aesthetic community. And the third concerns the fact that an aesthetic community is necessarily connected to a community of people.

  The aesthetic community as a structure is a structure of intensities, a different vibration introduced to the community of human beings. It is perhaps a *topos* of political subjectification that shapes the expectation of new political subjects, that provides the image of people to come

and that of their absence at the same time. It is a world whose architecture, however temporary it may be, will be based, principally, on an aesthetic structure, this means that the coherence and stability of the architectural construction will be safeguarded by an aesthetic rationality, a rationality that is not subjected to predetermined relationships between causes and effects. It is exactly what Rancière refers to as *aesthetic efficiency*, that is, "a paradoxical kind of efficiency that is produced by the very break of any determined link between cause and effect" (Rancière, 2008, p. 7).

In the *Theater of images*, Rancière analyzes the works of Alfredo Jaar as exemplary cases of world constructions where there is a constant shift from the world of the victims to the world of a few unknown living people. There changes of attention are performed through inversions that are part of rhetorical structures such as litotes and metonymy. The world-shapes in Jaar's works emerge through the construction of a certain space-time, of an architecture that sets its proper temporality. In this way new plans are created for the circulation of images: a rearrangement of the streams of sense and information, a redistribution of the meaning of things.

All this is evidently done through ascertainments about the existence and functioning of the dominant forms of selection and circulation of images that are deemed to be the most representative, that is, to be in the place of other images and speak in their name. Therefore, there is a world of images claiming a role of telling and showing us the world, what is happening in the world. However, it is one of the fundamental tasks of art and politics to suggest another world of images, another way of making connections between the singular and the whole, the choice of the singular that can also speak for the whole.

These new connections could also arise through reversals between causes and effects. Rancière mentions an essential Mallarméan principle: "paint not the thing, but the effect it produces here" (Rancière, 2007, p. 76). So, the body that was there, the eyes that saw the event, constitute a world that can speak of something that has been. But obviously, it is not enough to say that this body was there. A proper design is needed, to bring out the enigmatic, aesthetic power of this relationship between the *I was there* and the *now we are here as viewers*. This force, which Rancière also analyzes with reference to Godard's work, he calls it *solidarity*. It is about a force of connecting with another through the recognition that there is a common ground of humanity. Solidarity is a condition of compassion but the reverse is also true: through

compassion one can be led to the realization of the work of solidarity. Anything that appears as a positive designation, of course, as a desired or existing human quality is suspect. Compassion, however "is not pity for the unfortunate, it is the capacity to feel with them, which equally entails the capacity to make them feel with us, to constitute the sensorium of a capacity shared equally by the boat people and the New York artists" (Rancière, 2007, p. 77).

We recognize in these formulations the ethical nexus of relationships which, is complemented by the aesthetic. Community appears here as the construction of a sensory arrangement that seeks to restore attention. The world is approached as a sensory event through the changing connections between the part and the whole. The focus and manner of that focus, the staging of a body, a face, or even a gaze can function as metaphors for what has happened, for much larger group of individuals. A new world is designed when these metaphors exist. A new space of substitutions can be made possible through the capacity to move in a network of equivalences between senses. A key dimension of world design is giving shape to a story. Here, the form also defines the viewing angle of the story. Designing a world has to do more with a local rearrangement within a world that already exists, a change in existing spatial and temporal connections, the creation of a different plan of intensities. Designing a world can emerge from rendering a story in images and other elements that have been placed together or could be placed together.

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Transformation and Transcendence of the Tragic: Milo Rau's "Theatre of the Real"

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ABSTRACT. The paper argues that the productions for theatre of the internationally celebrated Swiss director Milo Rau, director of the NTGent, and his International Institute for Political Murder (IIPM) can be regarded as an aesthetic and political transformation of Greek tragedy and its philosophical reception. The typical form of a reenactment that Milo Rau has become famous for can count as a revival of the practice of early Greek tragedy insofar as his reenactements and other theatrical productions aesthetically highlight the tragic dialectics of the global capitalistic order. Likewise, the audience response Rau intends to elicit entails an emotional participation, mainly through compassion, and recognition of one's own guilty enmeshment in global political and societal order. The paper proposes to understand his productions not just as recognition of the actuality of tragedy but also as a transcendence of tragic necessity insofar as they open up possibilities to intervene in historical situations that produce tragic narratives. The aesthetic experience of tragic involvement can make the spectators reflect on their ability to resist the seemingly fateful historical reality.

1. Einleitung

I'm not talking to you as an actress, because it's not about art anymore, it's not about theatre anymore. Our tragedy happens here and now, in the world, before our very eyes.[128] (Kay Sara, actress, performer and indigenous activist)

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[127] Email: a.trautsch@gmx.de

[128] Kay Sara: This madness has to stop. Speech from 16th of May 2020, https://www.ntgent.be/en/news/aan-deze-waanzin-moet-een-einde-komen

Der äußerst produktive Schweizer Theatermacher Milo Rau inszeniert keine Tragödien. Während die Zahl der weltweit aufgeführten tragischen Stücke seit dem Ende der 1960er Jahre stark angestiegen ist und aktuell kaum eine Spielzeit eines größeres Stadttheaters im deutschsprachigen Raum ohne Inszenierungen antiker oder neuzeitlicher Tragödien auskommt,[129] findet man keine Inszenierungen von Klassikern wie Shakespeare oder Racine unter den Theaterproduktionen Milo Raus und des IIPM bzw. NTGent ebenso vergeblich wie die zeitgenössischer Autorinnen und Autoren, die Tragödien oder tragische Stoffe in ihren Arbeiten ausdrücklich aufgenommen haben wie etwa Elfriede Jelinek (*Die Schutzbefohlenen*), Sarah Kane (*Phaedra's Love*) oder Botho Strauß (*Ithaca*). In Raus Arbeiten gibt es keine Masken, keine Tänze und keinen Kothurn. Weder finden sich Chorstücke darunter, in denen Einar Schleef eine nötige Auseinandersetzung mit der antiken Tragödie erkannte, noch auf Körperbewegungen fokussierte Aufführungen, die sich – wie Richard Schechners *Dionysus in 69* (1968), Ariane Mnouchkines *Les Atrides* (1990-1993) oder Jan Fabres *Mount Olympus* (2015) – dem dionysischen Element der Tragödie widmen und den tragischen Schmerz tanzend darstellen. Dieser Befund dürfte sich auch fortsetzen: Folgt man dem 2018 veröffentlichten *Genter Manifest,* lehnt der Schweizer Regisseur Aufführungen klassischer Stücke rigoros ab: "Die wörtliche Adaption von Klassikern auf der Bühne ist verboten."[130] Maximal 20% der Textvorlage dürften historischen Texten entstammen, so die Forderung des Manifests, dem Milo Raus Arbeiten am NTGent folgen.

Trotz dieses Befunds möchte ich für die These argumentieren, dass das "Realtheater" Milo Raus und des IIPM als kritische Aneignung der antiken Tragödie und eine Neuverhandlung des Begriffs des Tragischen verstanden werden kann.[131] Milo Raus Arbeiten stellen eine produktive Auseinandersetzung mit der antiken Tragödie und Versuche zu ihrer Transformationen unter Bedingungen des globalen Kapitalismus dar. Sie bringen Tragik auf die Bühne und überschreiten sie zugleich.

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[129] Vgl. Edith Hall, "Introduction: Why Greek Tragedy in the Late Twentieth Century", in: Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, Amanda Wrigley (Hrsg.), *Dionysus Since 69. Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millenium*, Oxford 2004, S. 1-46.

130 Milo Rau, "Das Genter Manifest", in: ders., *Globaler Realismus – Goldenes Buch I/Global Realism – Golden Book I*, Berlin 2018, S. 144.

[131] Vgl. Johannes Birgfeld: "Milo Raus Theater der Revolution", in: Milo Rau*, Das geschichtliche Gefühl. Wege zu einem globalen Realismus*, Saarbrücker Poetikdozentur für Dramatik, hrsg. von Johannes Birgfeld, Berlin 2019, S. 149-171, hier: S. 164.

3. Tragödienspuren

Die Abwesenheit der antiken oder modernen Tragödien in Milo Raus Programmen wird durch seine Texte und mündliche Beiträge zur Tragödie und zum Tragischen konterkariert.

Wenn Milo Rau keine europäischen Tragödientexte im Sinne des dramatischen Literaturtheaters inszeniert, so hat er sie doch mehrfach in seinen Produktionen verarbeitet. Euripides' *Bakchen* etwa bildet die Vorlage für *Montana* (2007), jedoch so, dass die Vorlage bis auf einen Halbsatz nicht mehr zu erkennen ist.[132] In der *Europa Trilogie* (2014-2016) werden sowohl Shakespeares *Hamlet* (*The Dark Ages*, 2015), der auch in *Die Wiederholung* (2018) eine Rolle spielt, als auch Euripides' *Medea* (*Empire*, 2016) und Aischylos' *Orestie* integriert.[133] Für *Mitleid. Die Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs* (2016)[134] stehen Protagonist und Handlungsverlauf von Sophokles' *König Ödipus* Pate.[135] Einige Titel der wie in der Tragödie oft fünf Akte[136] umfassenden Stücke haben an antike Tragödien gemahnende Titel wie "Die Schutzflehenden" (1. Akt von *The Dark Ages*).

Der Regisseur und Autor bekennt sich – wiewohl selbst äußerst erfolgreich –zu einem "tragic worldview", der sich in seinem Interesse für die charakteristische Hoffnungslosigkeit des Individuums ausdrücke.[137] Statt aber aus diesem Grund Klassiker der Tragödie zu inszenieren, schreibt er selbst neue Tragödien und führt sie mit seinen Teams auf. Die Beschäftigung mit der antiken Tragödie hat jüngst eine neue Dimension in Milo Raus Arbeit gewonnen: Am 27. März 2019 hatte seine Bearbeitung von Aischylos' *Orestie* – d.h. vor allem von Teilen der Handlung und des Textes[138] – unter dem Titel *Orestes in Mosul* im irakischen

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[132] Vgl. Rolf Bossart, Milo Rau, "Das ist der Grund, warum es Kunst gibt", in: Rolf Bossart (Hrsg.), *Die Enthüllung des Realen. Milo Rau und das International Institute of Political Murder*, Theater der Zeit, Berlin 2013, S. 16.

[133] Vgl. Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 67, 73.

[134] Von August bis Dezember 2018 ist eine erweiterte, am NTGent erarbeitete Version unter dem Titel *Compassie. De geschiedenis van het machinegeweer* aufgeführt worden.

[135] Vgl. Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 108.

[136] Vgl. ebd., S. 39. Vgl. zur regelpoetischen Forderung der 5 Akte Horaz, *Epistula ad Pisones (Ars poetica)*, V. 189.

