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Edited by Connell Vaughan and Iris Vidmar

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## Table of Contents

<b>Claire Anscomb</b> <i>The Epistemic Value of Photographs in the Age of New Theory</i> .....	1
<b>Marco Arienti</b> <i>Some Concerns with Experientialism about Depiction: the Case of Separation seeing-in</i> .....	19
<b>Marta Benenti and Giovanna Fazzuoli</b> <i>Experiencing the Making Paintings by Paolo Cotani, Marcia Hafif and Robert Ryman</i> .....	35
<b>Larissa Berger</b> <i>The Felt Syllogism of Taste – a Reading of Kant's Sensus Communis</i> .....	55
<b>Nicolò Pietro Cangini</b> <i>Prose and Life. A Comparison between Hegel's Aesthetics and Romantic's Poetics</i> .....	78
<b>Pol Capdevila</b> <i>Poetics of History in Contemporary Art</i> .....	93
<b>Stephen Chamberlain</b> <i>Literary Realism and the Significance of Life</i> .	122
<b>Melvin Chen</b> <i>To Chuck or Not to Chuck? Túngara Frogs &amp; Evolutionary Responses to the Puzzle of Natural Beauty</i> .....	153
<b>Zoë Cunliffe</b> <i>Epistemic Injustice and the Role of Narrative Fiction</i> ....	167

<b>Laura T. Di Summa-Knoop</b> <i>Defining Fashion: Novelty, Play, and Identity</i> .....	180
<b>Daniel Dohrn</b> <i>Art avant la Lèttre</i> .....	204
<b>Nemesio García-Carril Puy</b> <i>Against Hazlett’s Argument: Musical Works Qua Types are Modally Flexible Entities</i> .....	212
<b>Lisa Giombini</b> <i>Material Authenticity in Conservation Theory</i> .....	235
<b>Vitor Guerreiro</b> <i>The Unity of Our Aesthetic Life: A Crazy Suggestion...</i>	260
<b>Eran Guter and Inbal Guter</b> <i>A Critique of Langer’s View of Musical Temporality</i> .....	289
<b>Valentina Hribar Sorčan</b> <i>La Vie et la Mémoire</i> .....	308
<b>Eda Keskin</b> <i>Everyday Aesthetics and Empathy Development</i> .....	329
<b>Lev Kreft</b> <i>From Universalism to Singularity, from Singularity to Moralization</i> .....	343
<b>Gloria Luque Moya</b> <i>Experiencing the Extraordinary of the Ordinary</i> .	359
<b>Jerzy Luty</b> <i>Do Animals Make Art or the Evolutionary Continuity of Species</i> .....	381
<b>Giovanni Matteucci</b> <i>The (Aesthetic) Extended Mind: Aesthetics from Experience-of to Experience-with</i> .....	400
<b>Philip Mills</b> <i>The Politics of Poetic Language: An Analysis of Jean-Luc Godard’s Alphaville</i> .....	430
<b>Washington Morales</b> <i>Naturalization and Reification of the Human Global Subjective Experience in Some Forms of Scientific and Technological Art</i> .....	444

<b>Ancuta Mortu</b>	<i>Aesthetic Cognition and Art History</i> .....	459
<b>Dan O'Brien</b>	<i>Cubism and Kant</i> .....	482
<b>Una Popović</b>	<i>The Birthplace of Aesthetics: Baumgarten on Aesthetical Concepts and Art Experience</i> .....	507
<b>Matthew Rowe</b>	<i>Minimalism: Empirical and Contextual, Aesthetic and Artistic</i> .....	524
<b>Salvador Rubio Marco</b>	<i>Manipulating the Spectator's Moral Judgments: a Criticism of the Cognitivist Approach in Cinema</i> .....	544
<b>Marcello Ruta</b>	<i>Hermeneutics and the Performative Turn; The Unfruitfulness of a Complementary Characterisation</i> .....	557
<b>Sue Spaid</b>	<i>Are Art and Life Experiences "Mostly Perceptual" or "Largely Extra-perceptual"?</i> .....	598
<b>Daniela Šterbáková</b>	<i>John Cage's 4' 33": Unhappy Theory, Meaningful Gesture</i> .....	620
<b>Polona Tratnik</b>	<i>Challenging the Biopolitical through Animal-Human Hybridization</i> .....	643
<b>Andreas Vrahimis</b>	<i>Aesthetics, Scientism, and Ordinary Language: A Comparison between Wittgenstein and Heidegger</i> .....	659
<b>Weijia Wang</b>	<i>Kant's Two Approaches to the Connection between Beauty and Morality</i> .....	685
<b>Ken Wilder</b>	<i>Rosalind Krauss: From 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' to the 'Spectacle' of Installation Art</i> .....	698
<b>Mark Windsor</b>	<i>Tales of Dread</i> .....	722
<b>Lorraine Yeung</b>	<i>Art and Life: The Value of Horror Experience</i> .....	737

# *The Epistemic Value of Photographs in the Age of New Theory*

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ABSTRACT. The “new” theorists of photography have argued that the non-intentional aspect of photography should be shrunk to the registering of light on photosensitive surfaces, meaning that the creation of a photograph need not be considered the largely non-interventive image-making process that the “orthodox” theorists proposed it to be. This largely non-interventive premise was however, widely considered to be the source of the epistemic value of photography, as an “objective” form of image-making. Given the new focus on the role of the agent in photographic practice, I examine what kinds of representational content photographs may contain and what kinds of knowledge can be formed from these. I distinguish between the representation of naturally-dependent subjects, common to all photographs, and the representation of intentional subjects, which entails the former. Evidence suggests that it can be difficult for viewers to discern one from the other and so, I propose a set of negative criteria to test the reliability of a photograph as a source of knowledge and to aid the production of warranted beliefs, which can be especially difficult to form as a result of viewing photographs in the digital age.

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## 1. Introduction

The “new” theorists of photography (Atencia-Linares 2012; Lopes 2016; Phillips 2009) have given greater weight to the role of agency in photographic practice and emphasized that photography is not necessarily counterfactually-dependent on a real subject, as the “orthodox” theorists of photography have maintained. A consequence of the new theorists’ approach is that photographs do not necessarily convey accurate visual information about particulars, but can have different kinds of representational contents, which can pertain to fictional subjects or nonfactual states of affairs. Taking the new theorists’ approach into consideration, what kinds of knowledge do viewers stand to gain from the representational contents of photographs? To account for the different kinds of representational content that photographs may contain and the different kinds of knowledge that can be formed from these, in this paper I distinguish between the representation of naturally-dependent subjects, common to all photographs, and the representation of intentional subjects, which are comprised of naturally-dependent subjects. I suggest that viewers can form propositional knowledge, pertaining to the facts of a subject, from both of these kinds of representation, but that in addition situated knowledge, relating to human experience, can be conveyed through the representation of intentional subjects. As I shall outline, viewers can struggle to discern the different kinds of knowledge that they stand to gain from photographs, given that the latter kind of representation entails the former. Taking into account the context in which a photograph is created and dispersed can help viewers to determine what kind of knowledge they

stand to gain from a photograph however, in the digital age there is an increased creative potential to post-produce the image and there are fewer guidelines in place to ensure the regulated dissemination of photographs on digital platforms. Under what circumstances then are viewers warranted in forming beliefs about the representational contents of a photograph? To address this question, I conclude this paper by proposing a set of negative criteria that can be used to test the reliability of a photograph as a source of knowledge.

## **2. Naturally-Dependent Subjects and Intentional Subjects**

Viewers tend to characterize photography as an “objective” medium, or as a way of conferring visual information that is not distorted by the intervention of the human hand or mind (Daston 2007, p. 187). Non-intervention is not however, identical to objectivity and moreover the intervention of the hand and mind of an agent can, provided that they are subject to certain rules and guidelines, or what I shall refer to as “warrant conditions”, enhance the capacity to convey propositional knowledge through an image. There are many knowledge-oriented image-making domains that are not photographic (Lopes 2016, p. 112), such as archaeological lithic drawing, but that are subject to stringent warrant conditions that enable agents to convey propositional information for specific purposes (Lopes 2009, p. 17). The intervention of agents does not, therefore, preclude the possibility of objectively processing visual information. If, however, all one requires are warrant conditions to determine whether an image will contain propositional information, then why do image-makers frequently use automatic processes,

such as photography, to create images to convey this information? Part of the answer lies in the fact that automatic image-making processes tend to constitute consistent information channels (Walden 2005). Automatic image-making processes, if harnessed as such, produce consistent results and this means that they tend to be more reliable, provided that agents use them to this effect. Consequently, in pursuing the goal of preserving and communicating propositional information, many image-makers have utilized automatic processes to create their images. This could be just one stage of the creation of the image, such as tracing an outline, or automatic processes could be employed at every stage possible, as some forms of photography make it possible to do.

Photography, in addition to being an automatic image-making process, that can be belief-independent to a high-degree, is also a naturally-dependent process, which means that the subject of a photograph is a real one. Very broadly speaking, the orthodox and “second-generation orthodox” theorists of photography have maintained in varying formulations, that as a result of photography having been developed to be a naturally-dependent, automatic process, it is also a process that is counterfactually-dependent on the properties of the subject and so consequently, photographs cannot misrepresent particulars (Hopkins 2009, p. 74; Abell 2010, p. 101). The new theorists of photography however, have in various terms, defended the fictional competency of the medium (Atencia-Linares 2012; Lopes 2016; Phillips 2009, p. 19), as they have argued that photography is not necessarily counterfactually-dependent on the real subject, by shrinking the non-intentional element of photography down to the registration of light on photosensitive surfaces, or what they call “the photographic event” (Phillips

2009, p. 10). To materialize this event, agents can use any number of processes, from analogue processes to digital processes, to create a photograph that need not match the appearance of what was recorded in the photographic event. Photographs then, according to the new theorists, need not convey the facts of a real subject, but may contain different kinds of representational contents, pertaining to fictional subjects or nonfactual states of affairs. Taking the new theorists' approach into consideration, what kinds of knowledge do viewers stand to gain from the representational contents of photographs? To account for the different kinds of representational content photographs may contain and the different kinds of knowledge that can be formed from these, I propose to distinguish between the representation of naturally-dependent subjects, which is the representation of real subjects that is common to all photographs, and the representation of intentional subjects, which is the representation of fictional subjects or nonfactual states of affairs, constituted from naturally-dependent subjects.<sup>2</sup> As the latter form of representation entails the former, it can be difficult for viewers to discern one from the other, which is an issue that I shall direct my focus towards once I have provided further details about these different forms of representation.

Representations of naturally-dependent subjects record the visual appearance of the real subject and so, certain practices and institutions may,

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<sup>2</sup> In proposing these two types of photographic representation, I am drawing upon a distinction suggested by Wilson (né Phillips). She has proposed that all photographs are "images" but that in addition, some are also "pictures". Pictures are the result of human design, whilst images can be produced by nature, mechanical processes, or human manufacture. (Phillips 2009).

for example, make use of this kind of representation for identification records or photogrammetric purposes, the latter of which consists in photographing the subject from regulated viewpoints (Wilder 2009, p. 38), in order to preserve and present factual visual information, from which propositional knowledge about the presented subject matter can be generated. Representations of intentional subjects however, may be used for the purpose of depicting fictional subjects, presenting visual information whilst offering an explanation or perspective about the subject, or conveying situated knowledge. An example that very clearly illustrates the distinction between the photographic representation of naturally-dependent and intentional subjects, is Gijon Mili's photograph of Picasso "drawing" a centaur using light (1949). The photograph represents the naturally-dependent subjects, Picasso, the room, the pottery in the background, and the small electric light, but also represents the intentional subject, the fictional centaur, which was created by Picasso's act of drawing in the air with the small electric light and captured by Mili's use of a long exposure. Warranted beliefs about the representational contents of a photograph can be formed from both of these types of representation, for example by looking at the Mili photograph, viewers can form warranted beliefs about the appearance of Picasso's face, or the shape of the room he was in, when the photograph was taken. Viewers would not be warranted however, in forming the belief that the centaur really existed, but would be warranted in believing that Picasso had moved a small electric light in such a way as to create the outline of an imaginary centaur. Although it is obvious in this example, that the intentional subject was not veridical, in many cases this is harder to detect. For example, numerous photographs that are used in

advertisements are subject to production and post-production processing in order to make the intentional subject, the product, seem appealing and effective, and so convince viewers that it is worth purchasing. It is rare however, for viewers to be adequately informed about when photographs have been subject to such processing in this domain and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) frequently receive complaints about photographs being used in advertisements that are deceptive for this reason. For instance, a 2009 advert for Olay eye cream received over 700 complaints for using a photograph that, due to extensive post-production work, presented a misleading representation of the efficacy of the product on a woman of the model's age. This particular case led a Scottish MP to campaign for a symbol that would indicate whether images had been altered and to what extent (Cockcroft 2009). As Mitchell has explained, "if this suspension of the rules is not clearly signalled with sufficient clarity, then we may justifiably feel deceived – that fiction has slipped into falsehood." (1998, p. 219) Given that the representation of an intentional subject, which is constituted from a naturally-dependent subject, can convey nonfactual subjects and states of affairs, clear signalling must be given by image producers and publishers to indicate deviations from fact, otherwise the photograph will be misleading and the image will cease to be of reliable epistemic value.

Extrinsic factors, then, such as the outlet in which the photograph is released or the caption that accompanies the photograph, are also important to take into consideration in order to ascertain what representational content viewers are warranted in forming beliefs about. Some photographs may even be misleading for reasons that are largely extrinsic to the

representational contents of the photograph itself. For example, in the photograph *Migrant Mother* (1936) by Dorothea Lange, the naturally-dependent subject, Florence, is represented quite accurately in terms of the relative spatial locations, facial expressions and clothing of Florence and three of her children.<sup>3</sup> The intentional subject of “the deserving poor” however, as represented by an anonymous family that, in Lange’s full caption for the photograph, included a father who was identified by the photographer as Californian, does not accurately reflect the situation of the individuals depicted (Sandweiss 2007, p. 195-6), as the identities and stories of the individuals pictured are subsumed into an overarching cultural comment (Ritchin 2010, p. 150). Photographs are frequently taken by viewers to objectively present the subject and while Lange’s photograph does accurately represent the naturally-dependent subject, taking extrinsic factors into account, such as the caption, may mean that viewers are not warranted in forming certain beliefs about the naturally-dependent subject. Intentional subjects are often represented in order to communicate situated knowledge, which can potentially mislead the viewer about the real subject of a photograph if there is not adequate signalling provided for the viewer that what they are looking at is intended to be a particular idea or experience that is presented. Consequently, I propose that epistemic warrant should rest on the regulated processing *and* dissemination of the image. There are many photographs that are created and disseminated without regulation and may not be reliable sources of knowledge as a result. Conversely there are many fields where works that are produced by a combination of manual and

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<sup>3</sup> The photograph was however, subject to some alteration as, on the tent pole, at the bottom right hand corner of the image there is a semi-transparent thumb.

automatic processes, or even works made entirely by manual means, are highly reliable sources of knowledge, due to the rigorous management of their creation and dispersal. Viewers however, frequently fail to recognize this (Cohen and Meskin 2008). Nevertheless, the digital or post-photographic age has given viewers a chance to reassess their beliefs and so I shall now turn my attention towards issues pertaining to epistemic warrant in the digital age.

### **3. Epistemic Warrant in the Digital Age**

Despite post-photographic worries (Ritchin 2010, p. 27), from theorists including Mitchell (1998) and Savedoff (2008), that photography would lose its epistemic standing in the digital age due to the enhanced creative potential to post-produce images, evidence shows that viewers are generally confident in the reliability of digital photographic products (Pogliano 2015, p. 558). Whether consciously or not, many viewers display behaviour that indicates that they view photography as an objective medium (Levin 2009, p. 331). Walden has described this phenomenon as the digital photography paradox, whereby such images should undermine the viewer's confidence in photographs yet do not actually seem to have.<sup>4</sup> Many post-photographic concerns are unfounded however, for example although Savedoff has claimed that manipulation is standard in digital photographic practice (1997, p. 211), this is not necessarily a new phenomenon for photography and nor, as I outlined in the previous section, does manipulation necessarily preclude

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<sup>4</sup> One reason he cites for this is the public dismissal of photo-journalists, such as Walski, who are found to have manipulated their images (Walden 2008, p. 109).

the final photograph from conveying propositional information or other kinds of information. Indeed, post-production is not the real issue in the digital age, as I shall now demonstrate.

As I established in the previous section, the context in which an image is dispersed is also key to ascertaining the reliability of the image and what in turn, the viewer is warranted in believing as a result of looking at a photograph. This has been demonstrated by the Abu Ghraib case, which involved digital photographs taken as amateur visual records by military personnel involved in the practices shown. Moreover, it was one of the first cases to show that digital photographs are still considered to be epistemically valuable by authority figures and other viewers. By contrast, the unprecedented release of silver-based photographs by the Daily Mirror on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 purporting to show British soldiers torturing detainees, were widely dismissed by experts and journalists as being faked (Gunthert 2008, p. 106). What is key to note in the Abu Ghraib case, is not only that the digital photographs functioned as representations of naturally-dependent subjects, but also that the context of their dissemination enabled viewers to form warranted beliefs that what they were shown in the photographs was an accurate reflection of the situation:

Correlated with testimony enabling the identification of the photographers, the date and the conditions in which they were taken, the images had the status of evidence, explicitly referred to by the prosecution as proof of the charges. The cornerstone of the photographs' credibility, the criminal case also provided the conditions of their transmission to the press. (Gunthert 2008, p. 107)

Conversely, the editor of the Daily Mirror was fired for failing to ensure that the images depicting British soldiers had been verified as accurately representing the event that was purported to have taken place. Warrant conditions are supposed to be followed by such outlets and there are consequences for those who do not follow them. This situation however, has changed in recent years.