137 Rau, *Orestes in Mosul*, S. 29.

138 Zum Bearbeitungsprozess siehe Milo Rau, *Orestes in Mosul – Golden Book III*, Berlin 2019, S. 16f.

Mossul Premiere, gefolgt von Aufführungen (als eine Art "Making-Of" ohne die aufgrund verweigerter Visa nicht angereisten irakischen Darsteller) am NTGent und am Theater Bochum im April und Mai 2019 (Abb. 1).[139] Aktuell produziert der Regisseur im Amazonas-Gebiet eine neue Tragödie nach Sophokles, in der eine indigene Aktivistin zur Antigone wird.[140] Es handelt sich bei diesen Produktionen nicht um Aufführungen des Originaltexts, sondern um Verwandlungen der antiken Dramen in neue Kontexte. Die Rollen bleiben, viel am Text und Kontext wird an die neue Situation angepasst.

3. Die tragische Dialektik im globalen Kapitalismus

Die Fortschreibung und Kommentierung der griechischen Tragödie gründet für Milo Rau auf der Einsicht in die tragischen Verhältnisse im Realen. Die theater- und literaturwissenschaftlich vertretene These vom "Ende der Tragödie" muss für das Realtheater wie eine Ablenkung von der existentiellen Leistung wirken, zu der das politische Theater fähig ist, dem es laut Rau um die Frage geht: "Wie zivilisiere ich die Tragödie, ohne sie zum Stillstand zu bringen?" Für ihn ist Theater ein Raum, "in dem es *drauf ankommt*" und in dem er sich "existenziell verantwortlich"[141] fühlt. Diese Charakterisierung macht bereits einsichtig, dass es Milo Rau und seinen Mitstreitern um ein Theater geht, in dem der Ernst der Praxis und seine tragische Dimension nicht aufgelöst, sondern verhandelt werden.

Das Verhältnis von Raus Realtheater zur Tragik im Realen wird in seinen Texten explizit. So spricht er in der Eröffnungsrede zum *Kongo Tribunal* von der "Tragödie des kongolesischen Volkes",[142] wie er auch die Kriege im Irak, Syrien und Jugoslawien als Tragödien begreift.[143] Anders als die verbreitete alltagssprachige und auch in akademischer Forschung zu findende Redeweise von schrecklichen Tatsachen wie Kriegen als Tragödien

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[139] Ebd., S. 107. Diese Regiearbeit Raus ist gleichwohl keine Inszenierung eines klassischen Textes, von dem nur die Struktur und einige Fragmente des Originaltextes verwendet werden (ebd., S. 16).

[140] Auf diese wegen der Corona-Pandemie im März 2020 unterbrochene Produktion der *Antigone im Amazonas*, die erst nach Fertigstellung dieses Aufsatzes begonnen wurde, kann ich leider nicht mehr eingehen.

[141] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 41, 42, 45.

[142] Milo Rau, "Die Wahrheit hören lassen. Eröffnungsrede zum Kongo Tribunal", in: ders., *Globaler Realismus – Goldenes Buch I/Global Realism – Golden Book I*, Berlin 2018, S. 124.

[143] Vgl. Andrea Kasiske, "Regisseur Milo Rau - und das Ende Europas?", Interview mit Milo Rau der *Deutschen Welle* vom 2.11.2016.

verbindet sich für Milo Rau mit "Tragik" aber ein spezifischer Sinn.

Zum einen geht es Milo Rau um die universellen, aus der antiken Tragödie vertrauten Themen der Gewalt und des Bösen, der irrationalen Schicksalshaftigkeit und "unmöglichen Gerechtigkeit",[144] des Verlusts und des Leidens – und dabei zugleich um ihre theatrale und narrative Darstellung und Erfahrung. In Reenactments historisch spezifischer Ereignisse wie der Produktion *Die letzten Tage der Ceausescus* (2009/2010), die den Schauprozess gegen das Ehepaar Ceausescu vom 25.12.1989 aufführt, oder *Die Wiederholung* (2018), die sich auf den Mord an Ihsane Jarfi durch eine Gruppe homophober junger Männern in Liège am 22. April 2012 bezieht, werden daher auch allgemeine Fragen von existentiellem Gewicht adressiert: "Wie sprechen wir eigentlich über den Tod, die Trauer, die Einsamkeit – dieses unerklärliche, unerbittliche Schicksal aller Menschen? Und wie zeigen wir die Gewalt, die zum Tode führt? Wie können wir mit Verlust umgehen?"[145] Diese Fragen leiten auch die jüngste Produktion am NTGent an: *Grief & Beauty* (2021), die das auf Video begleitete Sterben einer Frau mit der gesellschaftlichen Reaktion konfrontiert. Der Tod ist für Rau "die radikalste Tragödie, sicher die demokratischste", weil sie keinen Ausweg lasse.[146]

Der Verzicht auf Aufführungen von historischen Theatertexten Klassikerdistanz wird von Milo Rau theaterpolitisch und zuweilen polemisch akzentuiert, um ein neues zeitgenössischeres Verständnis des Stadttheaters zu propagieren. Zugleich aber nutzt er die Klassiker, um in der zeitgenössischen Geschichte das Tragische zu enthüllen.[147] "We do not need to act a tragedy", gab 2019 Mustafa Dargham, ein junger irakischer Chorist im *Orestes in Mosul*, der *New York Times* zur Auskunft und ergänzte: "This play is just talking about the reality of Mosul."[148] Ebenso bezieht Sara Kay, die die Protagonistin in Raus *Antigone in the Amazon* spielt, die nach einer Uraufführung im November 2020 im brasilianischen Bundesstaat Pará im Mai 2023 in Gent gezeigt werden wird. Nicht die tragische Antike kehrt bei Rau wieder, sondern die Moderne erscheint selbst als aischyleisch-archaisch: "It's shocking just

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[144] Milo Rau, *Europa Trilogie*, S. 136.
[145] Laudenbach, "'Die Toten hören uns.'"
[146] https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/pandemie-trauer-und-der-liebende-blick-der-lebenden-li.207805
147 Vgl. Ewoud Ceulemans, "'Orestes in Mosul': wat op het scherm te zien is, is vaak interessanter dan wat op de scène gebeurt", in: *De Morgen*, 18.04.2019.
[148] Alissa J. Rubin, "Can a Greek Tragedy Help Heal a Scarred City?", in: *The New York Times*, 17.04.2019.

how archaic we are today and how modern archaic societies are."[149]

Die Darstellung des Tragischen ist keine allgemeine, ewig wahre, gar der realen Welt allegorisch enthobene, sondern basiert auf der konkreten Geschichtlichkeit heutiger Lebensläufe. In ihnen aber zeigt sich Universelles, die Verflochtenheit des Handelns und Leidens in globaler Dimension. Marxistisch ist Raus Ansatz, weil er kenntlich machen will, dass diese Ordnung nicht nur hier und da Ungerechtigkeiten sozusagen als "Nebeneffekte" zulässt, sondern auf systematischer Ausbeutung insbesondere der Menschen in den ehemaligen Kolonien Europas beruht und auf einen ökologischen Kollaps der anthropozänen Zivilisation zusteuert. Das politische Pathos seiner Arbeiten liegt darin, die Einsicht in den globalen Zusammenhang von ökonomischem Wachstum – insbesondere in Europa, den USA und China – und Zerstörung – der Ausbeutung von rohstoffreichen Regionen in Afrika und Asien bis hin zu katastrophalen Kriegen, dem gewaltsamen Ende traditioneller Kulturen und der massiven und vermutlich irreversiblen Ruinierung des Planeten – exemplarisch als Wahrheit über die kapitalistisch dominierte Welt ihren notorisch diesen Zusammenhang ausblendenden Bewohnern zu Bewusstsein zu bringen. Es geht dem Theater des Realen darum, den "Weltinnenraum des Kapitals"[150] vor allem seinen europäischen Nutznießern auszuleuchten, um seine Konsequenzen sichtbar zu machen und gegen sie Handlungsmöglichkeiten aufzuschließen. Der historischen Selbstunterscheidung der Moderne von der Tragik der Antike antwortet Milo Raus aufgeklärter Katastrophismus, der die "Tragik unserer Zeit"[151] in der globalen politischen Verstrickung aller Produzenten und Konsumenten erkennt, die zu einem zivilisatorischen "Kollaps aller klimatischen und sozialen Überlebenssysteme"[152] in der zweiten Hälfte des 21. Jahrhunderts führt.

Tragisch im antiken Sinn ist der von Rau als "Schicksal" apostrophierte globale politische, ökonomische und ökologische Wirkungszusammenhang aufgrund der dialektischen Rückwirkung von Handlungen auf die Akteure und ihrer unfreiwilligen Verstrickung in Schuld und Unheil. Mit der Betonung des globalen Zusammenhangs und der ausdrücklichen Frage

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149 Rau, *Orestes in Mosul*, S. 24.
150 Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals. Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005; vgl. Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 248.
151 Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 236.
152 Milo Rau, *Was tun? Kritik der postmodernen Vernunft*, Zürich, Berlin 2013, S. 48.

nach der Zukunft der Menschheit kann eine sowohl von rechts als auch von links je unterschiedlich begriffene und bewertete räumliche, ökonomische oder politische Trennung von "die" versus "wir" oder "West" versus "Ost" nicht als politisch weiterführend verstanden werden. Es gibt, so Rau, "kein Anderes mehr", sondern längst "nur einen einzigen planetaren Innenraum",[153] in dem die Begrenzung der Folgen von zerstörerischer Aktivität auf Entfernte nicht allein ein moralisch höchst fragwürdiges Privileg der Industriestaaten darstellt, sondern auch eine fatale Illusion. Denn alles ist im Realen längst auf eine im einzelnen oft schwer nachvollziehbare Weise interdependent.

Die von der Globalisierung erzeugten, nicht erst die durch die anthropogene Klimaerwärmung hervorgerufenen Verwerfungen werden auf die Hauptverantwortlichen – die Menschen der reichen Industriestaaten – fatal zurückwirken, auch wenn sie sich besser zu schützen in der Lage sind und sein werden als die Hauptleidtragenden im globalen Süden. Doch auch die Ausbeutung der lokalen Bevölkerung etwa in Zentralafrika oder die industrielle Zerstörung traditioneller Kulturen wirkt auf den liberal-humanistischen Menschen Europas oder der USA zurück, indem dessen damit kollidierendes normatives Selbstbild unterminiert wird. Die Folge sind Verdrängung und sonstige Formen der moralisch höchst fragwürdigen Distanzierung von systemischer Schuld, d.h. die unbewusste oder zynische Einwilligung in die eigene Verantwortungslosigkeit.

Diese Verfassung des Bewusstseins im globalen Kapitalismus zu verstehen und in aller Klarheit darzustellen, dass "die ökologischen, die humanen, die philosophischen Katastrophen"[154] bereits am Eintreten sind, heißt für Milo Rau, ein tragisches Wissen wie in der antiken Tragödie zu vermitteln: Was man selbst – auch ohne böse Absicht oder ausreichende Kenntnis – tut, ist kausal nicht zu isolieren von dem, was ein anderer und letztlich auch man selbst erleiden wird. Was ich als gewöhnliche Bürgerin in der EU nicht zur Kenntnis nehme oder vermeintlich unschuldig oder – wie Aktivisten in NGOs – sogar mit ethisch gutem Willen tue, verstrickt mich, wie insbesondere *Mitleid. Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs* zeigt, in den globalen Schuldzusammenhang: "Wenn ich vorgeblich nichts weiß von der Ungerechtigkeit auf der Welt, heißt das nicht, dass ich nicht mitschuldig bin an ihr – genau

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[153] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 142.
[154] Ebd., S. 239.

dadurch werde ich es."[155]

Die Verstrickung von Handeln und Schuld, von Beförderung des Unglücks mit guten Intentionen zeigt eine Dialektik, die in der antiken Tragödie im Moment des Umschlags zur Wirkung kommt. Er markiert den Punkt, an dem die Erfahrung des Könnens und Tuns verkehrt wird in die des Leidens, in faktische Verschuldung und Unheil. Absichten kippen in ihr Gegenteil (die aristotelische *peripeteia*), Unwissen wird zu Wissen (*anagnorisis*),[156] Unschuldige werden zu Schuldigen, Macht schlägt um in Ohnmacht, Freiheit in Unfreiheit und Glück in Unglück.[157] Dieses Motiv der tragischen Dialektik aus den attischen Texten und ihrer aristotelischen Theorie wird in der neuzeitlichen Tragödientheorie von Schelling und Hegel über Simmel, Weber und Freud bis die Kritische Theorie aufgenommen.[158]

In Milo Raus Theater des Realen kommt sie in globaler Perspektive ebenfalls als tragische zur Erscheinung. Die ironisch distanzierende Haltung zum Wirklichen, die Milo Rau in seiner *Kritik der postmodernen Vernunft* (2013) und vielen seiner Texte polemisch angreift, wird in seinem Theater existentiell gewendet zur tragischen Ironie im Realen. Es zielt darauf, die reale tragische Verstrickung zu zeigen und zu Bewusstsein zu bringen, wie im *Kongo Tribunal* (2015), bei dem es im Verlauf der drei Tage in Bukavu (29.-31.05.2015, Abb. 2) und Berlin (26.-28.06.2015) um nichts weniger als "die *wahre* Gestalt eines wirtschaftlichen Weltkriegs"[159] ging.

Freilich erhöht das Realtheater des Globalen Realismus damit auch sein Risiko, an seinen epistemischen Ansprüchen zu scheitern.[160] Die Frage, die es bei jeder Produktion neu beantworten muss, lautet: Wie werden die sozioökonomischen Bedingungen der lebensgeschichtlichen Tragik unter globalen Bedingungen in ihrer theatralen Darstellung erkennbar? Dass dies nicht immer mit der für sich stehenden Aufführung allein gelingen kann, zeigt sich in der Strategie Raus mit dem IIPM und NTGent, jeweils ein Buch mit Interviews und Texten zu den Produktionen im Berliner Verbecher Verlag sowie weitere Essays und

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[155] Ebd., S. 44.
[156] Vgl. Aristoteles, *Poetik*, 1452a-b.
[157] Vgl. Asmus Trautsch, *Der Umschlag von allem in nichts. Eine Theorie tragischer Erfahrung*, Berlin, Boston 2020.
[158] Vgl. ebd. und Peter Szondi, *Versuch über das Tragische*, in: *Schriften, Bd. I*, Frankfurt a.M. 1978, S. 149-260.
[159] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 40.
[160] Vgl. Jakob Hayner: "Spiel mir das Stück von der Versöhnung", in: *Jungle World*, 02.05.2019."

theoretische Texte zu veröffentlichen, Interviews zu geben und die Produktionen in die öffentliche Diskussion zu bringen. Die Bühne allein reicht nicht mehr für die Erkenntnis und Bearbeitung globaler Tragik.

4. Exemplarische Darstellung des Tragischen

Um dem Tragischen nahezukommen, müssen die ignorierten oder weitgehend aus der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung fallenden Zusammenhänge als Netze der (verdrängten) Verantwortlichkeit aufgedeckt werden. Die so vergegenwärtigte, das Publikum in der eigenen Verantwortung adressierende Geschichte im tragischen Theater vermag aufzudecken, zu erinnern, zu erregen und die Frage nach Alternativen gegenüber dem Bestehenden zu provozieren.

Wie ist es aber ästhetisch und theaterpraktisch möglich, etwas Komplexes und Allgemeines wie geschichtliche Zusammenhänge oder das "tragische wie banale Wesen der Gewalt",[161] das selbst für abstrahierende theoretische Beschreibung eine Herausforderung darstellt, überhaupt theatralisch zur Erscheinung zu bringen? Die Antwort liegt für Milo Rau in einem Konzept exemplarischer Darstellung, einer an Goethes Symbolbegriff und Hegels Einsicht in die Realisierung des Allgemeinen im Besonderen entwickelten Methode, die er "Affirmation" nennt. Sie zielt auf die Erkennbarkeit eines Allgemeinen – etwa der Dialektik des globalen Kapitalismus – im Besonderen, wobei das Besondere die Figuren auf der Bühne darstellen, in deren individueller Lebensgeschichte sich das Allgemeine konkret in Erfahrungsspuren ausprägt.

> Die Methode der Affirmation entdeckt im Subjektiven das kollektive humane Projekt, ohne aber das Geringste des subjektiven Überschusses abzugeben. Für mich ist jeder Schauspieler, jeder Mensch, den ich interviewe, mit dem ich arbeite, der erste und letzte, der exemplarische Mensch. [...] Die Methode der Affirmation ist also in einem Satz: Das Spezifische ins Exemplarische zu führen, ohne das Geringste vom Spezifischen aufzugeben.[162]

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161 Laudenbach, "'Die Toten hören uns.'"

[162] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 11f. Vgl. zum Symbolbegriff auch Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 95f.

Indem ein Schauspieler eine Figur verkörpert, die in einem für die Zuschauer meist nicht identifizierbaren Maß auf seiner eigenen Lebensgeschichte oder der Geschichte historischer Individuen beruht, exemplifiziert sein Spiel die je besonderen Auswirkungen einer alle betreffenden historischen Konstellation. Die *Figur* ist also immer ein Doppeltes: *Individuum*, das von (eigener und angeeigneter) Geschichte geprägt ist und insofern dem Publikum als von ihnen unterschiedene Besonderheit *gegenübertritt*, zugleich aber ein *Zeichen* für das konstituiert, was dieses Individuum mit seinen Zuschauern *verbindet*: Sie ist "zugleich ganz sich [sic] selbst (und niemand anderes), die reine Gabe einer totalen Individualität, eines fremden Lebens, und doch eben etwas völlig Allgemeines, etwas, das uns allen gehört",[163] so Rau.

Voraussetzung dafür ist erstens, dass die geschichtlichen Ereignisse "eine Tragödie [sind], die ins Individuelle hineinspielt",[164] dass also transsubjektive Prozesse wie geopolitische Konflikte am einzelnen Leben wie in einer Monade erkennbar werden. Die Erfahrung des Individuums wird zum Zeichen für das die einzelnen systemisch Umgreifende, weil dessen Wahrheit nur durch seine Wirkungen auf das Leben einzelner für einzelne – die ästhetischen Subjekte im Publikum – erkennbar wird. Dadurch erkennen sich Spieler und Zuschauer in einer Art Schicksalsgemeinschaft. Die Geschichte wie die der Globalisierung ist ein empirisch als Ganzes nicht fassbares Resultat der Mannigfaltigkeit von kollektiven und individuellen Entscheidungen im komplexen Kontext der Technosphäre und Biosphäre.

Die zweite Voraussetzung besteht in der spezifischen Fähigkeit von Schauspielerinnen und Schauspielern, dieses Allgemeine mit seinem begrenzten Repertoire an Möglichkeiten zu zeigen. Das kann es nach Milo Rau, wenn die Spielenden – statt sich in ironischer Distanz gegenüber der Festlegung auf eine Rolle freizuspielen – eine Figur so utopisch verkörpern, dass an ihrem individuellen Fall die Mechanismen der Geschichte beispielhaft erkennbar werden und eine solidarische Identifikation durch die Zusehenden möglich wird. Entscheidend dafür ist die Konkretion, die eine bestimmte Individualität zeigt, die sich, ihre je eigenen Geschichten, ihre Bindungen und Verluste "mit und für andere"[165] erzählt. Dabei müssen die Schauspieler auch Distanz zum biographischen Anteil von sich einnehmen, sie spielen eine

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[163] Rau, "Der einzige Autor, der mich im Theater interessiert".

[164] Colette M. Schmidt, "Milo Rau: "Meine Hoffnung ist eine Revolution von unten"", Interview mit Milo Rau, in: *Der Standard*, 31.8.2016.

[165] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 12.

Rolle, die nicht *nur* die Zusammenfassung ihrer Lebensgeschichte ist, mit der sie sich vielmehr bewusst zu identifizieren haben.