The problem, I propose that faces contemporary viewers of photographs is not post-production, but the fact that images released on digital platforms, such as social media outlets, are not subject to warrant conditions that determine the circumstances of their dispersal and so can present viewers with misleading or misguided “facts”. Amateur, private, and non-professional photographs have been used for journalistic and other knowledge-oriented purposes for a long time; however, the social media channels in which these are now dispersed are simply not as reliable as professional outlets, including news sources, that will (or are supposed to) cross-check sources in order to ascertain the veridicality of what is being shown and reported (Solaroli 2015, p. 518). Information can now be shared in seconds, which is both an advantage and disadvantage as for example, whilst photographs of current and developing events can be shared with the world instantly this can come at the price of sharing the most appropriate image, or giving a photograph an accurate caption or frame (Morris 2011, p. 193; Ritchin 2010, p. 86). While these issues existed prior to digitalization, as is evident in the *Migrant Mother* case, misunderstandings or miscommunications are more likely to occur in the digital age, even in professional circles, given how little time photographers have to edit their photographs and “to digest what had happened” before immediately sending

their photographs off for publication (Ritchin 2010, p. 86). Under what circumstances then, are viewers warranted in forming beliefs about the representational contents of a photograph? To address this question, I propose that the following negative criteria can be used to test the reliability of a photograph as a source of knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Image Integrity:

- The subject exists or existed at the time the photograph was purported to have been taken, or signalling is provided to indicate that the photograph is nonfactual i.e. if the photograph shows a person known to have been deceased for five years but was purportedly taken last year and there is no indication that it is fictional, it is not a reliable source of knowledge
- The scene or event depicted is within the realms of plausibility, or signalling is provided to indicate that the photograph is nonfactual i.e. if the photograph shows a person present at an event that occurred before they were born and there is no indication that it is fictional, it is not a reliable source of knowledge
- The physics of the scene the photograph depicts is accurate, or signalling is provided to indicate that the photograph is nonfactual i.e.

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<sup>5</sup> Morris has proposed four criteria for determining authenticity in photography: 1) Digitally altering photographs after the photograph has been taken 2) Photographing staged events as if they were real events 3) Staging scenes or moving objects and then photographing them 4) Providing false or misleading captions (2011, p. 214) The criteria I propose here, however, significantly expand on this, in particular with respect to the image authenticity category.

if the background features of the photograph show a slight curve and a very slim celebrity there is a strong chance that the photograph has been digitally altered to enhance their figure and if there is no indication that any such processing has occurred, it is not a reliable source of knowledge

Image Authenticity:

- The photograph is presented in a trustworthy context i.e. if the photograph is presented in a fashion advert or certain magazines there is a strong likelihood that it has been retouched without indicating that this has occurred and so it is not a reliable source of knowledge
- Supporting text should verify what is depicted in the photograph i.e. if there is a caption with the photograph, this should cohere with the facts of the depicted subject, or indicate that it is nonfactual, otherwise it is not a reliable source of knowledge
- There is sufficient supporting data to verify the photographed event i.e. if the photographed event does not appear to have any other reliable witnesses, or if there is no other documentation that the photographed event occurred then there are reasons to doubt that the photograph is a reliable source of knowledge
- The original source of the image be traced i.e. if the photograph appears in the media or on the internet it can be traced back to the source where it first originated from, which should be verifiably trustworthy, otherwise it is not a reliable source of knowledge
- The conditions of release have been respected i.e. if the photograph has been released by a specific person, or party, under certain

conditions then the distribution of the photograph should reflect these, otherwise there are reasons to doubt that it is a reliable source of knowledge

This list is not exhaustive, but provides the basis for establishing the reliability of a photograph as a source of knowledge. If the majority of these conditions are met then it is likely that the photograph is a reliable source of knowledge. Whilst some of these conditions may be necessary, certainly none are sufficient for forming warranted beliefs about the representational contents of a photograph. There is nothing inherently wrong in not meeting any of the aforementioned conditions, particularly with respect to the integrity criteria. If, however, such conditions are not met and a photograph is released without the appropriate signalling and presented as a representation of a naturally-dependent subject, then this is an act of deception and viewers may not be warranted in the beliefs they form as a result of looking at the photograph or moreover, viewers, unaware of this deception may feel warranted but form false beliefs about the representational contents of the photograph. Using this kind of criteria may help viewers to identify and infer any anomalies and thus evaluate how warranted they are in the beliefs that they form from viewing a photograph.

Given however, that “humans are unreliable in identifying fake images” (Korus 2017, p. 1) why may it be a good idea to advocate the use of testing criteria rather than automatic detection methods? Broadly speaking, there are currently four automatic approaches to detecting image forgery: a) digital signatures, which are metadata, b) authentication watermarks, which are embedded directly in the image content, c) forensic analysis, which

examines whether the physics of what the image depicts is accurate, for instance by determining whether figures have been removed, or inserted, by examining the lighting of the image, and d) phylogeny analysis, which aims to recover the editing history of the image. Each of these methods suffer from limitations (Korus 2017) and given that automatic methods to determine the authenticity of an image are not widely available, it is good epistemic practice to have some general warrant conditions that can be used to test the reliability of an image. Using these criteria may not yield specific answers, such as exactly what part of a photograph may have been subject to modification and what kind of modification this may be, but the proposed criteria can at least provide the basis for a viewer to know when to exercise caution. A naturally-dependent, automatic stage that processes, such as photography, contain may give viewers some grounds to assume that the resultant images are of higher epistemic value than other kinds of images however, in this paper I have affirmed that warranted beliefs should not be based on this factor alone. Instead, viewers should take into account the conditions in which a photograph was both created and dispersed, in order to discern what kind of knowledge they may gain from viewing a photograph and evaluate how warranted they are in the beliefs that they form about the representational contents of a photograph.

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Claire Anscomb

*The Epistemic Value of Photographs in the Age of New Theory*

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***Some Concerns with Experientialism about Depiction:  
the Case of Separation seeing-in***

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ABSTRACT. Experiential theories claim that depictive representations should be defined with reference to the experience elicited in their viewers. To accommodate both the visual and the representational character of pictures, they introduce the idea of a standard of correctness determining the appropriate pictorial subject, which is made available to our experience by resorting to general background knowledge. I argue that this kind of account is unable to clarify what makes some piece of information more suitable than another to contribute to the recognition of the depicted subject. I support my point with an analysis of the notion of *separation seeing-in*, developed by Robert Hopkins to account for pictures like stick-figure drawings, which exhibit a gap between what is visible in them and what we take them to depict. The result is that visual experience cannot guide the selection of the necessary information to individuate the represented subject: the representational function of a picture cannot be reduced to any idea of experience suitably constrained.

Many philosophical accounts of depiction can be regarded as proposing to understand it in terms of the experience elicited by a certain kind of surface. Although they differ from each other concerning the identification of such

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an experience,<sup>2</sup> these views share many crucial features regarding their explanatory stance. Exactly because of their insistence on the importance of the spectator's reaction to depictive representations, they have been often considered together as a unitary class of "experiential" theories, as Robert Hopkins (1998) has labelled them.

The common aim of these positions is to capture both the visual character of pictures, that is the fact that they convey the visual impression of a three-dimensional scene, and their representational character, namely that they are about a subject matter which can be grasped either correctly or incorrectly. Experiential accounts thus contend that causing a certain visual experience governed by correctness conditions for pictorial reference is a necessary and sufficient condition for depiction: to express the idea with Richard Wollheim's words, "a painting represents whatever can be *correctly seen in it*" (2003, p. 5, italics mine).

This paper will discuss the outcomes and the limits of this kind of definition. In Section 1, I will start by spelling out some basic tenets of experiential theories, with particular attention to how the visual and the representational aspects of pictures are explained. The analysis will show that our experience of a picture needs to be supported by background general knowledge in order to grasp the standard of correctness for the depicted content. Section 2 will outline some arguments pointing out a

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the most debated solutions variously suggest understanding depictive experience as an illusory visual experience (Gombrich, 1960), a veridical *sui generis* visual experience (Wollheim, 1987), a visual experience coloured by imagination (Walton, 1990), or an experienced resemblance between the depictive and the depicted item (Hopkins, 1998).

possible drawback of such a claim, namely that we cannot suitably select solely on the basis of our experience which information enables us to recognize the *represented* subject, without already presupposing some insights concerning that subject. In Section 3 I will examine the whole discussion in the light of some puzzling cases of depictive representations, such as stick-figure drawings, explained by Hopkins with the notion of *separation seeing-in* (1998). These pictures, characterized by a certain degree of indeterminacy, exhibit a clear mismatch between what is properly visible in them and what they represent. I will argue that an experiential explanation, like the one proposed by Hopkins, gives rise to some doubts regarding the role played by experience in pictorial interpretation. Finally, I will draw from these reflections some conclusions about the need for a theory of depiction not to downplay the specific scope of notions like experience and representation.

## **1. Pictorial Experience and Standard of Correctness**

Experiential theories adopt a stance towards pictorial representations which takes seriously what has been defined as “the beholder’s share”.<sup>3</sup> Following experientialism, a spectator faced with a picture undergoes a distinctive kind of visual experience, which should enable her to pick out the represented subject. However, subjective experience alone is surely not sufficient to determine the *right* content of a picture. Unless specific constraints are in place, what is seen in the pictorial surface may well be consistent with many

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<sup>3</sup> The expression has been made famous by Gombrich (1960).

possible options. As an example, the picture of a sea otter realized in the peculiar split-style typical of Haida Native American tribes has its proper subject: it does depict a sea otter. Nonetheless, in line with its visual appearance, the image could also be mistakenly understood as depicting other items, such as an eel, a snake, a smiling anthropomorphized half-moon, a Frisbee, a piece of jewellery, and so on. But even if it is possible in principle to see all these alternatives in the picture, there is only one which the audience is *entitled* to see as the depicted subject; that is, a sea otter.



**Figure 1:** Haida sea otter

This is the reason why experiential views appeal to the idea of a *standard of correctness* applying to the experience of pictures. Such a standard is a normative statement which fixes the subject to be correctly recognized and rules out incorrect interpretations. Its content is usually set with reference to the picture maker's representational intentions or, as many authors contend

in the case of mechanically produced pictures like photographs,<sup>4</sup> by other kinds of causal relations holding between the scene and the picture. Hence, to stick to the example previously mentioned, a defender of experientialism would propose that the Haida picture depicts a sea otter since we can see a sea otter in it and, moreover, its author intended us to see a sea otter in it. A crucial implication of such a move is that the intention behind the standard should be *fulfilled* by the resulting picture. This means that the author should be able to make her intention available through her work: what really matters here is not just entertaining some depictive intention, but also expressing it. From an experiential point of view, the picture maker succeeds in pictorially representing a subject insofar as, under the ideal conditions, a spectator undergoes an experience which complies with the intended standard.

The issue about the author's fulfilled intentions is particularly worth considering, because it sheds light on an explanatory asymmetry regarding the conditions for depiction provided by experientialism. In fact, an experiential kind of approach appears to grant a sort of priority to the conditions capturing the visual character of pictures, which work as *explanans* also for the conditions of the representational character, while, in contrast, these latter depend on the former ones. The reason underlying this

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<sup>4</sup> Issues concerning the adequacy of assuming a separate standard of correctness for photographs are largely debated in Hopkins (1998, pp. 71-78) and Lopes (1996, ch. 8). For the purposes of this article, I will not get into the details of this discussion, nor will I take a stand about it. Furthermore, in what follows I will mainly refer to the standard of correctness as based on the author's intentions, as this has been the idea classically targeted by the main examinations of how pictures represent.

standpoint is outlined by this quote from Wollheim:

If all the suitable spectator can do is to pick up on the artist's intention [...] and there is no register of this in his experience of the picture, the conditions of representation have not been satisfied. Representation is perceptual. (1998, p. 226)

What Wollheim wants to suggest here is that recognizing the content of a picture is a radically distinctive task from other kinds of symbolic interpretation. The standard of correctness is fleshed out by how the subject appears in the visual experience of the spectator, as long as the author has successfully expressed her intention in the picture. Such considerations bring to the fore an important assumption adopted by experiential views on the nature of depiction. As it turns out, experientialism ends up treating depiction not merely as a distinctive *species* of representation, which shares some common features with other kinds of representations (like linguistic ones) but at the same time diverges from them in some more specific aspects. In an experiential light, pictures are rather understood as belonging to a distinctive *genus* of representation, with its own special mode of representing a certain subject matter: a mode which precisely involves some kind of visual experience. This clarification also shows how the notion of experience deployed by experiential theories can address the representational character of pictures by incorporating issues about communication and recognition of a message expressed in a visual manner.

At this point, however, an experiential position is faced with a problem arising from two conflicting intuitions. On the one hand, intentions determining the subject of a picture cannot be directly detected by a visual

experience of the picture: as Wollheim points out, “it is out of the things that can be seen in [a] picture that [a particular] intention determines what the picture represents” (2003, p. 9). On the other hand, visual experience still provides the key access to the subject represented: to put it as a slogan, “no pictorial content without experience”. To recall again Wollheim: “if something cannot be seen in a painting, it forfeits all chances to be part of its content” (*ibidem*). Yet, once it is accepted that the correlation between the content of a picture and the intentional factors behind it is not visible in the picture, one might wonder whether visual experience can actually give us the standard of correctness, and thus let us recognize the represented subject.

Experiential theories usually suggest treating the difficulty by allowing visual experience to be influenced by information, assumptions or hypotheses pertaining to the standard of correctness. Whenever these suggestions are not immediately available (for example from the title of the work) they can be generally drawn from acquaintance with contexts and methods of production, or from plausibility and common sense. Appealing to this kind of background knowledge enables the spectator to reconstruct the intentions or causal relations which are not themselves directly visible in the picture, but still determine the depicted scene to be recognized. Therefore, pictorial experience has been characterized by many authors as penetrated by various cognitive attitudes,<sup>5</sup> so that the standard of correctness

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<sup>5</sup> Gombrich (1960) has firmly opposed to the so called “myth of the innocent eye” by insisting that pictorial seeing cannot but be informed by thought. Wollheim (2003) and Voltolini (2014) have argued that pictorial seeing is open to being affected by concepts, in particular with regard to the recognition of the depicted subject. Walton (1990) has

can be visually relevant. Revised accordingly, the beholder's experience thus becomes sufficient to provide the represented subject.

## **2. The Problem with Background Information**

However, this proposal still leaves us with a question about how background knowledge connects with our experience of the picture to make us recognize the appropriate subject. Sure, some pieces of information are more suitable than others for understanding what the author intended to represent with a certain picture; the audience is thus supposed to be skilled enough to draw only on clues of the right kind. In other words, to put it as Catharine Abell does,

We need to know why, in certain cases, we are justified in applying such knowledge to our interpretation of a picture; why, in other cases, we are not justified in doing so; and how we tell the difference between the two kinds of cases. (2005, p. 59)

To remain true to an experiential perspective, a satisfactory answer should be guided by a twofold disclaimer. As argued in the last section, although a visual experience not supported by background information is *not sufficient*

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advocated for a slightly different kind of cognitive penetrability, which involves imagination. However, it is not necessary to construe the interaction between pictorial experience and background knowledge as an instance of cognitive penetration within the content of our seeing. As I will point out in Section 3, Hopkins (1998) proposes a model in terms of inductive reasoning to make sense of the appearance of the picture.

to carry out the recognition of the represented subject, giving rise to an experience has to be maintained as a *necessary* condition for depiction. Precisely for this reason, it seems implausible that the search for information is not directed and constrained by the spectator's experience. According to experientialism, in fact, the identification of the subject is undertaken by a visual experience of the picture. This assumption marks the difference from a purely *semiotic* point of view, which explains depiction in terms of the conventional features of pictorial signs, in a similar vein to the analysis of other kinds of languages.<sup>6</sup> Since it puts the stress on the denotative powers of pictures within symbolic systems, such an approach would allow us to take the visual significance of pictures as a sort of side-effect resulting from the structural characteristics of depictive symbolic systems. On the contrary, experiential proposals hold as an essential fact about pictures that they depict a scene by offering a look at it, so that the access to the represented subject has to be achieved through a visual experience.

A promising move could thus be to test whether the background information necessary for the interpretive task is recalled to the spectator's mind starting from an experience of the picture. On this point, it can be argued that such experience provides *relevant* hints which connect to background general knowledge in order to individuate the particular represented subject.<sup>7</sup> To get back to the Haida image example, facing the

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<sup>6</sup> The first and most famous defence of this position was provided by Nelson Goodman's book *Languages of Art* (1968).

<sup>7</sup> The notion of *relevance* here is based on many works on communicative interpretation and cognitive pragmatics, the most important of which is Sperber and Wilson (1986).<sup>8</sup> See again Sperber and Wilson (1986; 2005).

picture would remind us of general ideas about animals and their physical appearance, so that we can recognize a sea otter in it. Nevertheless, this suggestion appears problematic for two main reasons.

First, consistently with an experiential framework, the proposal takes experience to be both the relevant input for and the process itself of pictorial recognition. Yet a theory of interpretation should reasonably distinguish what has to be interpreted from the cognitive attitude required to interpret it. To better appreciate this point, it can be helpful to compare how the notion of relevance is applied to experientialism about depiction with the role played by relevance-based inference in the domain of verbal language.<sup>8</sup> In this latter case, it is the *sentence* itself, rather than our *understanding* of it, that provides the relevant clues to reconstruct the meaning of an utterance.