Milo Rau zitiert einen Satz seines soziologischen Lehrers Pierre Bourdieu, der dieses ästhetische Einlassen auf die Konkretion der Figur zum Ausdruck bringt: "In jedem Menschen spiegelt sich die Welt, wenn man nur lange genug hinschaut."[166] Die Konkretion muss also so weit getrieben werden, dass aus der Figur Universalität aufscheint: "Eine Individualität […], angereichert mit Schicksal und jenem unserer Spezies eigenen Trotz, den man Humanität nennen könnte."[167] Die so verstandene Figurendarstellung ist keine bereits durch das theatrale Dispositiv irgendwie gegebene Repräsentation, sondern verdankt sich am öffentlichen bzw. "tragischen Ort"[168] des Theaters einem bewussten Akt, für den die Schauspieler eine geradezu existentielle Verantwortung übernehmen müssen. Sie tragen Verantwortung, die Geschichten, die auch ihre intimen eigenen sind, "mit einem Selbstbewusstsein [zu] präsentieren, das sich als Teil der universalen Geschichte versteht",[169] wie Rolf Bossart betont. Damit sprengen sie den vermeintlich bloß privaten Rahmen ihres Lebens in den öffentlichen Horizont des Politischen auf, in dem das Einzelne als Angelegenheit aller erscheint, weil alle an den alle vernetzenden Bedingungen aktiv und passiv teilhaben. Durch diese Darstellung wird das Einzelne als ein Fall der Möglichkeit zu gegenwärtigen Lebensgeschichten überhaupt erkennbar. Die politische Kraft des Theaters liegt darin, dem Individuellen gerecht zu werden und in ihm das zu entbergen, das alle angeht.[170]

Insbesondere die *Europa Trilogie* und *Mitleid. Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs* zeigen, wie diese Methode funktioniert. So spielen in ersterer 13 Schauspieler (Ramo Ali, Karim Bel Kacem, Sara De Bosschere, Sébastien Foucault, Akillas Karazissis, Rami Khalaf, Johan Leysen, Sanja Mitrović, Maia Morgenstern, Sudbin Musić, Vedrana Seksan, Valery Tscheplanowa und Manfred Zapatka) Figuren, die aus ihrer eigenen Biographie genährt sind, und erzählen in ihren Muttersprachen Arabisch, Bosnisch, Deutsch, Flämisch, Französisch,

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[166] Rau, *Europa Trilogie*, S. 12

[167] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 18.

[168] Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 16.

[169] Bossart, "Schrecken, Trauer und Versöhnung. Religiöse Potenziale im Theater von Milo Rau", in: *Neue Wege* 11/2017, https://www.neuewege.ch/schrecken-trauer-und-versoehnung-religioese-potenziale-im-theater-von-milo-rau (Zugriff am 11.1.2019).

[170] Vgl. Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 149.

Griechisch, Kurdisch, Rumänisch, Serbokroatisch und Russisch ihre individuellen Geschichten, deren Konstellation und Verbindung zugleich "eine innere, eine unbewusste Geschichte Europas"[171] auffaltet (Abb. 4). In den drei eher statischen Stücken sprechen die Figuren vor allem – ihre Erzählung ist die Substanz der Aufführungen, nicht effektvolle theatrale Bühnenaktionen. Auch darin liegt eine Nähe zur antiken Tragödie, die physische Aktionen (insbesondere Gewaltakte) kaum auf der Bühne zeigt, sondern die Figuren von ihnen erzählen lässt.[172]

In *Mitleid* stellt Ursina Lardi sich an der Berliner Schaubühne als NGO-Mitarbeiterin dar, die wie der Sophokleische Ödipus ihre eigene tragische Blindheit erkennen muss. Sie erzählt auf einer mit den Trümmern der Geschichte vollgestellten Bühne, unter einer sie als Videobild vergrößernden Leinwand über ihre Erfahrungen im Kongo und darin zugleich die tragische Schuld der humanistischen Europäer mit ihrer gut gemeinten Entwicklungshilfe (Abb. 5). Insbesondere Lardi, deren außergewöhnliche Schauspielkunst Milo Rau in einem Essay gewürdigt hat,[173] gelingt es dabei, aus einer existentiellen Identifikation mit ihrer Rolle als handelnder NGO-Aktivistin und zugleich als tragisch blinder weißer Europäerin, die selbst zur schuldig Leidenden wird, eine symbolische Allgemeinheit zu vermitteln. Exemplarisch beantwortet sie durch ihr erzählendes Spiel die Frage: "Was geschieht tatsächlich, wenn wir glauben, das Gute und Richtige zu tun?"[174] Dieses sozusagen Lardi auf den Leib geschnittene Stück wird von ihr so konkret gespielt, dass sie jederzeit sich selbst als historisches Individuum und ihre Rolle als Schauspielerin zugleich verkörpert.

In dieser Affirmation liegt wiederum eine starke Verbindung zur antiken Tragödie. Denn auch in ihr treten unterschiedliche "Charaktere" (Aristoteles)[175] auf, die als besondere Individuen sich in ihren Erkenntnissen, Erfahrungen und Motiven unterscheiden, zugleich aber

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[171] Milo Rau, *Europa Trilogie*, S. 10.

[172] In *Die Wiederholung* (2018) wird Gewalt durchaus gespielt und gezeigt – auch in *Mitleid* pinkelt Ursina Lardi, die von der entsprechenden Demütigung eines Opfers erzählt, auf die Bühne.

[173] Vgl. Milo Rau, "Notizen zu meiner Arbeit mit Ursina Lardi/Notes sur mon travail avec Ursina Lardi/Appunti sul mio lavoro con Ursina Lardi/Notes on My Work with Ursina Lardi", in: Anne Fournier, Paola Gilardi, Andreas Klaeui, Yvonne Schmidt (Hrsg.), *Ursina Lardi. MIMOS. Schweizer Theaterjahrbuch,* Bern 2017, S. 79ff.

[174] "'Wer sieht uns, wenn wir leiden?' Der Regisseur Milo Rau im Gespräch mit Stefan Bläske", in: Milo Rau, *Mitleid. Die Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs.* Begleitheft zur Uraufführung, Schaubühne Berlin 2016, S. 11-25.

[175] Vgl. Aristoteles, *Poetik*, 1449b-1450a.

etwas Allgemeines exemplifizieren, etwa die Ironie heroischen Handelns, soziale Bedingungen Geschlechterrollen und Lebensformen oder die Dimensionen tragischen Leidens. Sie sind wie bei Rau "Mischformen aus Einzelwesen und Typen".[176]

Doch auch Unterschiede zwischen antiken und Rau'schen Figuren fallen auf: Zum einen sind in den antiken Dramen die Figuren nicht biographisch sie selbst, sondern schauspielende männliche Bürger, die die Rolle von historisch konkreten Individuen meist aus dem Mythos übernehmen. Zum anderen ist das Personal bei Milo Rau radikal demokratisiert, während der Mythos vor allem das Schicksal von Protagonisten mit sozialer Macht erzählt. Wie das bürgerliche Theater seit Lessing und Schiller die "Fallhöhe" abbaute und Menschen des Dritten Stands als ebenso heroisch Handelnde und Leidende zeigte, präsentiert das Realtheater des IIPM und NTGent gewöhnliche Menschen ohne Rangabzeichen auf globaler Ebene als Heldinnen und Helden, die durch das Sich-Zeigen "nobilitiert werden"[177] und Bedeutung in "Großaufnahme und tragischer Größe"[178] gewinnen.

Doch mit Blick auf die Darstellung des Allgemeinen im Besonderen gibt es gegenüber der Methode der griechischen Tragödie letztlich nur eine Differenz des Grades: "Wie in einem antiken Drama sprechen die Individuen, es sind aber Figuren, die für uns alle stehen",[179] so Rau. Sie sind "Konzentrate menschlicher Erfahrung", die auch heute, bei größter Differenz zu den Lebensbedingungen im archaischen Griechenland, "einen Effekt des Wiedererkennens ermöglichen".[180] Das können sie, weil das, was sie an Hoffnung, Begehren, Leid und Schmerz zum Ausdruck bringen, eine Anerkennung der Differenz im Wiedererkennen erzeugt. Es wird in der ästhetischen Erfahrung der Tragödie also die Erfahrung eines Besonderen und die der Repräsentation des Allgemeinen und damit der doppelte Aspekt von individueller Biographie und ihrem exemplarischen Charakter als Erkenntnisform eines Allgemeinen überblendet.

Dieser doppelte Aspekt wird besonders einsichtig im *Orestes in Mosul*, in dem Aischylos' *Orestie* wie eine zweieinhalbtausend Jahre alte Folie wirkt, durch die die gegenwärtige Lebensrealität im nördlichen Irak wie die antike Athens wirkt und *vice versa*: "In

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[176] Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 36.
[177] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 67.
[178] Milo Rau, "'Die Geste der Gebrüder Eyck wiederholen'. Milo Rau im Gespräch über sein Interesse und seine Arbeit am Projekt *Der Genter Altar*".
[179] Milo Rau, *Europa Trilogie*, S. 20.
[180] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 77.

Mossul weist jede Biografie Parallelen zu den Charakteren aus der Tragödie des Aischylos"[181].

5. Furcht, Mitleid und Katharsis

Die an Aristoteles' Tragödiensatz entzündete rezeptionsästhetische Debatte zur Tragödie, die mit der Renaissance wieder einsetzte, dreht sich um drei Begriffe, die auch in Milo Raus Arbeiten eine große Rolle spielen: Furcht, Mitleid und Katharsis.

Die Angst bzw. Furcht ist für Rau kein Nebeneffekt experimentellen Theaters, sondern Methode, denn erst wenn sie dominant wird, wenn man in der Angst "völlig eingeschlossen ist […] – erst dann fängt die künstlerische Arbeit an"[182] – eine Aussage, die von einem Regisseur und Intendanten freilich fragwürdig klingt. Aber was ist mit der Angst der Zuschauer? Um sie dreht sich ja die Frage der Tragödienwirkung seit Platon. Auch dem IIPM geht es nicht darum, dass die Künstler, "sondern die Zuschauer"[183] leiden. Dimension dieser emotionalen Erfahrung kann eine Angst sein, in der eigenen tragischen Blindheit ertappt worden zu sein und sich als mitverantwortlich für den Schrecken zu erkennen. Man könnte sagen: Die Angst der Zuschauer ist hier die des Patienten vor der Analyse – mit den praktischen Konsequenzen, die die eigene Einsicht fordert, sein Leben ändern zu müssen.

Dies gilt umso mehr mit Blick auf das Mitleid. An dem ethischen, sozialen Gefühl kritisiert Milo Rau in *Mitleid. Die Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs* zum einen seine geopolitische Begrenztheit, zum anderen seine narzisstische Dimension, einen zynischen Humanismus zu bestärken, der es beim guten Gefühl belässt, anstatt zur politischen Solidarität zu führen.[184] Es gibt aber auch ein Mitleid, das die Nähe des anderen empathisch sucht und die schuldhafte Verflechtung des eigenen Tuns und Unterlassens mit dessen Dasein erkennt – das existentiell unter den gleichen Fragen steht wie das eigene: "Wer sieht uns, wenn wir leiden? Wer sieht uns, wenn wir zugrunde gehen?", fragt sich Ursina Lardi am Beginn von *Mitleid* mit Blick auf ihr eigenes künftiges Leben. Das Mitleid, das eine geographische Erweiterung und praxeologische Reinigung des schaulustig-zynischen Mitleids bedeutet, stellt sich in der

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[181] Milo Rau, "Der endlose Zyklus der Gewalt", in: *taz*, 15.04.2019.
[182] Ebd., S. 206.
[183] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 41.
[184] Vgl. ebd., S. 116 und Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 82ff.

solidarischen Identifikation der Zuschauer mit den Figuren ein. Ein existentielles, politisches Mitleid, eine globale Solidarität, ist das von Milo Rau normativ geforderte Gefühl,[185] das theatral durch die Einsicht in die Falschheit des zynischen Mitleids der Gewinner mit den Verlierern eingeübt zu werden vermag.

Das aber heißt für Milo Rau *Katharsis*: Sie ist "das Erkennen des schon Gewussten" wie im Prozess des *König Ödipus*, in dem der Protagonist seine tragische Blindheit durchbricht. Indem sich die Zuschauer in der Figur, die sich in andere mitleidend einfühlt, selbst erkennen, wird gar eine "Steigerung von Katharsis"[186] möglich und das begrenzt-narzisstische Mitleid kann sich durch Einsicht in die eigene Mitschuld und Mitverantwortung zu einem politisch-existentiellen Gefühl weiten, in dem jedes Individuum als nicht-dehumanisierbarer Mensch erscheint, in dem das Elend in anderen Regionen und Kulturen eines ist, "das uns alle, das *mich* betrifft."[187] Die Pointe von Raus Katharsiskonzeption liegt darin, dass Katharsis nicht vorhandene Gefühle erregt und abbaut, sondern überhaupt eine ästhetische Erziehung zum richtigen Gefühl darstellt: einem nachhaltigen Solidaritätsgefühl, das die Einsicht in die Universalität des Menschlichen und der Verantwortung erst erarbeitet hat. In der Debatte über das Verständnis des Genitivs in Aristoteles' These von der Reinigung von Furcht und Mitleid[188] würde das Theater des Realen für die Deutung als *genitivus subjectivus* stehen: Das Mitleid soll gereinigt werden, nicht der Zuschauer vom Mitleid überhaupt. Im Gegenteil: Er soll nicht-exklusives Mitleid, Empathie, Solidarität erst lernen, dazu durch die Aufführung uafgeklärt und bewegt werden. Entsprechend dieser Katharsiskonzeption ist das praktische Ziel des Globalen Realismus, dessen Programm das Realtheater des IIPM verfolgt, "die Entwicklung einer globalen politischen Empfindsamkeit und damit einer global gedachten praktischen Solidarität."[189]

Ob die Energie der Katharsis so weit reicht, bleibt eine Frage, die jede Zuschauerin und jeder Zuschauer angesichts der jeweiligen Produktion für sich selbst beantworten muss. Es besteht stets das Risiko, dass die ästhetisch-theatrale Kraft, durch die erst ein Publikum

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[185] Vgl. Milo Rau in "Der endlose Zyklus der Gewalt".

[186] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 108. Vgl. dazu Bossart, "Schrecken, Trauer und Versöhnung".

[187] Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl,* S. 62.

[188] Aristoteles, *Poetik*, 1449b.

[189] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 257. Zum Globalen Realismus siehe Milo Rau: "Was ist Globaler Realismus", in: ders., *Globaler Realismus – Goldenes Buch I/Global Realism – Golden Book I*, Berlin 2018, S. 33-42

ergriffen wird, sich nicht stark genug mit dem epistemischen Anspruch an das Enthüllen der wahren historischen Wirkzusammenhänge und Konstellationen verbindet und der Eindruck des (vermeintlich) Dokumentarischen und medial Vermittelten das Publikum auf Distanz hält und die körperlich-emotionale Dynamik der Katharsis behindert.

6. Die Überschreitung des Tragischen im Realtheater

Wer von praktischen und politischen Zielen redet, scheint die Tragödie entweder hinter sich gelassen zu haben oder sich noch vor ihr zu befinden. In der antiken Tragik führt innerhalb der Tragödie kein Weg aus der tragischen Erfahrung heraus: Das Unheil wirkt aussichtslos. Es gibt nur ein Ende der Aufführung, nicht aber eine Auflösung des Tragischen. Die moderne Theater- und Theoriegeschichte hat versucht, Tragik entweder in eine Komik zu verwandeln, in der sich die Figuren von ihrem Scheitern heiter verabschieden, oder sie romantisch im Spiel mit metadramatischer Rollendistanz aufzulösen.[190] Milo Raus tragödienartiges Realtheater eröffnet einen anderen Weg: Die Tragik, so Rau, ist mitnichten am Ende, nur zeigt sie sich erst oder zumindest viel stärker, wenn man über den Rand befriedeter Wohlstandsbezirke in Europa hinausblickt.[191] Das global inspirierte Theater soll die Tragik darstellen und zwar so, dass es auch symbolisch Auswege vorführt, auf denen die tragikogenen Verhältnisse der auf den Abgrund zusteuernden Welt der globalen Zivilisation überwunden werden können. Entsprechend ist das Programm des Globalen Realismus politisch wie das des Tragik-Kritikers Brecht: Es geht nicht primär um Reflexion und Kritik, sondern um tatsächliche Veränderung.

Wie aber ist solch ein politisches Theater globaler Tragik denkbar? Wie können Aufführungen eine veränderte Realität schaffen, wenn schon internationale politische Organisationen darin scheitern? Die Antwort auf diese Fragen kann sich auf zwei Einsichten stützen: Zum einen vollzieht die theatrale Darstellung der Tragik selbst bereits einen Schritt zu ihrer Aneignung, insofern Theater der Ort für "die Verwandlung von Schicksal in Erzählung"[192] ist. In der theatralen Erzählung können sich die Figuren zu dem, was sie erlebt

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[190] Vgl. Menke, *Die Gegenwart der Tragödie*, S. 110-157.
[191] Rau, *Orestes in Mosul*, S. 27, 36.
[192] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 12.

haben, auf *eine neue Weise verhalten*: "Es gibt eine Freiheit, mit dem je eigenen individuellen Schicksal umzugehen im Sinne einer existenziellen Psychoanalyse."[193] Es handelt sich um eine ästhetische Freiheit, in der das darstellende Individuum zum Gewesenen in ein künstlerisch aneignendes Verhältnis tritt und eine eigene Form des sprachlich-performativen Widerstands gegen den Schein eines übermächtigen Fatums entwickelt. Aus dem Freiheitsgewinn gegenüber der Tragik wird es möglich, ihren Schrecken in einen die Gemeinschaft der Darstellenden und Zuschauenden umfassenden Sinn zu verwandeln.[194] Indem das Realtheater die Tragik des Geschichtlichen auf der Bühne nicht einfach reproduziert, sondern als ästhetische Aufführung mit politischer Absicht transformiert, ruft es zur Einnahme einer ästhetisch-politischen Perspektive auf, in der die Tragik – der Kreislauf aus Handeln und Leiden, Gewalt und Schuld – erst ästhetisch erfahren und anerkannt werden muss, bevor er durchbrochen werden kann. Das erzählte Schicksal kann so in einem "tragische[n] Akt der Freiheit"[195] vor den Augen der anderen angenommen werden. Diese Freiheit haben bereits Schiller und Schelling den tragischen Figuren der Antike attestiert. So schreibt Schelling etwa, dass der Held noch in seinem Untergang seine Freiheit durch die Annahme der Schuld für eine nicht-absichtliche Tat beweise.[196]

Das möglichst heterogene Kollektiv aus Produzenten und Rezipierenden ermöglicht dabei, die eigene "tragische Blindheit" erkennbar werden zu lassen, die die einzelnen – wie Ödipus – aufgrund der Beschränkung unserer Erkenntnisfähigkeit nicht alleine durchschauen können. Aus Einsicht in die strukturelle Limitierung der eigenen Perspektive im globalisierten Kapitalismus plädiert daher Rau für gemeinsame Erarbeitung und Autorschaft von Stücken, an der auch Laiendarsteller und zunehmend die Öffentlichkeit beteiligt sein sollen, wie der zweite, dritte, fünfte und siebte Punkt des *Genter Manifests* fordern.

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[193] Ebd., S. 117.

[194] Vgl. Milo Raus Selbstaussage: "Meine Theaterprojekte sind für mich die Rettung aus alledem, meine Form der Transformation von Fatalismus in etwas Anderes – in etwas wie Solidarität, sogar Schönheit." (in: Florian Merkel, "'In jedem von uns stecket ein Pegidist'", Interview mit Milo Rau, in: *Die Welt*, 22.1.2016.)

[195] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 18.

[196] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, in: *Sämtliche Werke,* hrsg. v. Karl Friedrich August Schelling, Bd. V, Stuttgart, Augsburg 1859, S. 695ff. Vgl. dazu Katia Hay, *Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns. Das Tragische als Bestimmung der Philosophie bei Schelling*, Freiburg 2012. Zu Schiller siehe Wolfram Ette, „Die Tragödie als Medium philosophischer Erkenntnis", in: *Handbuch Literatur und Philosophie*, hrsg. v. Hans Feger, Stuttgart, Weimar 2012, S. 105ff.

Die zweite Einsicht besteht in der Freiheit der Darstellung *gegenüber* ihrem Gegenstand, auch wenn dieser sie als Genre definiert. Theater, das geschichtliche Tragik aufruft, ist ihr selbst nicht ausgeliefert, sondern kann aus ihrem Lauf heraus zugleich in sie eingreifen. In einer Analogie zur Intervention des Areopags und Athenes in die Kausalkette von Rachehandlungen in den *Eumeniden* des Aischylos geht es z. B. in *Mitleid* darum, "die Tragik der Geschichte zu durchbrechen".[197] Die zweite Schauspielerin des Stücks, Consolate Sipérius (Abb. 6), hält den Kreislauf der Gewalt auf, weil sie am Ende kein Maschinengewehr nehmen will, um sich für erlittene Gewalt zu rächen, sondern sich weigert und stattdessen Kinderlachen eingespielt wird. Dadurch wird eine Zäsur erzeugt, die einen Ansatz für eine Transzendenz der Tragik ermöglicht. Eine ähnliche, wenngleich unentschlossenere Zäsur zeigt sich am Ende von *Orestes in Mosul*, als der Chor junger irakischer Männer, von Athene (Khitan Idress) befragt, darüber abstimmen soll, ob IS-Mörder hingerichtet werden sollen (Abb. 7). Während er sich am Beginn der Proben noch dafür aussprach, enthalten sich nun alle: "Rachebedürfnis und Moral halten sich die tragische Waage."[198]

Zum anderen wird das Realtheater selbst zum Prototypen einer Praxis, die die Darstellung der Tragik in eine neue Praxis überführt und damit das, was Mark Fisher *Kapitalistischen Realismus* nannte,[199] aufbricht: die systemisch stabilisierte Weltanschauung, dass es keine veritablen Änderungen und Alternativen, sondern nur Reproduktionen des Ähnlichen innerhalb des alles bestimmenden Systems gäbe. Das Theater des Realen denkt nicht nur, sondern *setzt* performativ Alternativen gegen diese "monotone Tragik des globalisierten Kapitalismus", der, wie Milo Rau in Tradition von Marx und der Kritischen Theorie bekräftigt, auch in seiner schicksalshaften, weil global dominanten Macht, eben "keine Naturkraft ist",[200] die sich nicht prinzipiell durch Menschen ändern ließe. Das ist die Pointe des Programms des Globalen Realismus: Was das Theater tut, muss, so Rau, selbst "wahr werden, es muss real werden. Analyse allein reicht nicht",[201] um aus dem Diktat des Bestehenden einen Ausweg zu

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[197] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 118.