Second, our experience of a picture does not seem able to specify the appropriate pieces of background information any more than it can directly convey the represented subject. After all, if experience could constrain this far the selection of that information, why should it not have also what it takes to move further to directly grasp what is depicted? The issue here is that background knowledge necessary for pictorial recognition belongs to the wider context of such practice; such context involves a great number of considerations which go beyond the face value of our experience.<sup>9</sup> The information mobilized for the recognition of the subject uncovers those contextual elements; its role consists exactly in making the interpreter aware

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<sup>8</sup> See again Sperber and Wilson (1986; 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Following McDowell (1994), I talk here of taking an experience at its face value as judging that something is in a certain way on the basis of what is presented by the experience.

of the standard of correctness behind the representation.

What appears from the arguments outlined is that no straightforward way to resort to background information seems available starting exclusively from our experience of a picture. On the contrary, it seems that this information is salient to the viewers only as the standard of correctness itself is salient: the relevance of experience together with other assumptions is a function of the success of the pictorial work in making the standard available. However, the strategy pursued by experientialism takes the represented subject to result from having further information derived by visual experience. This contrast between the explanatory powers and the *desiderata* of experientialism risks in this way giving rise to a circularity: while the represented scene is grasped by referring to additional knowledge, this latter is in turn grasped by referring to represented scene.

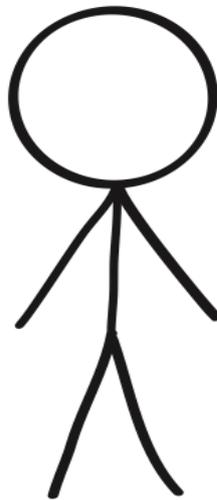
### **3. Separation Seeing-in**

An instance of the experiential position targeted so far has been developed by Robert Hopkins with his idea of *separation seeing-in*.<sup>10</sup> This notion refers to many examples of pictures displaying some sort of depictive indeterminacy: what we *determinately* see in them does not coincide with what they *indeterminately* represent. The typical example addressed by Hopkins is the stick figure drawing of a person. What we strictly speaking discern in this kind of picture is a creature with an odd appearance (a totally

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<sup>10</sup> The concept is also discussed by Brown (2010), who takes separation seeing-in to occur in front of an even wider range of pictorial representations than Hopkins would be willing to admit.

blank face, no hands and no feet, an abnormally thin body); notwithstanding, we would not hesitate to recognize the subject as an ordinary person, despite the lack of accuracy in the design. Here, following Hopkins's own term, a "separation" occurs between the visible content and the represented content of the picture.



**Figure 2:** stick-figure drawing

As a fundamental tenet, Hopkins maintains that our experience of pictorial representations should be the starting point for interpreting them: as he writes,

experience of course provides our first and best guide to what the picture depicts. To see something in a surface is already to begin to explore hypotheses about whether, and what, it depicts. (1998, p. 130)

However, when it comes to indeterminate pictures, he also concedes that the mere visual appearance of the picture fails to provide a straightforward identification of the subject. His proposed adjustment is that, in those cases, our recognition of the depicted scene is guided by all the background (and often implicit) knowledge relevant to the task at hand. In addition to basic acquaintance with what a particular item looks like, pictorial competence encompasses also assumptions about what we normally encounter in our world, what would most likely be depicted, and about the characteristics of the diverse pictorial styles, media and techniques (especially insofar as they interfere in some way with the artist's intentions). Hopkins outlines this integration between experiencing and assuming as a sort of practical reasoning to the best explanation which starts from the basis of our experience. By compensating for the wrong track of our initial impressions, the whole range of background information acts as a razor towards all the possible unauthorized interpretations of a picture. The principles underlying this practice are considered by Hopkins to be so elementary that, in its general lines, the process of pictorial understanding "parallels the interpretation of many other aspects of our environment" (*ivi*, p. 140).

This solution is undermined by the same worries discussed in the previous general overview of experiential approaches to depiction. To begin with, let us assume that an experience of the stick figure drawing reminds us of certain background information about men. However, if our experience is already sufficient to narrow down the scope of information required for pictorial recognition, why should the initial misleading impression conveyed by *that same* experience take place at all? As a result, separation seeing-in ends up being treated in the same way as ordinary perceptual error. The

problem is that a mismatch between the visible and the represented content of a picture cannot be reported and fixed merely by our experience, which is only responsible for the visual character of the image.

A second concern requires us to restate the relevance of what we see in front of a picture. The figure seen is *relevant* because it connects in a profitable way with background information, so that a person can be recognized as the pictorial subject. Yet, can such relevance be determined only by the mere visible features of the image, without relating them to the context presupposed by practices of pictorial recognition? The notion of relevance basically refers to a communicative goal to be achieved: nothing is relevant unless it is embedded in a *context* of interpretation.

These arguments show that the experience of the stick figure cannot be relevant just by itself but, rather, its relevance is determined by understanding how it fits in the context of background knowledge needed to interpret a picture. This means however that our experience makes such connection manifest to us insofar as it also makes the standard of correctness manifest. As a consequence, the necessary information to make sense of an instance of separation seeing-in seems only accessible to us by being already able to deal with other pictures of the same kind. To frame the point in the light of Hopkins' concrete example, seeing a person in a stick figure requires knowing the potential of *that* depictive system, in realizing *that* depictive intention. This amounts to nothing more than being able to see how people can be depicted through stick figures, which in turn is exactly to be able to see a person in a stick figure.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is now possible to advance some general considerations on the purposes of experiential accounts. These theories point out with good reasons that the visual and the representational values of pictures can diverge, but they still aim at characterizing both as relying on the beholder's experience; the only attempt to distinguish the two aspects consists in establishing a standard of correctness for an appropriate identification of the depicted subject. Such a condition is too weak to preserve the conceptual gap between the notions of experience and representation. The *representational* value of an item cannot be assessed just as a matter of perceptual appearance: it is rather a function it plays in a certain context of interpretation. Therefore, an adequate explanation of depiction cannot reduce the represented content of a picture to some kind of experience, not even one governed by conditions of correctness.

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***Experiencing the Making Paintings by Paolo Cotani,  
Marcia Hafif and Robert Ryman***

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ABSTRACT. In the paper we deal with the possibility that we experience creative gestures in the fruition of a specific kind of abstract paintings. For this purpose, we consider few specific, abstract works by artists Paolo Cotani, Marcia Hafif and Robert Ryman, dating back to the early 1970s. These paintings among others have been described by critics as *displaying the act of their making*, although they are all characterized by an extremely limited range of chromatic and formal features. Searching for a justification of this description, we resist the temptation to account for it in terms of the critics' knowledge about artists' intentions and working methods. We rather insist that it is grounded in the perceptual properties of the paintings and in the kind of response that they can trigger in the viewers. We therefore develop a simulative account of the creative gesture, aiming at doing justice to artists', art critics' and historians' theoretical framework, as well as to the observer's phenomenal experience.

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## 1. Introduction

In our paper we try to account for the phenomenally rich experience of a specific kind of abstract paintings displaying an extremely limited range of chromatic and formal features. These paintings have been described by art critics as *making their creative process visible on canvas*. In assessing the plausibility of this description, we resist the temptation to account for it in terms of the critics' knowledge about artists' intentions and working methods. We rather insist that it is grounded in the perceptual properties of the paintings and in the kind of response they can trigger in the viewers. As a result, we suggest that the perceptual experience of a creative process is potentially available to any beholder that is not provided with specific background knowledge.

For this purpose, we consider few paintings dating back to the early 1970s. We first provide the reader with contextual information about the relevant artists, the paintings themselves, and the way they have been described by art critics. We therefore propose an account based on simulation and imaginative engagement triggered by such properties. Finally, we look back at the works and test our hypothesis against their features. This allows us to suggest experimental and further practical applications of our approach. Importantly, we insist that, despite it may illuminate the aesthetic experience we can have of certain artworks, our view should not be overgeneralized. Its strength resides instead in its consistency with the works' critical discourse. Our proposal is the result of a joint venture between philosophical and art-historical perspectives.

## 2. Art Historical and Critical Framework

During the Sixties and Seventies, the tendency towards the dematerialization of the art object which characterized both the American and European stage, with the international rise of conceptual art, process-art, installation art, video and performance, contributed to the discussion around the future of the painting medium. Especially in Italy – which will be the geographical focus of our paper, along with New York City – painting was often considered obsolete. Many abstract painters carried out an investigation into the fundamental elements of painting and their mutual relations through the act of painting itself: an analysis and deconstruction of the medium and discipline of painting aiming at reviving the latter by, ideally, returning to its “degree zero.” For many, this was an interim period of work, a way to rediscover painting through a systematic and often solitary practice, in order to move on towards new and unexplored directions.

Notwithstanding the incredible variety of its outcomes, this attitude towards painting often resulted in body of works conceived as systematic groupings presenting very reduced expressive features, excluding all emotional, symbolic and metaphorical references, and forcing the viewer into a situation of visual constraint. Within this framework we have decided to focus on a few works dating back to the late 1960s and early 1970s by three international artists – namely Paolo Cotani, Marcia Hafif and Robert Ryman – that will later serve as test bench for our thesis.

By the mid Sixties, New York based artist Robert Ryman had begun to develop discrete series of works, such as the *Winsors* (1965-1966). Ryman loaded a two-inch brush with white paint and pulled it across the

unprimed support from left to right until the brush was bare. The same gesture was always repeated beginning just under the previous white stroke of paint whose bottom edge served as demarcation for the next. The last stroke would more or less coincide with the bottom edge of the painting. The resulting traces thus appear almost equivalent in width and length, yet uneven with regards to the application of paint, its materiality and thickness, in relation to the canvas. In this view, the latter was no longer considered a mere support. Instead, the ground becomes significant per se: its color, texture and reaction to paint – always white in color – are exposed to the viewer.

A few years later, during the first half of the 1970s, Rome based artist Paolo Cotani's *Passages* (1972-1974) present the viewer with stratifications of acrylic paint that is accumulated on the canvas with repetitive and potentially unended gestures running from one edge to the other and covering the entire surface – a surface whose dimensions relate to the maximum extension of the artist's arm. His later works entitled *Elastic gauzes* (1974-76) elaborate on the *Passages* presenting various degrees of thickness determined by layers of superimposed elastic bandages. These are painted prior to being stretched and wrapped around the frame and, finally, color is spread in a homogeneous stratum over the whole surface. These works are characterized by a controlled artistic gesture, pushed to the point of its maximum extension, in order to literally construct the painted surface – i. e. the canvas. Thus, they focus both on the materiality of the painted surface and on the process of its making. An internal rhythm is also determined by the incessant interplay between background and foreground: the focus of our gaze constantly moving from one layer to the other as we

attempt to define its figure-ground relationship.

Marcia Hafif was born in Pomona, California, and moved to Rome, Italy, in the early Sixties. She was thus influenced by Italian painting and theory and took this cultural background with her to the States in the 1970s. After completing her Master's degree at Irvine, California, Hafif moved to New York to explore painting. In New York she elaborated new painting criteria, namely an operating method which appears to relate in some way to those previously mentioned: a medium pencil was used to trace short vertical marks on a sheet of drawing paper starting in the upper left, working across and down to finish at the bottom of the paper surface. The repetitive marks rhythmically scan the surface with a pregnant and continuous pattern determined by a regular movement of the hand. A similar gesture was later experienced with more traditional painting tools: a brush and acrylic paint. Fourteen colors were chosen to represent a standard palette, each applied in vertical strokes covering the front surface and leaving a margin at the edges. The work's title refers to the date on which the actions took place, thus excluding any external reference.

The illustrated works have been described by critics as focusing on the process of their making. Unlike other paintings where forms and colors play a major expressive role, these works limit their palette to focus on their material and process-based features. Moreover, by eliminating all emotional, symbolic and metaphorical references, they signify painting per se.

According to several critics of the time, the painter's creative processes are said to be perceivable as displayed on canvas. Naomi Spector states that Ryman's *Winsors* "had no meaning outside the paint and the

supporting material and the history of the process of the application.” (Spector 1974, p. 9). Within the framework of an exhibition displaying works by Cotani and Hafif, amongst others, Marisa Volpi states that the exhibited works “shift the viewer’s focus towards the mental and artisanal processes through which the works have been conceived and realized” (Volpi 1973, *our translation*). Claudio Cerritelli describes the superimposed layers of paint in Cotani’s *Passages* as “the sum of subsequent passages relating to the real time of the pictorial process.” (Cerritelli 1985, p. 32). According to the aforementioned critics, these paintings appear to make the process of their creation available to the observer. How can this be?

### **3. Our Hypothesis**

One may try to account for the idea that we can see the creative process in the paintings by appealing to all sorts of contextual information: a process-based approach to the visual arts that is typical of the period; knowledge of the techniques employed; acquaintance with the critical discourse; artists’ statements about their works, and so on. Yet, reducing the explanation to a matter of background, contextual knowledge and expertise risks to undermine the role played by the specific perceptual structure of these works. Therefore, our effort will be to focus on such perceptual structures in order to strengthen the idea that they can, to a relevant extent, convey the experience of a creative process. More specifically, we believe that, in virtue of their perceivable features, these paintings trigger in imagination the simulation of their alleged creative process.

### 3.1. Simulation Theories

Our hypothesis it thus that these paintings manage to trigger in viewers a mechanism of simulation such that they can experience the artworks as being the result of some creative processes. Unsurprisingly, this hypothesis relies on so-called “Simulation Theories” of mindreading that, although very widespread, deserve a brief introduction.

Common sense has it that, in many circumstances, we represent others’ mental states by putting ourselves *in their shoes*. Simulation Theory develops this intuition into a theory of *mind-reading*. According to this approach, we understand what’s on others’ mind thanks to our capacity to inwardly simulate their mental states. Simulation processes can be triggered by others’ behaviours, expressions, movements, as well as by the beliefs one holds about them. As explained efficaciously by Shanton and Goldman in an overview about simulationist approaches:

ST (in its original form) says that people employ imagination, mental pretense, or perspective taking (‘putting oneself in the other person’s shoes’) to determine others’ mental states. A mentalizer simulates another person by first creating pretend states (e.g., pretend desires and beliefs) in her own mind that correspond to those of the target. She then inputs these pretend states into a suitable cognitive mechanism, which operates on the inputs and generates a new output (e.g., a decision). This new state is taken ‘off line’ and attributed or assigned to the target. (Shanton & Goldman 2010, p. 527).

Although Simulation Theory is mostly concerned with mind-reading, it has

been used to deal with numerous aesthetic issues. For instance, it plays a major role in most of Kendall Walton's theorizing: from *make-believe* to emotions in fiction (Walton 1990), from engagement with music (Walton 2008) to empathy (Walton 2015). Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft mostly rely on simulation to ground theory of imagination (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002) and, more broadly, Currie is firmly convinced of the pivotal power of simulation in empathizing with people, fiction and objects (Currie 2011). Just to quote one further, less common example, in his view based on sensuous imagination, Paul Noordhof takes Simulation Theory to be the best suited to account for expressive properties of artworks (Noordhof 2008). According to these theories, simulations are triggered not only by other human beings – real or fictional – but also by inanimate objects, provided that they are experienced either as resulting from intentional activities, or as behaving “intentionally” – like animated beings do.

Thus, applications of simulation to aesthetics and aesthetic experience are neither new nor spare, so that we can peacefully rely on this model for our own present purposes. Unlike the above mentioned examples, however, ours is not intended to be an account of painting fruition in general. That is, we do not take simulation, and especially the simulation of creative processes, to be essential to all kinds of painting appreciation. Rather, we limit to apply this idea to the paintings at stake, suggesting at most that it could be extended to similar ones.

### 3.2. Two Levels of Simulation

According to its proponents, simulation can be paradigmatically a low-level or a high-level process (e.g. Goldman 2006; Currie 2011). High-level simulation is a conscious experience with a rich, integrated phenomenology that involves imagination, namely imagining to be “in the other’s shoes”. It basically consists in the capacity to adopt others’ perspectives in order to understand their reasons and intentions. Low-level simulation, instead, can operate “within the person”, which means that it can be out of personal control, inaccessible to awareness and nevertheless give rise to conscious experiences. Classical examples of high-level simulation are visualizing – the cognitive process of generating visual images – and motor imagery – the cognitive process of imagining bodily movements and actions (Currie 1995; Currie & Ravenscroft 2002; Goldman 2006). A quite common argument in favour of simulationist explanations of motor imagery is the fact that imaginative performances about bodily movements are frequently constrained by the same biochemical factors that determine actual bodily movements (Parsons, 1987, 1994; Parsons, *et al.* 1998; Goldman 2006). Low-level simulation is commonly taken to be the class of subpersonal mechanisms implementing simulation processes, that is mirroring processes. The *mirror neuron system* is usually considered the main responsible for this sort of processes (e.g. Gallese et al. 2004; Goldman 2006; Hurley 2005).

Given this preliminary distinction, we are in the position to look back at our paintings and hypothesize that perceiving the visual features that they instantiate can trigger a process of motor simulation – more specifically, a process that mimics those gestures that have or might have lead to the

realization of the paintings. The simulation process provides an integrated experience of those visual features as resulting from the simulated creative gestures, the outcome of the process being the experience of paintings as resulting from a creative activity – namely the one that that has been performed in imagination.

Apparently, this hypothesis is compatible with both levels of simulation. Let us start from the subpersonal level and its neural implementation. We overtly draw on the hypothesis proposed by Freedberg and Gallese (2007), according to which:

the artist's gestures in producing the art work induce the empathetic engagement of the observer, *by activating simulation of the motor program that corresponds to the gesture implied by the trace*. The marks on the painting or sculpture are the visible traces of goal-directed movements; hence, they are capable of activating the relevant motor areas in the observer's brain. (Freedberg and Gallese 2007, p. 202, *our emphasis*).