[198] Daniele Muscionico, "Bei Milo Rau kommt Kunst an ihr Ende", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19.4.2019. Vgl. auch die Auskunft eines Schauspielers, die Entscheidung sei "tragisch" (Milo Rau, "Der endlose Zyklus der Gewalt.")

[199] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Winchester 2009.

[200] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 142, 251.

[201] Bossart, Rau: "Das ist der Grund, warum es Kunst gibt", in: *Die Enthüllung des Realen*, S. 18. Vgl. das erste, Marx' elfte Feuerbachthese variierende Dogma des *Genter Manifests*: "Es geht nicht mehr nur darum, die Welt

weisen. Dabei geht es nicht darum, reale Institutionen mimetisch auf der Bühne zu repräsentieren, sondern überhaupt erst neue zu schaffen: "Was es in der Realität, in der Politik nicht gibt, muss es dann in der Kunst geben."[202]

Wenn im Ostkongo und Berlin das *Kongo Tribunal* tagt, um in einem eigens geschaffenen "utopischen Rechtsraum"[203] (den es trotz beteiligter Juristen nicht gibt, sondern dessen Geltung die Kunst performativ behauptet) Genozide aufzuklären und Schuldige zu identifizieren, oder in der Berliner Schaubühne das von Rau assemblierte *Weltparlament* (Abb. 8) zusammenkommt, um eine Charta für das 21. Jahrhundert zu verabschieden, dann handelt es sich um "ein utopisches Theater: Das nicht im Rahmen des Bestehenden für Abhilfe sorgt oder es anklagt, sondern reale politische Alternativen eröffnet."[204]

Statt die Machtpolitik und die Ungerechtigkeit nur zu kritisieren, damit andere die Praxis ändern, kreiert sie symbolisch selbst einen Entwurf für eine neue Praxis, die den Gegenstand der Kritik aushebelt. Diese "imaginäre Institutionalisierung"[205], erprobt in der ästhetischen Form des Theaters, kann die für eine andere Politik notwendige rechtlich wirksame Institutionalisierung seiner Veränderungspraxis zwar nicht garantieren, aber ihre reale Möglichkeit exemplarisch als eine Art Modell unter Beweis stellen.

Dieser symbolische, ästhetische "Vor-Glanz einer zukünftigen, noch nicht realisierten Realität" hilft, "durch die Imagination irgendwann neue Dinge tatsächlich zu realisieren."[206] Das künstlerische Versprechen auf gesellschaftliche Veränderung wird bei Milo Rau praktisch, indem seine Arbeiten beanspruchen, exemplarisch in der ästhetischen Zeit der Aufführung das Versprechen bereits einzulösen, dass es bei der Dichotomie von Kunst und Leben nicht bleiben muss. Freilich liegt hierin auch das Risiko, dass der utopische Vorglanz für die Sache selbst genommen wird. So kann das kuratorisch zusammengerufene Weltparlament nur den Schein von demokratischer Legitimität erzeugen. Genau deshalb aber sollte man die Arbeiten Raus als künstlerische Modelle möglicher Institutionen und nicht schon die Prototypen ihrer

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darzustellen. Es geht darum, sie zu verändern. Nicht die Darstellung des Realen ist das Ziel, sondern dass die Darstellung selbst real wird."
[202] Im Gespräch zum Weltparlament auf *KulturZeit*, 7.11.2017, http://www.3sat.de/mediathek/?mode=play&obj=69934 (Zugriff am 9.1.2019).
[203] Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 117.
[204] Milo Rau in Merkel, "'In jedem von uns stecket ein Pegidist.'"
[205] Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 103.
[206] Barzinger, "Warum der Regisseur Milo Rau Ärger mit Geheimdiensten und Milizen hat."

Realisierung verstehen.

Ästhetische Autonomie kommt hier nicht in der Abgrenzung zur Praxis, sondern in der inspirativen Kraft für eine veränderte Praxis zum Ausdruck. Insofern leitet das Theater solch eines "Möglichkeitsrealismus" doch, anders als Milo Rau meint, zum Handeln an,[207] insofern es mit geradezu megalomanischem Anspruch zeigt: Die neue, wahre Geschichte des Menschen im Anthropozän ist erst noch zu schreiben, der universale Humanismus, der solidarische Kampf für Gerechtigkeit sind erst noch zu verwirklichen – und zwar ab jetzt. Das Realtheater ist von dieser Überschreitung des Tragischen und der Gewinnung einer besseren Zukunft, für die sie ein Beispiel zu geben versucht, beseelt. Auf den realen Umschlag von Handeln in Schuld, Verlust und Leid unter den Bedingungen der globalen Weltordnung, den die Stücke der Ensembles von Rau aufrufen, antwortet in ihnen Widerstand gegen das vermeintliche Schicksal, das wir doch selbst als kontingentes Geschehen produzieren: der "Umschlag" des Willens, "die Ermächtigung, die Schubumkehr."[208], die von diesen tragödienartigen Spielen als Realität freigesetzt zu werden vermögen.

7. Gegenwart und Zukunft der Tragödie

Wie sich gezeigt hat, spielt das Theater des Realen zwischen Wiederholung der tragischen Geschichte und ihrer Überschreitung. In beidem handelt es sich um eine *Transzendenz der Tragik*. Zum einen im Sinne des *genitivus subjektivus*: Die reale Tragik der geschichtlichen Schuld in der Globalisierung transzendiert aus dem verworrenen und verdrängten Realen in die figürliche Kunst. Scharf ist es in seinen dramatischen Auswirkungen wahrnehmbar, die die Figuren im Theater erzählen und zeigen. Die tragische Geschichtlichkeit tritt über sie ins Bewusstsein der Zuschauer. Zugleich heißt *Transzendenz der Tragik* im Sinne des *genitivus objectivus*, dass durch die ästhetische Form der Produktion das tragische Schicksal durchbrochen und in neue theatrale wie praktische Möglichkeiten übertragen wird. Indem geschichtliche Tragik im Theater in eine "Gegen-Geschichte"[209] (Alexander Kluge) umgeformt

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[207] Rau, Bossart, *Wiederholung und Ekstase*, S. 250, vgl. ebd., S. 65, 119.
[208] Ebd., S. 252.
[209] Vgl. Rau, *Das geschichtliche Gefühl*, S. 24.

wird, ist das Verdikt über ihre Macht, die Zukunft zu determinieren, bereits gesprochen. Die Interventionen in die Kette der Gewalt sind jederzeit, hier und jetzt, durch alle, die sich in ästhetisch inspirierter Kraft politisch vereinen, als wirksame Akte möglich. Das Theater des Realen führt daher "Tragödie[n] gegen die Tragödie"[210] auf. Die Rettungsmöglichkeiten erschließen sich dabei nur, wenn man anhand exemplarischer Figuren ästhetisch erfährt, was es heißt, dass die Menschheit in den Abgrund steuert, und aus dieser Einsicht gemeinsam im Kollektivraum Theater Alternativen abgeleitet und realisiert werden: "Die Überwindung des Tragischen, des Unglücks und der Feindschaft funktioniert nur in der Gemeinschaft",[211] so Milo Raus These.

Vollzieht das Realtheater Raus und des IIPM also die moderne Überwindung der Tragödie? Die Idee einer ultimativen Utopie des Endes der Tragödie vertritt der Autor und Regisseur nicht. Wie in den *Eumeniden* das Gericht die tragische Zirkulation der Gewalt durch eine neue Praxis unterbricht, ihre Triebkraft, die Schuld und ihre Verluste aber nicht aus der Welt schafft, so werden auch in den Prozessstücken Milo Raus die Gegensätze diskursiv ausgetragen, sie bleiben aber nach den Aufführungen bestehen. Wie es im Irak nach dem Sieg über den IS weitergeht, ist offen. Die Abstimmung des Chors der irakischen Männer am Ende von *Orestes in Mosul* führt zur tragischen *epochē*, nicht zur Konfliktlösung. Transzendenz der Tragik heißt also: die Tragik ins Theater zu holen, dort Auswege aus ihr zu öffnen – und zugleich die Aussicht auf ihre Wiederkehr einzuüben. "Im Wissen um das Scheitern jeder politischen Handlung, um die Sinnlosigkeit aller Hoffnungen" liegt eine Würde, "die Herrlichkeit der tragischen Kunst",[212] die auf die politische Utopie bezogen bleibt, weil sie sie dialektisch hervortreibt. Die "Gegenrealität" kann im Theater nur dann entstehen, wenn sie "den ganzen Schrecken der Realität"[213] zeigt.

Doch Theater als ästhetische Anstalt, das politische Praxis unter der Bedingung erprobt, dass sie sie nicht selbst ist, kann nur Alternativen aufzeigen, sie aber nicht politisch-gesellschaftlich implementieren. Dazu müsste es seinen Ort innerhalb des öffentlichen Raums, seine Aktionen und sein Publikum als öffentliche Provokation oder zivilen Ungehorsam

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[210] Rau, "Der endlose Zyklus der Gewalt". Vgl. die Betrachtungen von Freddy Decreus unter dem Titel "Exporting the tragic feeling", in: Rau, *Orestes in Mosul*, S. 43ff.
[211] Gregoris, "Milo Rau: 'Ich will die absolute Notwendigkeit.'"
[212] Ebd., S. 48.
[213] Gregoris, "Milo Rau: 'Ich will die absolute Notwendigkeit.'"

wählen – und damit die ästhetische Distanz, aus der Gefühle und Reflexion eingeübt werden, eintauschen in eine Konfrontation, wie sie aktuell für die Aktionen der Letzten Generation oder XR typisch sind. Ob jedoch selbst dann die immer wiederkehrende Tragik von Gewalt und Schuld von Verstrickung in den Kreislauf aus Tun, Zulassen und Erleiden institutionell und nachhaltig gebrochen werden kann, bleibt eine von heute aus nicht zu beantwortende Frage.