Relying on evidences about the activation of the left premotor cortex caused by the visual presentation of handwritten letters (Knoblich *et al.* 2002 and Longcamp *et al.* 2005), Freedberg and Gallese predict that if our brains can reconstruct actions by observing their graphic outcome, then the same should hold for the experience of artworks that are characterized by the gestural traces of the artist. Some years later, Umilta *et al.* (2012) tested this hypothesis using reproduction of Lucio Fontana's notorious *Concetti Spaziali* (Spatial Concepts) and showed the activation of the cortical motor system in the viewing of Fontana's static artwork. In the light of these

results, we believe that various characteristics of the artworks with which we are dealing speak in favour of an explanation in terms of motor subpersonal activation. This will become clearer in a while, as soon as we will analyse the artworks feature by feature. In short: as well as in the already tested case of Fontana's works, it is likely that salient perceivable properties of these paintings trigger the subpersonal activation of a simulative motor mechanism.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding higher level, conscious simulation processes, we suggest that the observation of these paintings triggers an imaginative simulative engagement in the beholder. Due to the perceptual cues on the canvas, we are lead to consciously imagine the way in which those paintings were actually realized. Our imaginings represent the stages of supposed creative processes, for they find handholds and visual confirmation in the perceptual features of the paintings.

Importantly, the imagined creative processes need not be the real ones. That is, we may undergo the imagining of creative gestures that could not correspond to the actual techniques and actions employed by artists, but a mismatch between our imagining and actual creative processes that are

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<sup>3</sup> We are currently arranging an experiment thanks to a collaboration with the Gemelli Hospital in Rome, whose aim is precisely to test motor activation in the view of these paintings. We believe that a general virtue of our analysis is that it takes in due count the consistency with the art historical context. If true, the activation of motor imagery that allegedly characterizes the fruition of these paintings would match the explicit interest for creative and material processes expressed by artists and critics. This is particularly promising in the view of further applications in the practical context of exhibitions and art teaching.

behind artworks is not necessarily detrimental to the overall fruition. Kendall Walton notices something that he generalizes to all aesthetic appreciation and that is worth mentioning here: “The action we “see” in a work may not correspond to what the artist actually did in creating it; our perception may not be veridical.” (Walton 2008, p. 228). Yet, in the context of aesthetic appreciation, this is not problematic, because the aesthetic context deals with veridicality in a specific way:

Interest in appearances regardless of their veridicality is an interest of a special and somewhat unusual kind. In many or most ordinary (non-artistic) contexts, appearances are important primarily for what they might indicate about reality [...] Aesthetic contexts are different. Appreciators notice and enjoy appearances more or less for their own sake, without necessarily even wondering whether or not things actually are as they appear. (Walton 1999, p. 37)

#### **4. Applying The Hypothesis**

We can now go back to the concerned paintings and analyze their features so as to provide substance to our hypothesis of imaginative simulation.

Ryman’s methodical testing of material possibilities is revealed on the work’s surface. The means by which Ryman uses the edge to circumscribe the pictorial activity invite us to consider the work as the evidence of a series of actions. The regular strokes of white paint help us focus on the differences characterizing each stroke as a result of the uneven pressure applied and the slips of the brush. The material characteristics of the canvas also show between the strokes, while the title of the works refers to the paint

used and thus avoids any associative reference: *Winsor* derives from Winsor & Newton, the British paint manufacturers whose products Ryman used. A temporality internal to the painting itself is thus perceived by the viewer who is immediately engaged in imagining the elemental and repetitive act of covering the visibly unprimed linen canvas with regular strokes of white paint. A before and after of the painting process is also perceived as the observer confronts the work beginning on the top left as if it were a written text – consistently with Ryman’s method of spreading paint on the canvas.

One could argue that we – i.e. the observer – could have absolutely no knowledge about the materials and tools necessary for painting and would thus not easily be engaged by such material traces of the painting process, although clearly differentiated from one another and exhibited on the painting surface. On the other hand, Marcia Hafif’s works on paper develop a rigorous working method using more common tools. Her regular marks of black graphite scan the paper surface in a manner similar to our everyday experience of writing or scribbling on paper with a pencil. The dimensions of the paper support – and consequently those of the pencil marks left by Hafif – are much larger than those commonly used. Nonetheless, we are not overwhelmed by the work’s dimensions, and are able to imagine ourselves being capable of controlling such a surface and reproducing such traces of the artist’s creative process.

Similarly, the observation of Cotani’s gauzes presents the viewer with a material stratification suggesting the temporal succession of their creation. In virtue of the textural quality of the material, at least two simulative actions are triggered. First, the visibly tense gauzes invite to simulate the action of stretching; second, being the gauzes visibly wrapped around the

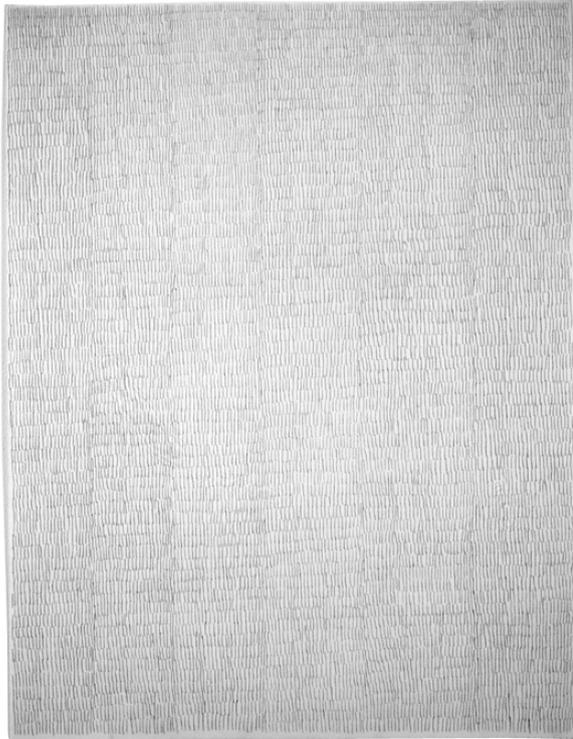
whole painting frame, the simulation involves a movement in space which ideally envelopes the entire painting-object. Such a simulation can find further appeal on the visible size of the picture frame, which relates to the extension and natural gesture of Cotani's arms. This allows for a mechanism of identification which is rooted in our bodily size and minimal capacities.

## **5. Conclusions**

In the paper we have tried to account for the possibility that we experience creative gestures in the fruition of a specific kind of abstract paintings. For this purpose, we have considered few specific, abstract works by artists Paolo Cotani, Marcia Hafif and Robert Ryman. These paintings, characterized by an extremely limited range of chromatic and formal features, have been described by critics as making their creative process visible on canvas. Far from being a metaphor, this description tells us something about the appearance of the works. As such, the "making" that is visible in these paintings is likely to be available for non-expert viewers too. Although we acknowledged the importance of contextual information in the artworks' fruition, we resisted the temptation to account for this description in terms of the critics' knowledge about the artists' intentions and working methods. We suggested that the kind of experience described is, instead, rooted in the works' perceptual features and involves the simulation of their alleged creative processes. We showed why this hypothesis is viable given the framework offered by Simulation Theory and experimental data about low-level simulation in front of static artworks. Moreover, we offered detailed descriptions of how high-level simulation could work in these

cases. We insisted that subpersonal mechanisms of mimicry – allegedly implemented by the mirror neuron system – could be responsible for imaginative processes that take place at the personal level. Viewers could accordingly be prompted to simulate in imagination those gestures that lead or might have lead to the realization of the works. Finally, we noticed that the selected paintings are particularly suitable for this kind of response thanks to their perceptual qualities, from the size of the canvas to the repetitiveness of the strokes, from the limited range of colours to the minimalism of shapes.

We think that our proposal could be a contribution to the historical and critical debate about these paintings. Namely, it could provide phenomenological as well as empirical support to critics focussing on the importance of the processes involved in the making of these works. Moreover, a perceptual approach enriched by simulation sounds like a viable strategy to make the fruition of minimalistic paintings available for broader audiences, precisely because it invites to a careful observation of basic features and to the imagining of creative processes, before appealing to critical, contextual knowledge. If empirical tests confirm that the way in which non-expert viewers tend to approach these paintings corresponds – at least to some extent – to the one we designed, fruitful strategies could be developed aimed at improving the audience's fruition of this and similar kinds of abstract paintings.



**Figure 1:** Marcia Hafif, February 16 1972, pencil on paper, 24x18 Marcia Hafif Trust



**Figure 2:** Paolo Contani Bende Elastiche (Elastic Gauzes) Gauzes and Acrylic 60 x 60 1975 Courtesy of Paolo Cotani Archive



**Figure 3:** Paolo Contani\_Bende Elastiche (Elastic Gauzes) (back side) Gauzes and Acrylic 60 x 60 1975 Courtesy of Paolo Cotani Archive

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# *The Felt Syllogism of Taste – a Reading of Kant's Sensus Communis*

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ABSTRACT. The Kantian judgment of taste famously claims necessary universality. To ground this claim, Kant introduces the *sensus communis*. Moreover, the *sensus communis* is also supposed to solve a certain paradox consisting of non-conceptuality and necessary universality. However, how exactly it can serve these functions is unclear and highly disputed. In this article, I will suggest that the *sensus communis* should be interpreted in analogy to the categories and the principles of pure reason: Including the disposition for a cognition in general, the *sensus communis* has a kind of *a priori* and transcendental status. Moreover, it functions as the major premise in a quasi-syllogism whose minor premise is the pleasure being felt and whose conclusion is the judgment of taste. This is only a felt syllogism or quasi-syllogism because its premises are non-conceptual.

The *sensus communis* (SC) is one of the core elements of Kant's theory of beauty, as it is supposed to explain why the judgment of taste is endowed with necessary universality. It is also the object of great confusion, for both what it is and its role in the judgment of taste remain highly opaque. In this article, I will focus on the role of the SC. It is my overall aim to demonstrate that it functions as the major premise in a quasi-syllogism and has an analogous status to a transcendental and *a priori* principle. Thereby I will

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make intelligible why the SC provides the judgment of taste with necessary universality. I will proceed as follows: In the first section I will unfold a certain paradox concerning the fact that the judgment of taste is endowed with necessary universality while being non-conceptual. In the second section I will explore what the SC consists of. Therefore, I will investigate its two components of being a ‘sense’ and being ‘communal’. In the third section I will make a digression to Kant’s theoretical philosophy by investigating the role of the *categories* and the *principles of pure reason*. I will show that they function as the major premise in a syllogism, which yields a necessary universal judgment of experience as its conclusion. In the fourth section I will draw a parallel between the role of the SC and the role of the categories. I will suggest the SC also functions as the major premise in a quasi-syllogism, which yields a necessary and universal judgment of taste as its conclusion. This syllogism is only a *quasi-syllogism* because its premises are non-conceptual and non-propositional.

## **1. The Paradox of Non-Conceptuality and Necessary Universality**

In the *Analytic of the Beautiful* Kant puts forward an analysis of the judgment “x is beautiful”, i.e., the judgment of taste. He starts this analysis by characterizing this judgment as *aesthetic*. Thereby, he roughly means that the predicate “is beautiful” expresses a state of feeling of the subject – namely, a state of (disinterested) pleasure – and that the judgment “x is beautiful” can only be justified by relying on that same pleasure. The fact that the judgment of taste has the status of being an aesthetic judgment

implies several further characterizations, which can be subsumed under the label of *non-conceptuality*:

- The predicate “is beautiful” is non-conceptual: it is not a concept by which a property of the object or the judging subject is grasped. (Still, it is a kind of concept by which we grasp our current state of pleasure.)
- The judgment of taste cannot be derived from a (conceptual and objective) principle, i.e., a principle of the form “All objects that possess the property p are beautiful”.
- The pleasure in the beautiful itself is not obtained by a concept: it is neither directly evoked by a concept nor is it based on a property of the beautiful object that could be grasped conceptually.

The non-conceptuality of the judgment of taste would not pose any problems if this judgment – just like the judgments about the agreeable – were only endowed with private validity. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Rather, the judgment of taste is endowed with universal validity or universality and, furthermore, it is endowed with necessity or, rather, “necessity of universal assent” (CJ: 239),<sup>2</sup> i.e., *necessary universality*. But this leads to a kind of paradox: the judgment of taste is non-conceptual, but also necessarily universal. For how could a judgment – within a Kantian

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<sup>2</sup> Citations to the *Critique of Judgment* (CJ), the *Logic* (Log) and the *Prolegomena* (Prol) are to the page number of the ‘Akademieausgabe’, citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) to the A/B page numbers of the first and second editions.

framework – be endowed with necessary universality if it is neither itself a conceptual, objective and *a priori* principle or derived from such a principle? At the least, Kant's aesthetics, as put forward in the *Critique of Judgment*, is nothing but an attempt to provide an answer to this question and, thus, to solve the paradox of non-conceptuality and necessary universality. As this answer is developed in multiple steps all over the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, I cannot deal with all of its facets in this article. Rather, I will focus on one element of this answer which is put forward in the fourth moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. In this moment Kant reveals *necessity* as the modality which holds for judgments of taste. Having characterized this necessity as “exemplary”, “subjective” and “conditioned” (CJ: 237), he identifies the (aesthetic) *sensus communis* as “[t]he condition of the necessity that is alleged by a judgment of taste” (CJ: 237). Obviously, the SC is supposed to explain how and why the judgment of taste can rightfully claim necessary universality. In that way, it is supposed to help solve the paradox of non-conceptuality and necessary universality. In order to better explain this role of the SC, I will seek to answer the following questions:

- i. What is the SC? And what does the SC consist of?
- ii. Why is the SC called a “subjective principle” (CJ: 238)?
- iii. How does the SC function so that it can provide the judgment of taste with necessary universality?

- iv. How does the SC help solve the paradox of non-conceptuality and necessary universality?

Even though it is not the main topic of this article, I will also touch on the following question:

- v. In what sense is the judgment of taste a synthetic judgment *a priori*?

## 2. How to Interpret the *Sensus Communis*

Unfortunately, Kant is far from clear on what exactly the SC is. Stepping away from the Kantian text, a *sensus communis* must contain two elements: (1) it should be a faculty that is somehow associated with sensibility (*sensus*), and (2) it should be common to all people, i.e., every human being should possess this faculty, it should function the same way and lead to the same results (*communis*).<sup>3</sup> In what follows I will briefly illustrate both of these aspects.

*The aspect of sensibility:* Kant claims that the aesthetic SC is a better candidate for a common sense than the common or healthy understanding, “if indeed one would use the word ‘sense’ of an effect of mere reflection on the mind: for there one means by ‘sense’ the feeling of pleasure” (CJ: 295). Thus, the word “sense” in “*sensus communis*” refers to the feeling of

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<sup>3</sup> Zhouhuang calls these elements ‘extensional universality’ and ‘intensional emotionality’ (Zhouhuang 2016, p. 77).

pleasure: the SC is a faculty to have a certain feeling – namely, the pleasure in the beautiful. Whenever we experience a pleasure in the beautiful, this pleasure is an instantiation of this faculty. This fits well with Kant's saying that by the SC "we do not mean any external sense but rather the effect of the free play of our cognitive powers" (CJ: 238); for, the effect of the free play is nothing but the pleasure in the beautiful.<sup>4</sup> To be more precise, the state of the free play of the imagination and the understanding is characterized by an "animation of both faculties" (CJ: 219). Only due to this can we experience the free play as a feeling of pleasure.<sup>5</sup> In that spirit Kant claims in § 21 that the SC is a disposition of the cognitive powers "in which this inner relationship is optimal for the *animation* of both powers of the mind (the one through the other) with respect to cognition [...] in general; and this disposition *cannot be determined except through feeling*" (CJ: 238 f.; my emphasis).<sup>6</sup> So, the SC as the faculty of the pleasure in the beautiful must be characterized by an animation of the imagination and the understanding – and it is this animation which is the reason for the SC being 'determined...through feeling'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See CJ: 218 f.

<sup>5</sup> I hold the theory that every inner activity (of our organs as well as our intellectual faculties), when being enlivening, is experienced as a feeling of pleasure, i.e., a "feeling of life" (CJ: 204). For similar interpretations see Allison 2001, p. 122; Guyer 2018, pp. 158-162; Makreel 1997, pp. 119-130.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike some interpreters I assume that in § 21 the *sensus communis* is to be understood solely as an *aesthetic* faculty, precisely because Kant refers to the 'animation of the powers of the mind' which is central to the free play of the faculties (for contrary positions see Allison 2001, pp. 154 f.; Fricke 1990, pp. 168 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> See CJ: 238, f., 295

*The aspect of communality:* There are feelings, and faculties to have certain feelings, which are not communal, e.g., all pleasures in the agreeable and the corresponding faculty – namely, “the taste of the senses” (CJ: 214). That every human being merely possesses the same faculty, does not automatically render it communal. Rather, this faculty should function in every human being the same way and should lead to the same outcome given the same situation. Following Kant’s argumentation in § 21, it is the notion of “the disposition of the cognitive powers for a cognition in general” (CJ: 238) which is the basis of the communality of the SC.<sup>8</sup> We should distinguish two questions: What exactly is ‘the disposition for a cognition in general’? And why should it be communal? Kant’s answer to the second question is that the ‘proportion...for a cognition in general’ is the “subjective condition of cognizing” (CJ: 238). If it were not present in a judging subject, she would not gain any cognition. Now, “[c]ognitions [...] must [...] be able to be universally communicated” (CJ: 238) – otherwise skepticism would prevail. For cognitions to be universally communicable, the conditions being necessary for every cognition must be universally communicable as well and so must the subjective condition of cognizing. Being ‘universally communicable’ means that every subject can *participate* in the ‘subjective condition for cognizing’,<sup>9</sup> i.e., every subject has the same

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<sup>8</sup> See also CJ: 290 Fn.