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European Society for Aesthetics

The Category of the Aesthetic
Considerations on Theodor W. Adorno's Reading of Kierkegaard

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ABSTRACT. This paper proposes an investigation on Theodor W. Adorno's category of the aesthetic through an analysis of his *Kierkegaard. Construction of the aesthetic*. Published in 1933, this text shows how the development of an aesthetic theory is rooted in Adorno's philosophical reflection since its very beginning, culminating then in his posthumous masterpiece, *Aesthetic Theory*. By a careful reading of Adorno's comment on the Kierkegaardian thought, I aim to gain a deeper comprehension of his own category of the aesthetic. In particular, I will argue that by emphasising Kierkegaard's plurality of equivocations of the term "aesthetic" Adorno manifests his intention to grasp such category in a constellative way. This implies that its inner meaning cannot be fully expressed through the singularity of any of its moments, but only through their interrelation. As a consequence, the traditional reception that conceives it as immediately coinciding with the artistic sphere alone needs to be urgently revised.

1. Introduction

The following study intends to present an analysis of Theodor W. Adorno's *Kierkegaard. Construction of the aesthetic*, namely the dissertation for his *Habilitation* at the University of Frankfurt am Main, written in 1929/30 under the supervision of Paul Tillich and then published in 1933, after a radical revision. In this occasion, my purpose is neither a philological examination of the volume nor a judgement on the plausibility of Adorno's interpretation of

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Kierkegaard. On the contrary, the focus will be rather placed on the way Adorno investigates Kierkegaard's category of the aesthetic in order to gain a deeper understanding of Adorno's own conception of the aesthetic.

Since it is an early writing, actually Adorno's very first major philosophical publication, it might seem illegitimate or at least unlikely to argue that some of these early theorisations could have been valid throughout the development of his entire aesthetic thought, right until his posthumous masterpiece, *Aesthetic Theory*. And yet, it is worth noting that already Adorno's contemporaries felt that *Kierkegaard* could have been read as a significant incubator for his future philosophical insights. This is the case, for example, of Benjamin's review on the *Vossische Zeitung* (Benjamin, 1933), that explicitly underlined its anticipatory aspect with respect to Adorno's later writings. Moreover, Adorno himself must have looked always with renewed interest to his early work, as it is demonstrated by the periodic recurrences of the theme. For instance, the article *On Kierkegaards Doctrine of Love*, sent to Krenek and then published in 1940 in the journal "Studies in Philosophy and Social Science". Thereafter, a new edition of *Kierkegaard* followed in 1962, sent to Bloch with the designation of «dreamlike anticipation» (Müller-Doohm, 2005, p. 519), and finally in 1966 a third re-publication of the volume, the last one personally edited by Adorno. New appendices were added here, such as the essay dedicated to Tillich, *Kierkegaard noch einmal*, and the expansion of the *Notiz*. Such perseverance is explicitly echoed in Adorno's words in the foreword of the Italian edition in 1961, where he affirms that «his deep aversion to always starting a new life is also evident in his relationship with his books» (Adorno, 1983, p. 11, trans. by EV). Even more remarkable are the statements that follow few lines below: here, he openly recognises the inevitable changes and evolutions that both his thinking and his writing style have undergone since then. Nevertheless, he strongly refuses to reject this book as a mere preliminary stage. On the contrary, he believes that little in it does not deserve to be re-examined under the aspects of his later thought (Adorno, 1983, p. 11).

Last but not least, one could enhance the relevance of the *Kierkegaard* book in the development of Adorno's aesthetic theory by bringing full attention to the originality of its perspective compared to the prevailing historical-philosophical context. In this regard, it should be noted that the early 1920s witnessed the so-called Kierkegaard-*Renaissance*, a resurgence of studies that saw in Kierkegaard primarily the Father of modern existentialism, emancipating

him from the predominant religious interpretation. Now, Adorno's choice to devote himself to the Danish philosopher should not be interpreted as adherence to such intellectual current: rather the opposite is true. Adorno's different focus stands out already from the subtitle of his work, *Construction of the Aesthetic*: the most deprecated existential stage in Kierkegaard's thought becomes the privileged centre of Adorno's investigation.

Accordingly, it is my intention to show that *Kierkegaard. Construction of the Aesthetic* indeed contains significant passages suitable to support the main assumption of my argumentation: i.e., the idea that Adorno's category of the aesthetic does not let itself be limited to the artistic sphere, but conversely possesses a deeply philosophical dimension. To that end, I plan to read this early work in light of a specific sentence that Adorno wrote for the first time in the aforementioned foreword, namely: «aesthetics does not mean here [in this work], as it does not in Kierkegaard himself, only a theory of art but, in Hegelian terms, a position of thought in regard to objectivity» (Adorno, 1983, p. 12, trans. by EV). The key point that this quotation illuminates is twofold. On the one hand, it explicitly opens aesthetics to a dimension beyond art theory; on the other, it creates a clear correspondence in this particular sense between Kierkegaard's attitude towards aesthetics and Adorno's one. Showing how this Adorno's retrospective statement effectively takes shape in his early work will allow me to seize a surplus of the aesthetic beyond the artistic terrain, manifesting its strong theoretical instance. To that aim, I firstly take into consideration Adorno's method of analysing Kierkegaard's aesthetic (§2); secondly, I examine Adorno's comment on some crucial concepts in the Kierkegaardian philosophy (§3). Lastly, on grounds of all these elements, I formulate a hypothesis concerning the kind of position in regard to objectivity that aesthetics actually is (§4).

2. How to construct the aesthetic

Following Adorno's own words, the purpose of his dissertation is the construction of the aesthetic in Kierkegaard's thought, that is to say, «to grasp the meaning of his category of the aesthetic» (Adorno, 1989, p. 23). Investigating the moves Adorno elaborates in this occasion could be of the utmost interest to help better understand his position too, since, as we shall see, some of those are going to become hallmarks of his later philosophical approach.

More specifically, Adorno inaugurates the volume by defining the status of the material he intends to work on, namely the exclusively philosophical nature of the Kierkegaardian *œuvre*: « the first concern of the construction of the aesthetic in Kierkegaard's philosophy is to distinguish it from poetry» (Adorno, 1989, p. 5). As a matter of fact, there has always been a tendency to consider Kierkegaard's works as literary creations: in doing so, however, what is missed is nothing less than their philosophical truth content (Adorno, 1989, p. 3). In this sense, one should not confuse what Adorno admits being a fundamental convergence between philosophy and art with an identity between them. In Kierkegaard's particular case, Adorno banishes from artistic terrain his texts, which do not fulfil the necessary criteria to rise to the rank of artworks. For it is not enough to simply shape a philosophical thought through literary configurations, like Kierkegaard's writings, in order to earn the designation of art. So far, however, it remains unexplained why it is so imperative for Adorno's project to purge Kierkegaard's philosophy of all poetic ambitions. In this regard, my firm belief is that Adorno, in ascertaining the philosophical character of these texts, makes also for the aesthetic eminently philosophical claims that would otherwise be dissolved if one regarded them as artistic creations that are in their nature essentially alien to concepts.

Once attested the full philosophical citizenship of the object of his analysis, Adorno moves on by announcing a plurality of equivocations of the term 'aesthetic' in Kierkegaard. Firstly, the concept refers to the realm of art criticism; secondly, to the first of the three "stages" of existence; and thirdly, to the form of subjective communication (Adorno, 1989, pp. 14-15). Every single meaning remains distinct but at the same time related to the others. Thus, their synthesis should not be sought in abstract summations, but only through an analysis of individual phenomena. It is clear that Adorno's attitude towards the concept of the aesthetic is here already articulated in a constellative way. Such a conceptual modality indicates Adorno's sensibility in recognising the relevance of multiple and divergent meanings of the aesthetic, which is taken on in its entire complexity. Thinking the aesthetic as a constellation signifies then that none of its equivocations, considered in its singularity, can express the complete and deeper sense of this category. Hence, Adorno refuses to construct it relying exclusively on its most traditional linguistic usage, namely the doctrine of art and beauty, which is nonetheless indeed present in Kierkegaard's *œuvre*. Because of its being isolated in the entirety of his thought, Kierkegaard's art theory relates itself only fragmentarily to his dialectics, limiting the

dialectical potential of the aesthetic itself, which, on the contrary, Adorno evidently wishes to preserve.

Thereby, to the originality of the point of access in Kierkegaard's thought Adorno adds also an element of complexity in the conception of this category that makes it operative on several philosophical levels. As a matter of fact, the interpretative key he adopts goes beyond its more traditional determinations: necessary but not sufficient conditions for an effective construction of the aesthetic. In Adorno's view, the latter is not confined to its historically correlated domain, namely the artistic, just as it is not to the existential one, which is its usual reference in the secondary literature on the Danish philosopher. At a closer look, the conclusion Adorno comes to at the end of the first chapter *Exposition of the aesthetic* seems thus to fully account for the exceeding of the aesthetic beyond a theory of art. An invitation to dig deeper that cannot but resonate as a warning also towards Adorno's thought itself, especially in light of his abovementioned later claim, whose first part finds in these preliminary considerations already a concrete confirmation. Consequently, Adorno identifies the only fruitful path to pursue a real construction of the aesthetic in the investigation of the subject/object relation in the Kierkegaardian philosophy, since its category is indeed «one of knowledge» (Adorno, 1989, p. 14). Not only the Greek etymology '*aisthesis*' that strongly resonates in the term 'aesthetic', but also the present mention to the gnoseological relation *par excellence* contributes to assigning a theoretical dimension to this category. Therefore, at the end of the first chapter, the task that Adorno has set himself seems far from being accomplished. Thus, it urges a continuation of the analysis within the Kierkegaardian *œvre* in order to find the meaning of the aesthetic with and against Kierkegaard.

3. *The aesthetic as Kierkegaard's* genius loci

Adorno's intention to investigate Kierkegaard's subject/object relation, more precisely their alienation, serves as a *fil rouge* throughout the manuscript and refers directly to the experience that lies at the heart of the book itself (Adorno/Krenek, 2020, p. 50): the one of the *Verstelltheit* of the meaning, namely the human historical impossibility to access meaning again. So, it begins an extremely complex journey through the depths of Kierkegaard's thought in the name of an immanent critique *in statu nascendi* that lets Adorno proceed through Kierkegaard

beyond him. Among the early twentieth-century receptions of Kierkegaard's work in Germany, Adorno's one is the only interpretation that takes the form of critique. In this case, however, critique does not necessarily mean total dismissal (Lee, 2008, p. 6). Adorno's critical movement operates rather by considering some Kierkegaardian formulations, recognising them as having indeed a value, although opposite to their original one. In short, «the order of the spheres is inverted» (Adorno, 1989, p. 124). This indicates that Adorno's reading of Kierkegaard is not only a receptive production but also and most importantly a productive reception (Schulz, 2011, p. 29). Thus, by means of a careful reading of the most significant moments of his immanent critique, it would be legitimately possible to discern Adorno's own philosophical beliefs.