<sup>9</sup> In 18th century German the word ‘mitteilen’ (communicating) has the basic meaning of sharing something or letting someone participate in something, which is confirmed by Adelung’s *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart*: „Theil an etwas nehmen lassen, einen Theil seines Eigenthumes einem andern übertragen, demselben eigen machen, am häufigsten von Dingen, welche man andern ohne Lohn oder Vergeltung eigen macht“ (Adelung 1808, p. 251).

state of ‘proportion’ of her intellectual faculties ‘for a cognition in general’ when cognizing. In this way the subjective condition for cognizing is *communal*; but what is a ‘the disposition for a cognition in general’? Kant also calls it an “agreement of the two powers of the mind” (CJ: 295).<sup>10</sup> This ‘agreement’, I submit, should be understood as:

- i.a unification of both faculties, in terms of the forms apprehended by the imagination being subsumed under a (determinate or indeterminate) concept of the understanding. Thus, the ‘proportion for a cognition in general’ signifies the agreement of both faculties in an activity of *subsumption*.<sup>11</sup>
- ii.a state of *purposive interaction of the imagination and the understanding*. In that manner Kant speaks of the “internally purposive disposition of our cognitive faculties” (CJ: 259).<sup>12</sup>
- iii.*the faculty of judgment as functioning properly*. For, “[t]he subjective condition of all judgments is the faculty of judging itself, or the power of judgment. This, employed with regard to a representation by means of which an object is given, requires the *agreement* of two powers of representation: namely, the

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<sup>10</sup> See also CJ: 217, 219, 256; FI: 220

<sup>11</sup> See: “And this [disposition of the cognitive powers for a cognition in general; L.B.] actually happens every time when, by means of the senses, a given object brings the imagination into activity for the synthesis of the manifold, while the imagination brings the understanding into activity for the unification of the manifold into concepts” (CJ: 238).

<sup>12</sup> See also CJ: 295, 344, 350

imagination [...], and the understanding [...]" (CJ: 287; my emphasis).

Relying on this, the SC as including the 'proportion for a cognition in general' is constituted by a state of subsumption, of purposive interaction, and of a proper-functioning faculty of judgment. Such a 'proportion for a cognition in general' makes up another characteristic of the free and harmonious play of the faculties.<sup>13</sup> Hence, once again, the SC can be understood as "the effect of the free play of our cognitive powers" (CJ: 238).

All in all, the SC being a 'sense' means that it is the ability to have a feeling of pleasure and that this pleasure is based on the aspect of 'animation' in the free play of the faculties. The 'communality' of the SC is based on the proportion for a cognition in general that is included in the free play.<sup>14</sup> Both aspects belong to the same mental state – namely, the free and harmonious play of the faculties. Thus, in the SC – the 'effect of the free play' – the aspects of being a sense and of being communal are united, which is just to say that the SC is the faculty to have a communal or universal feeling of pleasure.

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<sup>13</sup> See CJ: 217 f.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to take into account both aspects of the SC in order to understand it as the specific principle of judgments of taste. If, however, one focuses on the aspect of communality, one will easily make the SC "the objective principle of the faculty of judgment", which "is presupposed in all judgments" (Crawford 1974, p. 130 f.).

### 3. The Role of the Principles of Pure Reason for Judgments of Experience

Kant identifies the SC as the “subjective principle” of the judgment of taste (CJ: 238). In order to understand this role I will, via analogy, make a digression to the role of the (objective) principles of pure reason for judgments of experience. I will primarily focus on Kant’s analysis of judgments of experience as put forward in the *Prolegomena*.<sup>15</sup> Kant unfolds this analysis by contrasting judgments of experience with judgments of perception. Both kinds of judgments are empirical, i.e., “they have their basis in the immediate perception of the senses” (Prol: 297). However, unlike judgments of perception, judgments of experience can rightfully claim “necessary universality” because they “demand [...] special concepts originally generated in the understanding” (Prol: 298), i.e., the *categories* of pure reason. Here, I am primarily interested in how we apply the categories to a judgment of perception, thereby creating a judgment of experience. As is well known, the categories themselves cannot be applied to perception, because being pure concepts they are too different in kind.<sup>16</sup> Thus, they must be mediated by a *schema* which is “intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other” (CPR: A138/B177). Still, the schema cannot be applied to perception immediately, but only as being included in the so-called *principles of pure reason*. But how exactly do we apply the principles

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<sup>15</sup> I explicitly do not want to dig into the problematic status of the distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience. For an overview see Prien 2015, p. 535.

<sup>16</sup> See CPR: A137 f./B176 f.

of pure reason to perception? Kant writes: “A completely different judgment [...] occurs before experience can arise from perception” (Prol: 300). It is obvious that this ‘completely different judgment’ is a *principle of pure reason* and that Kant refers to the subsumption of the given perception under categories. Following Michael Wolff, I take Kant to describe in the passage just quoted the following form of a *syllogism*:<sup>17</sup>

Major premise: principle of pure reason (containing a category)

Minor premise: instance of perception (judgment of perception)

Conclusion: judgment of experience

That we should assume such a syllogism can be confirmed by a proper understanding of the term “principle” in Kant. Broadly understood, every cognition that serves as the major premise in a syllogism is a principle – such judgments are principles because of their *usage*; narrowly understood, only synthetic cognitions *a priori* that serve as major premises in a syllogism are principles – such judgments are principles, i.e., first beginnings, because of their *origin*.<sup>18</sup> In any case, the principles of pure reason function as major premises in syllogisms – and being synthetic cognitions *a priori* they even fulfil the requirements for principles in the narrow sense.

Now, the crucial question is: how does all of this explain why the judgment of experience is endowed with necessary universality? I suppose that this status is due, firstly, to the fact that this judgment is the conclusion

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<sup>17</sup> See Wolff 2012, p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> See CPR: A148/B188, A300 f./B356 ff.

of a syllogism, i.e., an inference of reason. For “[a]n inference of reason is the cognition of the *necessity* of a proposition through the subsumption of its condition under a given universal rule” (Log: 120; my emphasis). Secondly, the conclusion’s status of necessary universality is due to the fact that it was derived from a *synthetic judgment a priori* (a principle in the narrow sense), which is famously characterized by “[n]ecessity and strict universality” (CPR: B4). The principles of pure reason and the categories are the preconditions of experience – Kant calls the latter the “formal and objective condition[s] of experience” (CPR: A96 & A223/B271) – and, thus, *a priori*.

We should keep the following in mind: judgments of experience are necessarily universal because (a) we gain them by an inference in a syllogism and because (b) the major premise of this syllogism is a principle *a priori* which includes a category, i.e., an objective condition of cognition.

#### **4. The *Sensus Communis* as the Major Premise in a Quasi-Syllogism**

We should turn back to judgments of taste and the SC. Kant argues that judgments of taste must have “a subjective principle” (CJ: 238). I propose that we should take this talk of a ‘*principle*’ seriously: we should assume that judgments of taste are derived from a principle that is the major premise in a syllogism. (Remember that in both its broad and narrow meaning the term “principle” signifies the major premise in a syllogism.) Now, it is the SC which functions as the subjective principle of judgments of taste and, hence, as the major-premise in the syllogism whose conclusion is the

judgment of taste.<sup>19</sup> But what about the minor premise? Taking into account that the major premise is the faculty to have the pleasure in the beautiful, the minor premise can be nothing but the pleasure in the beautiful as being felt by the subject.<sup>20</sup> All in all, we can reconstruct the following form of a syllogism:

Major premise: *sensus communis*

Minor premise: instance of the pleasure in the beautiful

Conclusion: “x is beautiful”

Obviously, this syllogism is quite different from any ordinary syllogism. For the SC is not a proposition, but a faculty that is a “*matter of sensation*” (CJ: 291; my emphasis) and, therefore, non-conceptual. Moreover, the minor premise is also not propositional, but is an *instance of feeling*. Hence, the peculiarity of the syllogism consists in the fact that we subsume an instance of feeling under a faculty, which is a ‘matter of sensation’. Therefore, I will call this syllogism a “*quasi-syllogism*.”

Two questions may arise: (1) How can we apply the SC to an instance of pleasure? Do we need – here, too, – something like a ‘schema’ that mediates between the two? (2) Why does this quasi-syllogism yield the conclusion “x is beautiful”? At which point does the beautiful object enter

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<sup>19</sup> See CJ: 238

<sup>20</sup> This fits well with the minor premise in general including an instance of the condition that is expressed in the major premise (see Log: 120); for the pleasure in the beautiful as being felt is an instance of the SC, i.e., the faculty to have the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful.

into the story?

(1) How can we apply a *faculty* to a *feeling*? It seems as if the two are too different in kind and that we are in need of something like a ‘schema’ which mediates between them. I suggest that this mediating role can be fulfilled by *the pleasure in the beautiful generally understood*.<sup>21</sup> The pleasure in the beautiful generally understood equally bears a relation to the SC – the faculty to have a pleasure in the beautiful – and to felt instances of this pleasure. Thus, it can take over the same basic mediating role as the ordinary Kantian schemata.

(2) Since the conclusion of the quasi-syllogism is the judgment “*x* is beautiful”, the object *x* should somehow be included in the minor premise, i.e., in the pleasure being felt. Yet if this pleasure was opaque – as Paul Guyer<sup>22</sup> suggests – the minor premise would lack any connection to this object. This problem, however, does not arise if the pleasure is *intentionally* directed towards the object. In short, I interpret the following: The pleasure in the beautiful is nothing but the free play of the faculties inasmuch as it is felt. Moreover, the pleasure and the free play do not stand in a causal relation, but rather the pleasure is just what it is like to have a free play.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, if the free play is directed towards something, then the pleasure is equally directed towards that something, i.e., the pleasure too is intentional.

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<sup>21</sup> For an analogy think of a case in which a person identifies a feeling she currently feels as sadness. She might use her conception of sadness generally understood to mediate between her concept of sadness and her current feeling.

<sup>22</sup> See Guyer 2018 and Guyer 1979, pp. 116-119

<sup>23</sup> For the so-called ‘causal reading’ see Guyer 1979, pp. 106-111. For a critique of the causal reading see Aquila 1982 and Allison 1998.

Now, the free play is an intellectual treatment of the given representation of the object and, hence, directed towards this object. Consequently, the pleasure, which is the minor premise, is also directed towards the object,<sup>24</sup> and this is where the object enters the syllogism.

Relying on our reactions to (1) and (2) we can now adjust the model of the form of the quasi-syllogism:

Major premise: *sensus communis* mediated by the pleasure in the beautiful generally understood

Minor premise: instance of the pleasure in the beautiful intentionally directed towards the object x

Conclusion: “x is beautiful”

Eventually, we are prepared to answer the question of how the judgment of taste gains the status of necessary universality. Concerning judgments of experience, I have shown that they are necessarily universal because (a) we

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<sup>24</sup> The intentional understanding of pleasure in general can be confirmed by Kant’s explanation of “pleasure” as “[t]he consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, for maintaining it in that state” (CJ: 220). – In general, I defend the more sophisticated view of a double-directedness of the free play and the pleasure towards the beautiful object *and* the subject. Due to space limitations, I cannot unfold this view in this article. Note that there can be different understandings of the intentionality of the pleasure in the beautiful. For example, Allison takes the pleasure to be intentionally directed towards the harmony of the faculties (see Allison 2001, p. 53 f.). Similarly, Zuckert assumes a directedness towards the mental state of the subject, ‘but a state of reflecting on the object’s form’ (Zuckert 2002, p. 249). Thus, she proposes a kind of indirect directedness towards the object.

gain them by an inference in a syllogism and because (b) the major premise of this syllogism is an *a priori* principle which includes a category, i.e., an *objective condition of cognition*. As I just argued, we similarly yield judgments of taste by an inference in a quasi-syllogism. But surely the major premise of this quasi-syllogism, the SC, is not a synthetic judgment *a priori* – at least, it is not a judgment at all. Nonetheless, it has a very similar status. I argued that the SC's aspect of communality is based on the *proportion for a cognition in general* as being instantiated in the free play of the faculties. As already noted, this proportion for a cognition in general is the “subjective condition of cognizing” (CJ: 238), and, thus, it has a *transcendental function*. In this way it is very similar to the categories which are the ‘objective conditions of cognizing’. Hence, the SC including the ‘subjective condition of cognizing’ plays a similar role as the categories.<sup>25</sup> And even though it is not a *proposition* or a *concept*, it is very similar to a synthetic judgment *a priori* which takes over a transcendental function. This analogy can be confirmed by the following passage:

If, however, a judgment gives itself out to be universally valid and therefore asserts a claim to necessity, then, whether this professed necessity rests on concepts of the object *a priori* or on subjective conditions for concepts, which ground them *a priori*, it would be absurd, if one concedes to such a judgment a claim of this sort, to justify it by explaining the origin of the judgment psychologically (FI: 238).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kant himself several times parallels the role of the categories to the role of the subjective principle of taste respectively the SC. See CJ: 191, 287 f.

<sup>26</sup> See also: „if one evaluates it [the judgment of taste; L.B.] as one that may at the

Kant claims that the ‘subjective conditions for concepts’, which are clearly nothing but the subjective conditions for cognizing, have an *a priori* status. Thus, they are similar to the categories, i.e., the ‘concepts of the object *a priori*’. Like the categories, the subjective condition of cognizing is a precondition of cognition and, thus, universal and necessary; so is the SC. Hence, the ‘professed necessity’ of the judgment of taste rests on the SC as including the ‘subjective conditions for concepts’.

Finally, we have arrived at the point where we can fully unfold the analogy between the principles of pure reason and the SC. Once again, judgments of experience are necessarily universal because (a) we yield them by an inference in a syllogism and because (b) the major premise of this syllogism is an *a priori* principle which includes an *objective condition of cognition*. Analogously, judgments of taste are necessarily universal because (a) we yield them by an inference in a quasi-syllogism and because (b) the major premise of this quasi-syllogism includes the *subjective condition of cognition*.

Let me briefly show that my theory of the (quasi-)syllogism of taste makes Kant’s characterizations regarding the SC and the peculiar necessity claimed by judgments of taste much more intelligible. As already shown, it illuminates why Kant calls the SC a “subjective *principle*” (CJ: 238; my emphasis). Moreover, the theory of the (quasi-)syllogism explains why Kant calls the necessity of judgments of taste “exemplary, i.e., a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a

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same time demand that everyone should consent to it, then it must be grounded in some sort of *a priori* principle (whether objective or subjective)” (CJ: 278; see similarly FI: 239).

universal rule that we are unable to state” (CJ: 237).<sup>27</sup> For the SC understood as a major premise does serve the function of a *rule*, but because it is non-conceptual and just “a matter of sensation” (CJ: 291) it *cannot be stated*. As Kant puts it, it is “the common sense, of whose judgment I [...] offer my judgment of taste as an example and on account of which I ascribe exemplary validity to it” (CJ: 239).<sup>28</sup>

One objection: the theory of the quasi-syllogism seems to render the act of forming a judgment of taste too intellectualized and abstract. Thus, it seems to depart from our ordinary experiences of making judgments of taste. However, if we reduce this theory to its core idea, it clearly is not. What the quasi-syllogism stands for is nothing but the act of identifying and conceptually grasping a given pleasure *as a pleasure in the beautiful*. It is by this act that I identify the pleasure I feel as a pleasure in the beautiful (and not as a pleasure in the agreeable or the good) and by which I consequently apply the concept “beautiful”.<sup>29</sup> Hence, it is the act of identifying a pleasure

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<sup>27</sup> See also CJ: 239

<sup>28</sup> When Wenzel discusses the notion of ‘exemplary necessity’ he refers to an ordinary syllogism (“by subsuming ‘Socrates’ under the concept ‘human,’ we can derive ‘Socrates is mortal’ from the premise ‘Humans are mortal’”; Wenzel 2008, p. 80). Despite he also links the SC to the notion of ‘exemplary necessity’, Wenzel does not seem to assume a syllogism or quasi-syllogism of taste.

<sup>29</sup> I defend a moderate version of the so-called ‘two acts model’. I neither think that the pleasure in the beautiful *is* the judgment of taste – a position held by Ginsborg (see Ginsborg 2015, p. 96) –, nor that *a second act of reflection* on the pleasure’s causal history is necessary to form a judgment of taste – a position held by Guyer (see Guyer 1979, pp. 110-119). For a recent discussion of the two different models see Guyer 2017 and Ginsborg 2017.

*as a pleasure in the beautiful* which is central to a judgment of taste being necessary and universal. Moreover, it is by this act that I *a priori* extend my pleasure to all human beings. I can do so, because I subsume my pleasure under the SC which is *communal*. Thus, it is the act of the subsumption in the quasi-syllogism through which the judgment of taste is rendered an *a priori* judgment, and it is the universality of the pleasure which is *a priori* added throughout this process. As Kant phrases it: “It is an empirical judgment that I perceive and judge an object with pleasure. But it is an *a priori* judgment that I find it beautiful, i.e., that I may require that satisfaction of everyone as necessary” (CJ: 289).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In the first section of this article I put forward five questions. I will conclude by explicitly stating my answers to these questions. The first question was: what is the SC and what does it consist of? I have shown that the SC consists of two components – namely, being a ‘sense’ and being ‘communal’. As a faculty to have a feeling of pleasure, the SC can be characterized as a ‘sense’. This aspect can be traced back to the animation in the free play of the faculties. The aspect of being ‘communal’ is based on the free play of the faculties as including the proportion of the faculties for a cognition in general, which is the subjective condition of cognition and can be presupposed in every human being.