Hence, Adorno gives full attention to Kierkegaard's fundamental figure of inwardness, where the latter makes all the moments of meaning, subject and object converge. The primacy of the inwardness in the Kierkegaardian thought derives from its possibility of aspiring to access meaning again, which is conversely denied to the external world of things. Therefore, the movement that Kierkegaard undertakes is an inward movement, whereby the external world, denigrated as a mere accident, simply disappears. As a result, the dialectical dynamic in act cannot be said to be one between subject and object but between meaning and a subjectivity that has now become objectless: namely, an inner monologue of the spirit alone. Furthermore, Kierkegaard imposes the same verdict of rejection on everything that is not related to the inwardness, which first and foremost implies the aesthetic. And yet, Adorno's argumentation revolves around the attempt of showing that «the central antinomy» (Adorno, 1989, p. 66) of Kierkegaard's thought manifests itself precisely in the concept of the aesthetic. In other words, his strategy aims to penetrate «the obscure depths of a philosophy that his [Kierkegaard's] doctrine of art touches upon only in momentary shudders» (Adorno, 1989, p. 23), in order to uncover the real value of the category of the aesthetic.

As Adorno points out, all the equivocations Kierkegaard attributes to the aesthetic converge into a figurative definition, «certainly the most precise that he gave» (Adorno, 1989, p. 65), whose central core lies in the expression «my booty is images» (Adorno, 1989, p. 64), quoted also in a passage of *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno, 2002, p. 287). From this context, it is possible to infer the fundamental traits of Kierkegaard's aesthetic: briefly, those gather around the concepts of immediacy, semblance, discontinuity, contingency. In that regard, Adorno's

effort does not aim to negate such aspects of Kierkegaard's aesthetic *per se*. Conversely, he rather remarks that by pointing them out as insufficiencies, Kierkegaard identifies those which are actually the potentialities of the aesthetic. This is the reason why it is of the highest interest for my main assumption to take into account some of the moments in which Adorno's evaluative overturning appears more striking.

The first one concerns directly the key place Adorno names to construct the aesthetic, namely the subject/object relation. Particularly significant seems to be the passage where he affirms that right when Kierkegaard decides on aesthetic determinations, he comes indeed closer to the reality of the condition of his philosophy as «objectless inwardness as well as that of the alien things in front of it» (Adorno, 1989, p. 67, transl. mod.). Adorno's claim represents the exact opposite of Kierkegaard's philosophical approach. According to the latter, only the inwardness constitutes an instance of substantial reality, while everything different from it, namely the aesthetic or the external world, is labelled as mere semblance, incapable of leading to truth again. Unfortunately for Kierkegaard, such isolation that he theorizes for the inwardness is nothing but an illusion, since it is continuously challenged right by all those objective dimensions that, because of their being non-dialectically eliminated, keep pushing on the subject's apparent segregation. External history and language are just the two most evident examples of the problematic nature that Adorno ascribes to the allegedly isolated pure subjectivity. Hence, he concludes that Kierkegaard does not realise that that semblance character the aesthetic is accused of is deeply rooted also in the inwardness's abyss. Consequently, only where Kierkegaard is free from this mutilated and mutilating perspective, he is able to recognise the sterile objectlessness of the inwardness as well as to regain a firmer grip on the object itself: this occurs, *malgré lui*, precisely in his aesthetic thematizations.

Such an argumentation testifies the fact that Adorno sees in the aesthetic a relational modality between subject and object that escapes the immanent suffocation of the inwardness, affecting the whole experiential process. This brings the focus, of course, on the Kierkegaardian correspondence between the aesthetic and the moment of immediacy. As Kierkegaard recognises the historical loss of an immediate relation between subject and object, he tries to restore it in the inwardness, banishing as contingent everything that stays out of the subjectivity, the aesthetic included. However, following Adorno, what Kierkegaard thus misses is nothing less than the focal requirement of philosophical truth, namely the interpretation of

actual reality. And yet, Kierkegaard still presents a form of communication between the world of things and the objectless inwardness: this very last possibility can take place only in the *Anlaß* (occasion), whose necessary introduction, nevertheless, drives Kierkegaard to self-contradiction. The ontological meaning becomes dependent on the category of the occasion as an indispensable impulse to set in motion the dialectic of existence itself, without however being part of it. This grants thus new dignity to everything that was previously deprived of all truth: the external world and the aesthetic (Adorno, 1989, pp. 94-95). As Adorno notices, although Kierkegaard defines the latter as the sphere of mere immediacy, still he is forced to admit the presence in that same sphere of some susceptibility to mediation, i.e., the occasion. Through Adorno's comment then, it appears evident that, in his own conception, the aesthetic becomes the seat of an immediacy that is nonetheless able to transcend itself. So much so that Adorno comes to affirm that in Kierkegaard, paradoxically, «hope nowhere insists more stubbornly than in the aesthetic *Diapsalmata*» (Adorno, 1989, p. 124).

      This is the second and most decisive overturning of Kierkegaard's thought, since the evocation of hope represents its undeniable crux and final prerogative of the inwardness. Nevertheless, the inner contradictions that Adorno attributes to the latter impact also on its possibility of participating anew to meaning. As a matter of fact, as we have seen right from the beginning, the figure of inwardness is meant to be the keystone of the problematic triad subject-object-meaning. And yet, conversely Adorno is convinced that where Kierkegaard sees only contingency and discontinuity, right there the truth moment of his thought dwells. In lack of a relation with its other, the Kierkegaardian subjectivity closes non-dialectically in itself, whereas the realm of the aesthetic insists on the object, which is, however, never totally graspable. From its constant retraction comes then the need for the image, which allows to glimpse in things more than they are (Adorno, 2002, p. 330). At this point, according to Adorno, Kierkegaard fails to realise that the scheme of truth, enciphered and blocked, towards which his question has always been directed, finds its most adequate correspondences in the images that constitute the inner structure of the realm of the aesthetic. Adorno identifies the most indisputable evidence of his assumption in the representation of Marie Beaumarchais' despair that silently turns into hope (Adorno, 1989, pp. 125-126). This Kierkegaardian passage carries the metaphor of a letter containing information about life's happiness. However, its pages are worn out and the handwriting barely legible, forcing the eye to toil unsuccessfully as the paper

and the text become increasingly unreadable. In the end, all that is left is tears. Following Kierkegaard, this «endless, useless reading» (Adorno, 1989, p. 126) is supposed to correspond to the aesthetic individual's reflection, doomed to failure. On the contrary, Adorno understands it as the most faithful image of hope: in the aesthetic individual's overflowing eye, the vanishing traces dialectically return as comfort and hope. That the latter must glimmer in the sign of the most absolute negativity already seems to be Adorno's essential theoretical premise. For to assert it as immediately real would let it only fall back into mythology. The very own nature of the cipher prevents any fixed and immutable reading process: it is in itself possibility and fragmentariness, to which the aesthetic is *naturaliter* predisposed. This means that Adorno perceives in the aesthetic the capacity to penetrate so deeply into the concreteness of things that it ultimately transcends it. Thereby, an aesthetic way of comportment lets "something more" appear than just the mere existing. Nonetheless, like the Kierkegaardian metaphor of the rocket (Adorno, 1989, p. 131), this manifestation lasts only an instant, and yet, it strongly attests the presence of the possible in the existing and against it.

Lastly, I would like to remark a final but no less indicative passage in Adorno's argumentation. About that, it must be pointed out that Adorno indeed recognizes that Kierkegaard has grasped the intrinsic polymorphy of the concept of the aesthetic, but his comprehension is still affected by a certain partiality. In fact, his verdict on the aesthetic sphere and his doctrine of existence does not capture all of its images. What has escaped him is first and foremost the significance his philosophy attributes to the phenomenon of the Crucified. Kierkegaard inextricably enchains the original experience of Christianity to the image of the Crucifixion, handed down from generation to generation: the only one dialectically surviving. And yet, as Adorno puts it, according to Kierkegaard's account, the figurative manifestation of the Crucifix has almost no artistic value and then it cannot be considered effectively as art. In doing so, it goes beyond the artistic domain and, nevertheless, it remains itself an image. As such, «thus it rescues the aesthetic» (Adorno, 1989, p. 133). On closer inspection, this is clearly a further confirmation of Adorno's broadening of the spectrum of the aesthetic beyond the realm of the artistic. As the effigy of Christ testifies, the aesthetic sphere does not limit its images to those derived from the Kierkegaardian doctrine of existence, nor even to art, which is only one aspect of it. Therefore, in all its moments, Adorno's reflexion really seems to insist

on showing that the potential of the aesthetic can ultimately acquire fields of action other than those strictly linked to *a priori* given themes or contents.

4. Conclusions

I would like to conclude this paper by formulating my hypothesis on what aesthetics as a position of thought in regard to objectivity actually consists of. In light of all the previous considerations, I have stressed how already in this early work the contours of the category of the aesthetic have found a rather precise outline, which will be consolidated in Adorno's later thinking. These first formulations move towards a widening of the horizon of the aesthetic beyond the mere doctrine of art, while certainly encompassing it. In that regard, Kierkegaard's theorisation of the aesthetic offers Adorno very fruitful insights. It is in the discrepancy of its various manifestations and its inability to be contained within the rigid boundaries of a monolithic and unifying category that Adorno finds the crucial significance of the Kierkegaardian aesthetic (Hale, 2002, p. 44). According to both Kierkegaard and Adorno then, the theory of art alone does not fully account for the deeper meaning of the aesthetic. As a matter of fact, we could claim that the fundamental traits of the aesthetic find in art one of their most pregnant concretisations, for sure. Nonetheless, it appears that the key to construct its category could lie somewhere else: in a very theoretical setting, to be more precise. Adorno's reference to the subject/object relation as topical place to investigate the aesthetic brings the discussion to an experiential domain. To that extent, in a context of experiential mutilation that the *Verstelltheit* of the ontological meaning well represents, Kierkegaard reacts by dismissing the aesthetic of any claim to truth, which is thus exclusive prerogative of the objectless inwardness. On the contrary, Adorno's immanent critique shows that only by proceeding aesthetically the subject is able to maintain a relation with the object. The aesthetic does not eliminate the subjective moment at all, conversely, it conserves also the objective one, though. Accordingly, their relation is articulated in a such way that the aesthetic instance is so profoundly rooted into the object's concrete materiality that it manages to exceed it, as testified by the evocation of hope. Finally, in Adorno's view, aesthetics could then be considered as that position of thought in regard to objectivity that could still consent a critical experiential process in a situation of impoverished experience.

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