The second question was: why is the SC called a “subjective principle” (CJ: 238)? My answer to this question is that the SC functions as the major premise in a quasi-syllogism and bears a similar status as a

synthetic principle *a priori*, because it includes the subjective condition of cognition. Thus it is a principle in the narrow sense.

As a third question I asked: how does the SC function so that it can provide the judgment of taste with necessary universality? Here, I made use of the analogy between the SC and the principles of pure reason. I argued that the principles of pure reason function as major premises in syllogisms whose conclusions are judgments of perception. These conclusions are necessarily universal because (a) we yield them by an inference in a syllogism and because (b) the major premises of these syllogisms are principles *a priori* which include a category, i.e., an objective condition of cognition. Analogously, the SC functions as the major premise in a quasi-syllogism whose conclusion is the judgment of taste “x is beautiful”. This conclusion is endowed with necessary universality because (a) it was yielded by an inference in a quasi-syllogism and because (b) the major premise of this quasi-syllogism includes the *subjective* condition of cognition.

The fourth question was: how does the SC help solve the paradox of non-conceptuality and necessary universality? Remember that this question touches the core problem of Kant’s aesthetics. My answer to this question is that the SC is, on the one hand, non-conceptual because it is a faculty to have a feeling and belongs to sensibility; still, on the other hand it is similar to a synthetic judgment *a priori* because it includes the proportion for a cognition in general which has a transcendental function. Hence, it can provide the judgment of taste with necessary universality without challenging its status of non-conceptuality, i.e., without making the judgment of taste a derivation from a conceptual and objective principle and

without turning the predicate “is beautiful” into a concept by which a property of the object is grasped.

The final question was: in what sense is the judgment of taste a synthetic judgment *a priori*? My answer is that it is the universality of the pleasure in the beautiful which is added *a priori* to the judgment. And this universality is added by subsuming the pleasure I currently feel under the SC.

In the first section of this article I claimed that the paradox of non-conceptuality and necessary universality is unfolded in several steps. Let me highlight now that this paradox is not completely solved by the introduction of the SC. Still missing is a deduction of the SC, i.e., a proof that the SC really exists and is not a ‘figment of the mind’. This deduction is given much later in the *Critique of Judgment* – namely, in § 39. Even though this section is beyond the scope of this article, the sheer fact that there is such a deduction of the SC makes the analogy between the SC and the categories even stronger; for famously, the categories also require a deduction.

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# *Prose and Life. A Comparison between Hegel's Aesthetics and Romantic's Poetics*

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ABSTRACT. This paper will elucidate and expose two different concepts of prose and to compare them. The first concept is the one that Hegel provides in the *Aesthetics*. The second is the concept that can be extracted from the Early German Romanticism, especially from their reflections upon the nature of novel. My aim is to lay the basis for further analysis on the strong relations between life and art, especially literature, in the German Idealism.

## **1. Introduction**

The following paper will show the fundamental connection between a historical concept of life (i.e. the modern social life determined in a broad sense by economical drive) and the concept of prose. Specifically, I will compare the different perspectives on prose in Early German Romanticism (i.e. the Romanticism of Jena, reunited around the Schlegel brothers) and Hegel's *Aesthetics*.

Before I begin, at least two considerations are to be made:

- a) The first consideration is related to the object of the paper. One could ask: "Why would a concept of life be theoretically important for the modern theory of literature?". An exhaustive

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answer to this question would be too long for the limit of a talk<sup>2</sup>. So, I would like to just say two brief and far from conclusive words about this issue. Early German Romanticism brings about the first modern literary theory, a theory freed from the mimetic prejudice and canonical judgment of Aristotle's *Poetics*. One of the strongest impulses of this revolutionary process comes from a development of the Kantian system. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant seeks to bridge the strong division between epistemological knowledge and practical action that he had previously sharpened. The third *Critique* is devoted to aesthetic and teleological judgment. The work of art is here conceived as a production, an action guided by concepts and rules, but, at the same time, it camouflages this production, presenting itself as a free and spontaneous natural product. The work of art inverts the terms and blurs the division between the necessity of knowledge and the possibility of freedom. The active moment of artistic creation follows a conceptual rule, nonetheless the work of art appears as a free play for our reflexive judgment. The stage for this inversion is set by the existence of "genius". Genius creates genuine works of art by adding, somewhat magically, spirit to its product. Now, Kant defines the spirit as the harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding (an interplay that can invert the schematic separation constructed by the first and the second Critiques). This interplay is said to animate the product of

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<sup>2</sup>For an introduction to this topic, see: Campe, 2011, pp. 53-66.

genius and to exhibit what is a priori inexpressible, i.e. the idea. The spirit makes the work of genius a work of art: "Spirit, in an aesthetic significance, means the animating principle in the mind [...]. Now, I maintain that this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas; by 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" (Kant, 2001, p. 192). Presentation and animation (I wish to underline this last feature, as it has always been the first attribute of life) become the specific difference that helps distinguish a mechanical work of repetition from the free and creative work of art. Imagination has put a sparkle of life and freedom in the mechanical logic of intellectual rules. Art and life do not simply share some analogies, they present the same teleological inner structure. The presentation of the aesthetic ideas is proportional to an intensification of the spirit intended as the animating principle in the mind or, as we could more easily say, an intensification of its vitality. For Kant, the most communicative form is language and thus poetry becomes the model for each vital work of art. Kant leaves the younger generation of thinkers a concept of poetry in which they will find a secret place to overturn the rigid limit of his system and give birth to ideas in the liveliest manner.

b) The second consideration that I would like to make before getting to the heart of the matter is a methodological one. Usually, comparisons between Hegel and Early Romanticism discuss Hegel's strong criticism of Schlegel's concept of irony. The development of an analysis from that standpoint has strong philological reasons, but it will almost necessarily lead to a theoretical *cul de sac*. Irony is related to knowledge, but the logical form of knowledge plays different roles in the Romantic's theories and Hegel's Idealism, because they solve the problems raised by the Kantian systems in opposite way. While the Romantics strive to increase indefinitely the subjective power of the productive imagination and the reflexive intellectual consciousness at the same time, Hegel undermines the intellectual faculty of the empirical subject and poses the ground of his system in the historical and dialectical movement of Spirit which fulfills reason's Idea. Commenting on the relations between these two positions, one faces a choice: either one recognizes the flaw of subjectivity still present in the pseudo-dialectical thinking of romantic irony as a pioneer for the full-grown dialectic of Hegel – which is what Szondi holds (Szondi, 1974) – or, in opposition to the Hegelian dialectic, one considers it as a pure linguistic rhetorical device without any possible connections with a reflexively epistemological mind – i.e. the solution of deconstruction theorists like De Man (De Man, 1996).

For the reasons I've tried to briefly explain with this consideration, I hope that comparing these two different perspectives, not from a logical point of view, but from the less severe regions of literature will avoid that strong opposition between these two interpretations and may establish a shared ground on which they can converge. That's why I will focus the comparison on the concept of prose. Now, this hope appears to be a false one. The romantic manifesto affirms the reunion of poetry and prose in the yet to-come progressive poetry. It aims "to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical" (Schlegel, 1971, p. 175). On the contrary, Hegel strikes this movement of fusion by putting, at the beginning of his consideration of poetry, a strong line of argument in order to distinguish the poetic from the prosaic treatment of the linguistic material, and then to separate poetry, as an authentic form of art, from prose, that could be only partially and reluctantly considered as an artistic product (Hegel, 1975, pp.973-978). Nonetheless, in this particular case, the contradiction doesn't emerge on the epistemological level, but rather the aesthetic one. It could be defined as the opposition between a romantic vision of art versus a classicist one. Yet, Hegel's view of poetry as the spiritual synthesis of the partitions between different arts and different ages, as "*universal art*" (Hegel, 1975, p. 967), does not permit an historical evaluation, and, for this reason, the concept of prose is not limited to the decadence of beauty in the romantic age, but it menaces the true art of poetry in each stage of its dialectical development. Within Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (to be sure, as we can

read it from Hotho's edition), in its final recapitulation through poetry and through its prosaic leftover, there is a glimmer of possibility to move over the contradiction between Hegel and the Romantics.

## 2. Hegel's Concept of Prose

In light of these considerations, it is worth scrutinizing the Hegelian concept of prose. Hegel uses the term prose and its derivation in two different ways:

a) The first one is the common use of the word "prose" as the antonym of poetry. Ultimately, prose is defined as the form of writing and speech that doesn't employ verse, and in which language is not used in a figurative manner. (Etymologically speaking, "prose" comes from the Latin "*prorsus*", an adjective that means "straight ahead", something without the possibility of turning back, and, for sure, not capable of going *a capo*). In that sense, for Hegel prosaic language touches the superior limit of Art and achieves to become the spiritual vehicle of spirit. "Prose of thought" becomes the linguistic means for the spiritual end, superior to art, of total knowledge (Hegel, 1975, p.89).

b) The second way in which Hegel uses the term defines the historical situation of the development of the spirit in the world, that situation in which the spirit is alienated from its natural and unmediated existence. Some references for that usage are the well-known expressions "prose of the world",

“prose of human existence”, “prose of life”, “prose of actual nature”, “poverty of nature and prose”.

The alienation of the spirit, as always in Hegel, gains a natural aspect, the appearance of a being that is not yet fully realized in its concept. This naturalness and this separation from the spiritual movement is relevant here because it introduces us to the common feature that grants his Hegelian usage. In Hegel's philosophy, “Prose” and “prosaic” defines something that always lacks autonomy and which is always the means for something else. Their meaning is a concept which needs a relation to something else to be defined; which is not real because it misses the act of being realized, i.e. an intellectual abstraction in Hegel's view. Indeed, Hegel conceives the understanding<sup>3</sup> as the abstract distinction between the knowing limited subject and the known object. The aim of the dialectical logic is precisely to surpass this distinction. Prose is the language form in which understanding speaks, it is the expression of the “isolated living” of the abstract individuality (Hegel, 1975, p. 150). (That's the standpoint from which to see the coherence of the attack that Hegel moves against Schlegel. According to him, Schlegel's “‘poetry of poetry’ proved itself to be the flattest prose” (Hegel, 1975, p. 296), as an intellectualism which shows the imperfect subjective-oriented idealism of Romanticism. Romantics can't see reality as it really is, but only understand it as void reflection, unrelated objectivity that could only be treated ironically). As it comes from the work of mere

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<sup>3</sup> For the use of the English term “Understanding” for “*Verstand*” I refer myself to the clear and explicative argument given by Pinkard in his ‘Translator's note’ to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 2018, pp. xlii-xliv).

understanding, and not from the pure immanent presence of the absolute Spirit, prose is not to be considered as a genuine form of art in Hegel's system. When we search for the role of the understanding within the whole system, we find that it's always characterized as the provisional knowledge of finitude that mostly pertains to Kantian philosophy. In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel says:

It is first with Kant that the difference between the understanding and reason has been emphasized in a definite way and set down in such manner that the former has the finite and the conditioned as an object and the latter the infinite and the unconditioned. [...] Still, we should not stop short at this negative result and reduce the unconditioned nature of reason to the merely abstract identity with itself that excludes difference. Insofar as reason is regarded in this way merely as stepping out beyond the finite and conditioned character of the understanding, by this means it is in fact itself downgraded to something finite and conditioned, for the true infinite is not merely on the far side of the finite, but instead contains the finite as sublated within it. (Hegel, 2010, pp. 89-90)

The systematic collocation of the understanding is the last section of the chapter on consciousness within the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, albeit with some relevant cuts, this position is kept in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, too. The section of the *Phenomenology* dedicated to understanding contains the passage between the consciousness and the self-consciousness. In some particularly complex reflections, Hegel shows how the understanding, knowing the finite differences of the phenomenal world

from the universal point of view of the law, presupposes a concept of infinity. The understanding doesn't recognize the contradiction between finite and infinite, but an absolute concept of infinity contradicts its epistemological structure. This still partial and insufficient concept – because still determined through the empirical experience – is “to be called the simple essence of life” (Hegel, 2018, pp. 96-100) from a philosophical point of view. Here we don't have time for a detailed analysis, but, simplifying a bit, we can state that the concept of prose is connected to that impossible intuition of unmediated life through the faculty of understanding. This partial concept of life allows the transition from the static and positive knowledge of the consciousness, to the active and negative one of the self-consciousness. At this point, the unity of life is not yet conceived in the dialectical movement of the absolute spirit, in which art found its place in Hegel's system, but rather it is being experienced as something naturally given in the abstract isolation of a primitive empirical subject.

As an additional evidence to this line of argument we could make this remark: in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the subject, that works as the means for others, is the servant. Some years later in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, talking about the fables and Aesop, Hegel affirms: “In the slave, prose begins, and so this entire species is prosaic too” (Hegel, 1975, 387). To be sure, the referent for “slave” is here Aesop and for “entire species” is “fables”, but still there's a hint of the condition of the servant. In the reign of art, Hegel banishes the labour of work. Art cannot speak about the inevitable economic nature of the empiric human relationship and that could explain why he speaks of the romance as a “modern popular epic” (Hegel, 1975, 1092), a prosaic form that signs the limit where art continues beyond

its conceptual end: a form of art that doesn't correspond to its concept anymore. We could say: novel, as intellectual and abstract art, is a form of art born dead, if we hazard modifying a bit the well-known adagio. This could even clarify why some Marxist authors, as Lukács or Benjamin, focus their aesthetic reflections on the problem raised by the novel and literature in its truly prosaic form. In fact, the way we think the relationship between life, work and art, could define a paradigm that exemplify the way we had thought modern social life in its entirety.

### **3. Romantic's Concept of Prose**

Now we must briefly elucidate why both Lukács and Benjamin have reconsidered the Romanticism's heritage to improve a concept of prosaic literature that is able to criticize the aesthetic theory of Hegel. Twenty years before Hegel's *Aesthetics*, Romanticism has assigned a major role to the novel in its theory of literature. Here, putting aside all other enriching interpretations that this movement provokes, we must address two questions: a) What is the concept of prose developed by the Early German Romanticism; b) What are the connections between this concept and the concept of life.

a) Firstly, we must admit that speaking of a unitarian concept of prose for the Romantics is an act of interpretation. Even if we consider a strictly limited period, e.g. the last five years of 18th Century, each author has his or her personal view upon the question raised by a conceptualization of the novel as the paradigmatic romantic genre and its consequence for the

distinction between poetry and prose<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, even these individual reflections are far from conclusive or steady. However, to ease the situation, we can refer to Novalis, the romantic writer who has the deepest concern with the questions posed by the concept of prose and take his thoughts as paradigmatic for all the romantic group. In discrepancy with Hegel, the Romantics do not conceive prose as the antonym of poetry, but rather as its hypernym. Prose is the substance, the idea (Benjamin, 1996, p. 173), from which poetry stems. In the most paradoxical formulation: "Poesy is prose among the arts" (Novalis, 2007, p.57). In the same way in which poetry sums up all the forms of art, prose contains poetry as the indifferent state from which the rhythm and the verse pour out. Nonetheless prose is still a concept and not a pure chaos in which everything gets lost in everything. We must not fall into the false belief, promoted by Hegelian criticism and by historical tradition, that Early Romanticism is sort of individualism or a pure form of nihilism (Norman, 2000, pp. 131-144). Early German Romanticism is neither defined by the abandon of reason to the pure sentiment of the undifferentiated unity. On the contrary, we can schematize Novalis conception of prose as a progress of artistic and historical consciousness. In that scheme prose acquires two different meanings: aa) Metaphorically speaking prose could be seen as the noise from where the chant of poetry emerges, as a negative concept of common prose, i.e. as an unmediated beginning; bb) but there's a higher concept of prose. It originates from such a mastering of poetry that reunites the first prose and poetry in a poetic-prose. The prose of the world can become poetic in so far as the penetration inside its nature is fulfilled with a balanced spirit of

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poetry. The imperative of making the world romantic (Novalis, 1997, p.60) must be seen as the accomplishment of this higher concept of prose in its application to ordinary life, i.e. the first negative concept. In a letter to August Schlegel, Novalis writes: "If poetry wishes to extend itself, it can do so only by limiting itself ... It will acquire a prosaic look.' But, Novalis continues, 'it remains poetry and hence faithful to the essential laws of its nature ... Only the mixture of its elements is without rule; the order of these, their relation to the whole, is still the same [...] It becomes poetry of the infinite'" (Novalis in Benjamin, 1996, p. 174).

b) Let me now address the second question, i.e. the one concerning the connections between the concept of prose and the concept of life. While addressing the first question, we've already introduced a relationship between the concept of prose and the concept of life, since the higher stage of prose is a potential returning to the prose of life that defines the common prose. The reunion of poetry and prose in a multiplicity of rhythm that doesn't lose its unity in the infinite understanding of prose, means that every reality could blossom under the poetic eye, everything can be written in the Novel, in which all the genres become one in the romantic universal poetry of prose. But still it's impossible to tell whether this Novel could be realized or not. The model of the novel was *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre* for the Romantics. But the Romantics found it difficult to converge in one judgement. While Schlegel salutes *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre* as a novel of formation which has the aim to represent an education to the art of life (Schlegel, 1984a, p.61), Novalis, after a first enthusiasm, disdains it as a mere economic pedagogy, as prose that remains common prose. He even writes in a fragment around 1800 a defense of the novel against the terrible

consequence that Meister's analysis could have for the genre. Novalis and Schlegel diverge in judging Goethe's novel, but they converge in their ideal of the Novel. This ideal prose possesses an intensity that couldn't possibly be actualized in the real world. I quote from Schlegel *Letter about the Novel*: "Yet I appreciate all of the so-called novels to which my idea of romantic form is altogether inapplicable, according to the amount of self-reflection and represented life they contain" (Schlegel, 1984b, p. 79). And now I quote from Novalis: "Meister ends with the synthesis of antinomy – because it's written by and for the understanding. [...] Life must not be a novel that is given to us, but one that is made by us" (Novalis, 1997, p. 66). This impossibility to become actual of the art that consider life in its prosaic form, this permanent potentiality, that Hegel fiercely criticizes, may indicate that the solution would be impossible to find at the level of artistic production. Benjamin would say that the Idea of prose is to find in a redemptive history of the oppressed, in the attentive and rapid listening of the continued lament of the natural, prosaic life. That's radical, but possible. In any case, we should say that: if art cannot resolve the whole question of the prosaic within its proper limit, still it must dovetail with it and insist in representing it, until the real solution will be reached and there will be no need for a beautiful transfiguration of the world.

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## *Poetics of History in Contemporary Art*

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the historical consciousness that characterises some trends in contemporary art. Our working hypothesis is that contemporary art differs from postmodern art in that it appropriates the past in different ways, with the intention of exercising ideological criticism and having an immediate impact on the present; in other words, that contemporary art seeks to have an immediate social effect by activating repressed potentialities of our present and “redividing the sensible” (Rancière).

The first step in developing this argument will be an analysis of the concept of *contemporaneity* based on the work of significant theorists of aesthetics and contemporary art. In this analysis we will encounter concepts that are fundamental to an understanding of current art, such as *contemporaneity* itself (Osborne, Smith), *heterochronicity* (Bourdieu, Moxey), *anachronism* (Rancière, Agamben) and *suspension of history* (Ross), which we will also briefly analyse.

Lastly I will present two recent works taken from documenta 14 (2014) in order to discuss the applicability of these concepts and also to gather up new issues and practices to enrich future research. I will analyse two complex projects, the one by Irena Haiduk in Kassel, *Exacting Socialist Realism*, and the one articulated around *The Society of Friends of Halit*.

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## 1. Contemporary Art and History

This paper explores the historical consciousness that characterises some trends in contemporary art. This *zeitgeist* presents itself in a very particular mode in art that deals with historical events, because such art usually shows a rather refined relation with past and present times. Thus some of our essential references in the development of our argument come from works of current art. We will start by introducing some examples taken from a well-known artistic event, the documenta (17).



**Figure 1.** Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow* (2017), performance and installation. Irena Haiduk (Belgrade, 1982) gave the visitor a chance to taste the atmosphere of the Yugoslav communist world, witness feminist performances related to the history of the Balkans and participate in an economic project on the footwear industry in the former republic of Yugoslavia. Antonio Vega Macotella (Mexico, 1979) reconstructed a mill, driven by slaves, that was used to mint coins in Bolivia during the colonial era. Visitors could drive the mill, with their own strength, to mint coins and bitcoins, while at the same time collaborating in a project to create awareness of colonial history and its persistence in current power relations. Otobong Nkanga introduced the visitor to the exploitation of primary resources in unprotected regions and cultures. She has built a soap laboratory that runs with raw materials from many different Mediterranean and African countries. By buying a soap bar in Kassel, the visitor can take part in a sustainable circular economy that brings benefits back to some of the affected communities through the foundation funded by the artist during the documenta.<sup>2</sup> Maria Eichhorn (Bamberg, Germany, 1962), in *Rose Valland Institute*, researched and documented the expropriation of property formerly owned by Europe's Jewish population before World War II and the impact of those confiscations. She has played an important role in the restitution of artworks. She is also interested in questioning the structures of artistic institutions. Máret Anne Sara (Hammerfest, Norway, 1983) researches on the reindeer culls in Norway, which, being regulated by state

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<sup>2</sup> It is a complex process that in August 2018 still seems to be working. There are even projects that were still not defined during the documenta: <http://www.carvedtoflow.com/> (last visit: August 2018).

laws, require the Sámi to indiscriminately slaughter many heads of reindeer. She also reports on other brutal huntings and their related historic practices (such as buffalo hunting in the US), denouncing atrocious consequences for animal lives and related human communities. In this project, Sara has also helped her brother challenge state-ordered culls that are seen to undermine the Sámi community's struggle to preserve its culture and identity after centuries of "Norwegianisation". *The Society of Friends of Halit* was founded – by members of the victims' communities – after a series of murders of citizens of foreign origin in Kassel and Dortmund in the 2000s. Since then the society has investigated many of the unsolved crimes and has revealed how police inquiries and court decisions have been strongly influenced by racist tendencies in society.



**Figure 2.** Maria Eichhorn, “*Unlawfully Acquired Books from Jewish Ownership*”, part of the *Rose Valland Institute* project. Unlawfully acquired books from Jewish ownership by the Berliner Stadtbibliothek in 1943, registered in the book of acquisitions.

Practices such as these have become quite common in the current artistic landscape. They share an interest in recovering collective memories in order

not just to denounce old injustices but to reappropriate them in a poetic way, that is, in a productive and performative manner. Practices of this kind are intended to have an impact on the artists' own current communities, without waiting for a more critical consciousness to take root in younger generations. In the following pages I will take these artistic projects as representative of the contemporary historical consciousness and will characterise them using temporal categories drawn from current philosophers and art historians.

Although I am using these artworks and ideas to develop a general concept of "the contemporary", my position is not essentialist". Since our age is complex and plural, many other current artistic practices can represent our contemporaneity; but not all of them. A characterisation must also be operative and, therefore, in some way also exclusive.

## **2. Being Contemporary as Being Historical (Rancière)**

We will start with the conception of time that lies behind the term 'contemporary'. If we want to find a stronger meaning for contemporary than just being synonymous with coetaneous (as in "they are the same age"), then we have to find a deeper relationship between two (contemporary) things than merely being the same age. We could then state that two things are contemporary when they belong to a particular order of things that evolve in a set direction. Rather, two things become contemporary because they relate to each other in building a sense of time. Therefore, time does not exist before the events but is made by the events, when two or more things or actions become significant for others and become the epicentre of

a historical context. Thus, we can say that being contemporary is like being a reflection of an age. Something is contemporary when, rather than reflecting or copying its time, it has an impact on it and is influential or historical.

Rancière has defined the fact of being historical in an analogous but still more radical way. Being historical means breaking with one's own age. Since the concept of an age belongs to a static, immobile notion of history, being part of a time that passes must mean breaking with a static model of time. Rancière relates resistance to change to a tendency to stop history. In his view, historians also try to control time through important historiographical categories, most notably the concept of the age and the concept of chronology. An age or period is a long interval of historical time that is, by definition, internally coherent or homogeneous. History defines common features for an age, features that last throughout the period but are not found in other ages. The concept of the age thus defines what is possible in a given period and what is not.

Much the same applies to the concept of chronology. A chronology is a chain of events that establishes a law of causality or a logic of necessity between one event and the next. Through such an account, historiography again avoids unexpected events and controls what is possible in the order of a progression. In so doing, recorded history builds a paradigm in which an eternal and universal truth may be possible:

to abolish succession as such, to put in its place an image that resembles as far as possible the eternity of the true, to oppose time as the advent of a totality to time as the heterogeneity of successive parts

(Rancière, 1996, p. 56).<sup>3</sup>

Avoiding unexpected events and making time homogeneous in order to find a stable truth is not only an epistemological issue for historiography but also a political problem, since such a model for history becomes conservative. On the other side, any historical change, any unexpected movement in the direction of history implies something that was not appropriate for one time or was not expected in the chronological chain. Any historical change requires an anachrony that breaks the immobile, homogeneous conception of history.

There is history insofar as men do not “resemble” their time, insofar as they act in rupture with “their” time, with the line of temporality that inserts them in their place, by obliging them to use their time in one way or another (Rancière, 1996, p. 66).<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, Rancière advocates something like anachronism in historiography. If being synchronic means being of a time without being able to change it, being anachronic means untangling the knot between time

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<sup>3</sup> My own translation from: “abolir la succession comme telle, mettre à sa place une image aussi ressemblante que possible de l'éternité du vrai, opposer le temps comme avènement d'une totalité au temps comme hétérogénéité de parties successives” (Rancière, 1996, p. 56).

<sup>4</sup> My own translation from: “Il y a de l'histoire pour autant que les hommes ne “ressemblent” pas à leur temps, pour autant qu'ils agissent en rupture avec “leur” temps, avec la ligne de temporalité qui les met à leur place en leur imposant de faire de leur temps tel ou tel “emploi” (Rancière, 1996, p. 66).

and the eternal present of an age. Anachronism, that is, not pertaining to a time, is the only possibility for someone to introduce something new, that is, to become historical.

    this rupture is itself only possible because of the possibility of connecting this line of temporality to others, because of the multiplicity of lines of temporality present in “a” time (Rancière, 1996, p. 66).<sup>5</sup>

An anachronism can join two different lines of time and insert something new into a time or make something new happen. It has the capacity to “create new connections between lines of temporality” (“définir des aiguillages temporels inédits”). In the following, we will see that Agamben also understands the contemporary spirit in an analogous form to Rancière’s idea of anachronism.

### **3. Being Critical by Being Anachronic (Agamben)**

Agamben also understands the contemporary as something that, rather than assimilating to the general features of a time, does not coincide with its time. The Italian philosopher refers first to Nietzsche’s *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* to explain that only one who does not resemble her own time is able to go beyond it:

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<sup>5</sup> My own translation from: “cette rupture n’est elle-même possible que par la possibilité de connecter cette ligne de temporalité à d’autres, par la multiplicité des lignes de temporalité présentes dans “un” temps (Rancière, 1996, p. 66).

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [inattuale]. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time (Agamben, 2008, from the English translation, 2009, p. 40).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly to Rancière, the contemporary differs from the current (*zeitgemäss*) in not coinciding exactly with its own time. One who is contemporary does not adapt himself to his time. In a way, he is anachronic. This gives him the ability to stare at what is not clear: “The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity” (Agamben, 2008, from the English translation, 2009, p. 45).<sup>7</sup>

Looking into the darkness – Agamben goes on – opens up the possibility of perceiving the light to come, that is, what has been sown and will grow up in the future. Sometimes, this newness is found in the past, in the origin. Something that was lost in oblivion can be brought back as

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<sup>6</sup> “é veramente contemporaneo colui che [...] non coincide perfettamente con esso [suo tempo] né si adegua alle sue pretese ed è perciò, in questo senso, inattuale; ma, proprio per questo, proprio attraverso questo scarto e questo anacronismo, egli è capace piú degli altri di percepire e afferrare il suo tempo” (Agamben, 2008, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> “Può dirsi contemporaneo soltanto chi non si lascia accecare dalle luci del secolo e riesce a scorgere in esse la parte dell’ombra, la loro intima oscurità (Agamben, 2008, p. 14).

something new: “there is a secret affinity between the archaic and the modern [...] because the key to the modern is hidden in the immemorial and the prehistoric” (ib. 51).<sup>8</sup>

Hence past, present and future can join through a split in chronological time and meet in a sort of temporal pleat. Temporal continuity is broken by rummaging in the past, as a result, a door to the future is opened. One who lives his time as a contemporary does so not only by being attuned to all that happens but also by introducing fissures and splits in what happens, creating newness and changing the course of things. For that reason Agamben says that “the contemporary (...) is also the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times” (ib. p. 53).<sup>9</sup>

Concluding this first attempt to conceptualise the spirit of the contemporary, both in Rancière and Agamben we can find a common idea of breaking the homogeneity or continuity of the chronological advance of time, so that the new it is not merely the consequence of what preceded it. The contemporary spirit has a critical attitude, a distance that breaks with the simple present and, perhaps drawing anachronically on the ancient past, inserts a utopian idea that can transform the pace of time. Therefore, our contemporaneity can be understood as a type of temporality in which time is not so much homogeneous as heterochronic and in which different lines of

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<sup>8</sup> “fra l’arcaico e il moderno c’è un appuntamento segreto [...] perché la chiave del moderno è nascosta nell’immemoriale e nel preistorico” (Agamben, 2008, p. 22).

<sup>9</sup> “il contemporaneo [...] è anche colui che, dividendo e interpolando il tempo, è in grado di trasformarlo e di metterlo in relazione con gli altri tempi, di leggerne in modo inedito la storia” (Agamben, 2008, p. 24).

time meet and mix or anachronically relate different times. This is done in order to break the inertial present we seem to live in and open up the possibility of a change from now on.

#### **4. Heterochronic Artistic Practices? (Kubler and Bourriaud)**

The concept of heterochrony, which Rancière applies to historiography, as it is commonly quoted, was already advocated for art history by George Kubler. The American art historian reformed art's historiographical model by introducing a materialistic, open and flexible model for building relations among art objects. Following Kubler's conception of art history, there are countless temporal lines of continuity between the objects created by humans. These continuities may last different lengths of time, stop for periods, cross one another and converge:

We can imagine the flow of time as assuming the shapes of fibrous bundles, with each fibre corresponding to a need upon a particular theatre of action, and the lengths of the fibres varying as to the duration of each need and the solution to its problems. The cultural bundles therefore consist of variegated fibrous lengths of happening, mostly long and many brief. They are juxtaposed largely by chance, and rarely by conscious forethought or rigorous planning. (Kubler, 1962, p. 122)

Though the influence of the model proposed by Kubler on contemporary art historiography is unquestionable and has opened the door of a field that can

understand and renarrate the complexity and plurality of art in a postcolonial world (Moxey, 2013), the application of this concept to unique art objects is not straightforward. Following Kubler, what is heterochronic, rather than chronological, is the resulting story that relates works of art among themselves and not, therefore, the actual experience of artworks. Besides, the purpose of Kubler's model of time is to find new or rather deeper continuities. We may wonder whether an experience of the artwork that includes in itself a disruptive experience of historical time is possible.

Terry Smith has classified contemporary art in three main categories, all of them including temporal insights. The first group includes those artworks that more or less critically take up or develop topics and features of Modernity, thus representing in general a kind of continuity with the modernist period of art. The second group comprises postcolonial artistic practices. These question orthodox colonial narratives by confronting local and international art practices. Finally, the third and more heterogeneous group comprises mainly younger artists who “focus their wide-ranging concerns on questions of time, place, mediation, and mood. (...) Nowadays, the list looks more like: (alter)temporality, (dis)location, transformativity within the hyperreal, and the altercation of affect/effectivity” (Smith, 2006, p. 700).

Smith focuses on temporal issues that current art seems to deal with. However, he specifies neither whether the time questions include approaches to history nor what kind of historical consciousness they shape. Is there any phenomenological approach to current artworks that shows a critical historical consciousness?

Nicolas Bourriaud has managed to sketch an “aesthetic of

heterochrony” in the introductory text to his *Altermodern* show at Tate Gallery. For Bourriaud, what is contemporary, for the works of art collected by him, is not showing evident features of the current time but “the structure of the work: the very fact that it brings together heterochronic elements” (Bourriaud, 2013). A contemporary work can mix past elements, such as archival documents, with immediate stimuli and anticipatory images. Bourriaud groups all heterochronic displays into two well-known artistic practices: assemblage and storytelling. Both allow results that go further than the “principle of accumulation (postmodern baroquism)” and reveal features of our times.

It is worth considering that Bourriaud stresses the differences between postmodern and contemporary temporality. While postmodern temporality seems to be a kind of more playful and subjective mixture of elements that belong to different times, the contemporary use of heterochrony offers an insight into our contemporary reality. Furthermore, it is important that Bourriaud introduces a phenomenological approach to experience various temporalities in the work of art itself. Yet, it is hard to figure out how this “positive vision of chaos and complexity”, this “positive experience of disorientation” (Bourriaud, 2013) can go beyond a mere symbolisation of our present age and produce a strong critical attitude or performative statement aimed at creating a disruptive break in temporal continuity. Although Bourriaud critiques the postmodern “melancholic episode”, his contemporary inclusion of the future also looks like an aestheticising insight and does not seem to offer a future other than the one already predefined by the present.

So far we have defined the contemporary spirit as one that is actively

historical. Rather than being a development of a trend, it breaks with the continuity of linear time and inserts something new. This something new does not come out of nowhere: it can be a sort of reappropriation of forgotten or non-actualised pasts, so that the relationship between past and present is no longer one of continuity or opposition (tradition or progression) but one shaped by an anachronism that links different historical lines (Agamben). Having seen with Rancière and Kubler that anachronism and heterochrony are possible types of narrative relations in the making of history (or art history), that is to say, in the telling of history, we now ask ourselves whether art itself may trigger such experiences. Bourriaud has put us on the track: he has identified contemporary artistic strategies such as assemblage and montage as being capable of producing heterochronic and anachronic experiences of history. However, he misses their critical potential when he describes these practices as mere ways of representing the present. We must pursue our inquiry further to find an explanation that can trigger the experience of art as both anachronic and historically subversive.

## **5. The Subversive Experience of Anachronism in Art (Didi-Huberman)**

Didi-Huberman follows the iconic turn that has been diagnosed in cultural studies in the last two decades to consolidate the role of phenomenological analysis in the field of art history. He has made it possible to argue that an anachronic association in the experience of a work of art, understood as an inherent part of that experience, may subvert the orthodox historical experience of the work. This would mean that the work does not need to be

read from the outset in relation to its direct influences (coetaneous present) and its closest antecedents.

Didi-Huberman has exemplified the aesthetic experience with several case studies, such as his encounter with a Fra Angelico fresco in San Marco (Florence). He reminds us that what motivated his attention to part of a mural painting and the following discovery was its resemblance to a painting by Pollock. Without this initial startling reaction, he would never have paid attention to it nor have started his research. The research outcomes allow him to question much of the accepted wisdom on Renaissance art that misinterprets Angelico's oeuvre.

Taking advantage of this lesson, Didi-Huberman states that the experience of art cannot but be anachronic in the first instance, since the reception of an artwork is always triggered from the beholder's present context and expectations. A new point of view can bring attention to elements of the past that were unperceived until now and can unveil new aspects, traditions and meanings that were partially or totally hidden by all the meanings previously attributed to an age.

The structurally inherent anachronism of the experience of art thus not only gives rise to a newer interpretation of the past, which naturally has to be verified through historical knowledge, but also allows the emergence of new objects for human experience. These objects, as Didi-Huberman has also argued, involve both a resignification of past events and a reconsideration of one's own current perspective. After that experience in San Marco, he started to question his own expectations as a beholder and also some of his essential methodological postulates.

This follows a shift in the ontological consideration of the artistic

object, which ceases to be just an object waiting to acquire fullness of meaning through application of the appropriate context by the art historian and becomes instead an interlocutor that is able to bridge the temporal distance with the present. Indeed, “Before an image, finally, we have humbly to recognise this: that it will probably outlive us, that before it we are the fragile element, the passing element, and that before us it is the element of the future, the element of duration. The image often has more memory and more future than the one who looks at it”.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, Didi-Huberman has generalised this consideration to all kinds of images. Even though in this text he is interested in ancient images, in other texts he deals analogously with current images, because they deserve the same ontological status. However, it is not clear enough here how this dialogue operates with contemporary art. For this, we will have a look at Christine Ross’s consideration of the experience of history through contemporary media art. Although Ross does not focus on the concept of anachronism, we will see that her analysis concludes with the results we are looking for, that is, the problematisation of history through short-circuiting its structure.

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<sup>10</sup> Own translation from: *Devant une image, enfin, nous avons humblement à reconnaître ceci: qu’elle nous survivra probablement, que nous sommes devant elle l’élément fragile, l’élément de passage, et qu’elle est devant nous l’élément du futur, l’élément de la durée. L’image a souvent plus de mémoire et plus d’avenir que l’étant qui la regarde*” (Didi-Huberman, 2000, p. 10).

## **6. Suspension of History in Contemporary Media Art**

Christine Ross has analysed how contemporary art breaks the chronological chain of events when dealing with history and collective memories. Yet, all this has to be understood first in the wider context of a philosophy of present times. Following contemporary studies in philosophy of history (Koselleck, Hartog), Ross agrees with the idea that today's "predominant regime of historicity" is presentism, which is characterised as

the turning of the present into an absolute value, whose absoluteness now means a real disconnection from the past (perceived as lost) and the future (perceived as increasingly uncertain) (Ross, 2008, p. 128).

Contemporary presentism appears to be a compensation for the previous dismissal of the present in modernity, "based on progress, chronology and permanence" (Ross, 2006, p. 85). While modernism had put the focus and all hope into the future, the current regime of historicity, with the whole accent on the present, puts into question "in fact the possibility of history, which is claimed to be on the threshold of loss". The contemporary human experience of the world shrinks the historic dimension and its influence in the present to its minimum. In some sense, when there is no past that pushes the present, the present is unlikely to move forward.

In this social context, Ross's thesis about contemporary media art, or at least art which deals with historical events, is that it also suspends the course of history in a sort of presentist experience. But in doing so, it opens up the possibility of a reconstruction of historical time.

The Canadian art historian analyses some of Melik Ohanian's video works to exemplify how some works of art mix different records of a common reality: for instance, the mixing of an audio recording of Allende's final speech with video footage of the aerial bombardment of the Palacio de la Moneda on 11 June 1973 and Ohanian's self-taken images of present-day Santiago de Chile. According to Ross, the desynchronised perceptual experience of the work breaks the continuity of history with the present and avoids the possibility of a narrative construction of events, thus suspending the historical continuity between past and present.

However, Ross sets out a long argument to the effect that this suspension of history "might, under specific conditions, open up the process of history" (Ross, 2008, p. 138). Briefly, in this suspension of history the elements of the narration become disjointed and leave visible gaps. Because the spectator is perceptually confronted with the events without a structured narrative, he must adopt a role analogous to that of a witness. He must negotiate the parts presented and try to actively articulate them in a new yet subjective narration. The spectator is thus assigned the role of witness. It is up to him "to take up a narrative with the fragments of the coexisting documents" (Ross, 2008, p. 144). Thus the spectator becomes the history maker because, following Paul Ricoeur, the witness's testimony is the foundation of history, one that sustains the whole process of making history (Ross, 2008, p. 145).

In summary, by short-circuiting the perceptual experience of the narrations pointed at by the work, which thus questions current historical conditions and the sense of previous narratives, the spectator finds herself committed to the role of witness, that is, the one who articulates different

parts of the past in order to make a historical narration that has effects on the present. Thus, Ohanian's installation opens up possible new unfoldings for history and "in short, is more about the conditions of possibility of futurity than its noticeable actualization" (Ross, 2008, p. 148).

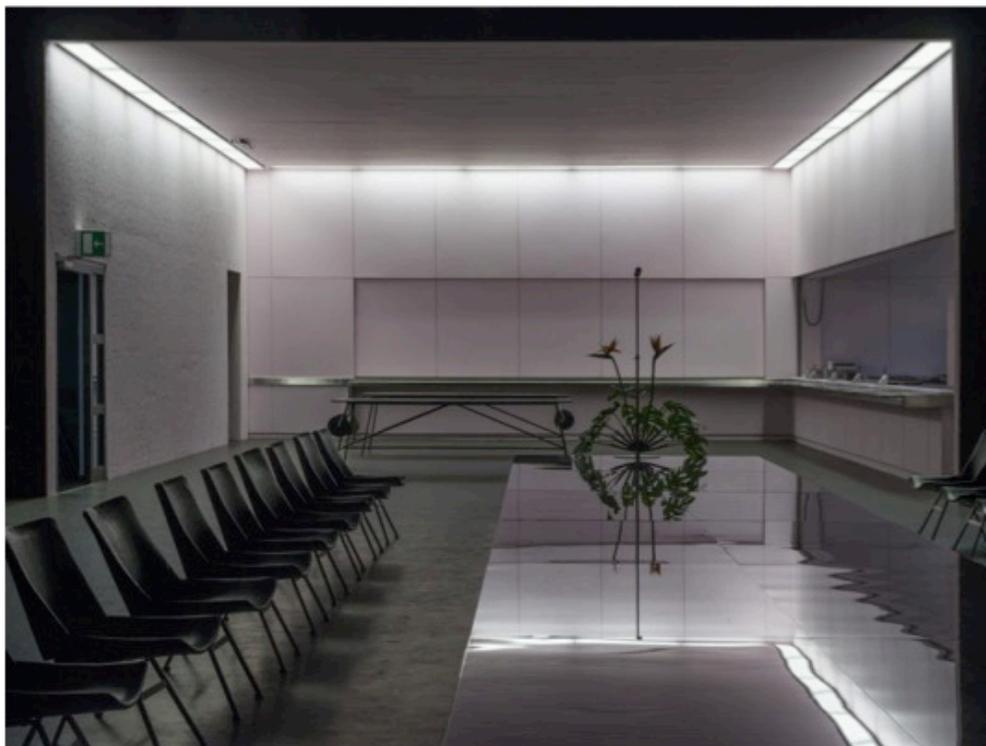
We can conclude that in producing a new present by rewriting the past, contemporary art offers us a poetics of history in a deep sense, that is, a repotentialisation of the conditions for historical times.

## **7. Two Modes for a Poiesis of the Past**

We have discussed some aspects of a possible contemporary aesthetic consciousness through the ideas of various philosophers and art historians who unfold their arguments in close contact with contemporary art. Beyond unavoidable subjective affinities, our selection of these arguments is oriented by what we have encountered recently in current artistic events. It is time to check whether those ideas help us understand better certain contemporary art practices. I have chosen two projects from documenta 14 (2017) not so much to illustrate the ideas unfolded as to show how art points to further, newer issues.

Irena Haiduk presented at the documenta a complex artistic intervention in which she resurrected objects from repressed memories and gave them a new, practical function. SER (Seductive Exacting Realism) is part of a long project with several ramifications called Yugoexport, an oral

corporation funded by the artist.<sup>11</sup> According to Haiduk, Yugoslavia is currently an empty space and Yugoexport occupies it, trying to recover the original sense of Yug or Jug, which is “south”, the cardinal point.



**Figure 3:** Irena Haiduk, *SER (Seductive Exacting Realism)* (2015– ), part of the installation

A parade walkway and a coffee shop counter occupied a large room. In the coffee shop, a clerk sold books, exhibition books and women’s shoes. These sober, elegant, ergonomically designed shoes in dark blue (known as

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<sup>11</sup> The artist has a website where more information is given and also some of the products can be purchased: <https://yugoexport.com/programs>

“Borosana shoes”) were produced for all public workers during the 1960s in the former Yugoslavia. Irena Haiduk claims to have rescued the production of these shoes from the past and given it a new life in the present. It is not a commercial activity: the price was adapted to the visitor’s purchasing power, calculated based on age and country of residence. Opposing the consumerist desire of the capitalist system, the product could be acquired only after signing a contract in which the buyer undertook to use the shoes during working hours for one year.



**Figure 4:** Irena Haiduk, *Spinal Discipline* (2016– ), a walking performance involving up to thirteen members of the Army of Beautiful Women in full Yugoform. Produced for Yugoexport

At the end of the space, a door opened into a dark room. Sitting in hammocks, visitors listened to a dialogue between two female voices about art, its value, the market, and art’s political function. Topics such as art and

action, revolution, art and value, economy, capitalism, etc. appeared. The dialogue was a transcript of the conversation Irena Haiduk had held with her compatriot Srda Popovic, a political activist who during the Balkan War co-founded the student group OTPOR!, which helped overthrow Milosevic.

Completing the installation were other objects, such as a collection of *In Search of Lost Time* translated into Serbian, a work much sought after during the civil war. This incomplete version, however, had been completed by Haiduk with a volume of theoretical texts about the contemporary era.

The project included a weekly performance by between five and thirteen women of different ethnic backgrounds who wore the complete Yugoexport uniform, consisting of the shoes and a sober, long plain dress. The women walked from Friedrichsplatz to the Neue Neue Gallerie, with solemnity and discipline, balancing a book on their heads. With this performance, called “The Army of Beautiful Women”, Haiduk hinted at the Via Militaris, a military and commercial route dating from 22 bC that started in Constantinople and passed through Thrace, Dacia and Macedonia before arriving at Singidunum, present-day Belgrade. Through this performance, Haiduk started to recover, by and for women, the route of a time without nations.

The Society of Friends of Halit brings together various groups of individuals and associations engaged in fighting racism and exposing the social relations that have prevented murders from being solved. Today it is part of a popular movement that began in 2006 after the killing of a German citizen, born of Turkish immigrant parents, Halit Yozgat. Halit was killed in April 2006 in an Internet café he and his family had recently opened. This murder, considered the ninth in a chain of racist killings, was the last straw,

triggering demonstrations under the slogan “Kein 10. Opfer” to warn of possible new attacks and alert police authorities to the racist motives behind that and previous murders.



**Figure 5:** The Society of Friends of Halit. Images of the first demonstration

The investigations promoted by the Society of Friends of Halit have unveiled how a system of institutions, politicians, media and part of civil society perpetuate a long racist history that is deeply rooted in Germany. In this context, the official investigations of the killings were plagued by errors and the cases remained unresolved.

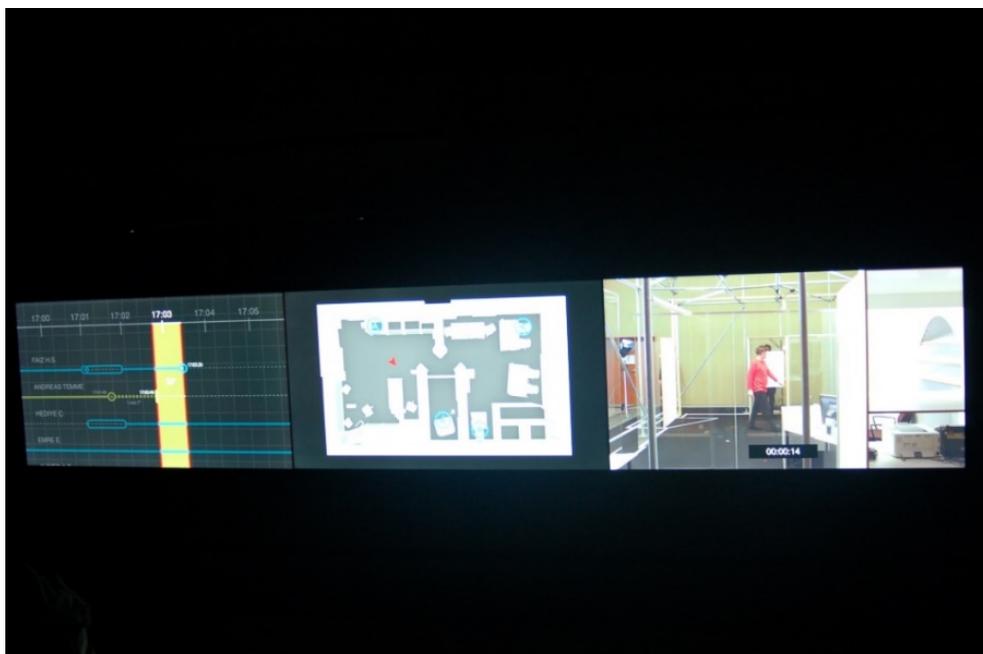
The group of associations and individuals gathered in meetings organised by documenta, gave workshops and exhibited the results of various inquiries. The exhibition at the Neue Neue Gallerie in Kassel focused on the research conducted by Forensic Architecture into the truth of

the evidence given by Hessian secret service agent Andreas Temme, who had been at the Internet café just before the murder. A review of all the witness testimonies and a virtual and physical re-enactment of the event (curated by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin) led to a questioning of Temme's statements.

This and other investigations were presented by Forensic Architecture in a meeting at the Parliament of Bodies (the documenta's central meeting place), posing many questions about the role and efficiency of the Hessen secret services in identifying the murderers.<sup>12</sup> The results do not provide an answer but raise questions by showing possible incoherences in the official version and by reconstructing various scenarios the original police reports deemed impossible (anachronic).

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<sup>12</sup> Detailed information on the research can be found on the Forensic Architecture website [https://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/77sqm\\_926min/#toggle-id-2](https://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/77sqm_926min/#toggle-id-2) (last view August 2018). The affair is described by Robert Mackey and Robert Trafford in a long article in *The Intercept*, "A German Intelligence Agent Was at the Scene of a Neo-Nazi Murder. He Can't Explain Why", October 18, 2017; <https://theintercept.com/2017/10/18/germany-neo-nazi-murder-trial-forensic-architecture/> (last view, August 2018).



**Figure 6:** The Society of Friends of Halit. Display set up by Forensic Architecture

The associations also gathered at the “34 Exercises of Freedom” in Athens in April and joined forces with local groups to encourage investigations of possible fascist attacks in Greece. Committed to seeking the involvement of other audiences, in Kassel the associations offered a workshop on sound technologies. In this workshop, the artist and activist Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt showed how racist codes and stereotypes are communicated through sound media and music and proposed various strategies for disrupting racist narratives.

Overall, the results of The Society of Friends of Halit’s inquiries do not so much offer a new version of the past as put the dominant ideology that has constructed certain narratives of the past into question by bringing different scenarios into the discussion. Thus, the aesthetic display has a deep

political function, in the sense of bringing ideological structures to light.

## **8. Conclusion**

Irena Haiduk's project and The Society of Friends of Halit have differences and points in common. Both are directed towards the past, aiming not only to question a certain narration of events (chronological history) but more particularly to refigure the historical conditions in a specific context and, in so doing, to give new meanings to its underlying ideology. Irena Haiduk, in a heterochronically structured project, vindicates certain elements of Yugoslavia's socialist past, mixing them with references to ancient history and feminist demands. The Society of Friends of Halit does not so much produce a different version of events and their authors as denounce the power relations that determined the construction of the official narrative.

Both projects, especially that of Haiduk, also include a participatory dimension aimed at influencing an immediate present. Indeed, *Seductive Exacting Realism* invites the public to participate in an economic and cultural production project. On Halit's behalf, The Society of Friends of Halit organised workshops with visitors on technology and sound and, thanks to the research into Halit's murder, has managed to get the case reopened in the courts of Schleswig-Holstein.

We can also say that through their appropriation of the past and the creation of intervention mechanisms in the present, both projects acquire a historical-performative dimension that transforms the horizon of the future. By generating anachronisms and intervening in the present, both projects preclude the function of historiography as "learning the lesson of the past",

as if the relationship of the past with the future were that of a causal chain. By shaking up the relationship between past and future, they promote agency towards the future. Haiduk's proposal, which works more like a conglomerate of projects united by a homogeneous aesthetic, leaves the public freer to subjectively appropriate the different aspects and apply them to other contexts. In contrast, The Society of Friends of Halit, with its cold, objective, scientifically modelled display, strongly urges the visitor to think afresh about racism and fascism in the Old Continent.

In conclusion, according to curator Nina Möntmann, "this specific mode of dealing with history, which marks a rupture with the concept of chronology and genealogy in favour of an updating of historical fragments, is specific for the current critical understanding of contemporaneity and the actualization of its potentials in the age of globalisation" (Möntmann, 2017, p. 129). Through the combination of objective records, fictional elements and subjective references, different temporalities and planes of reality come into play in the construction, not of a representation, but of a situation for the visitor, who is able to become a participant. The participant can then be empowered by the energy recovered from the past to participate in the construction of a new present and new outcomes. It is not only about drawing attention to ideological structures but also about participating, as Rancière puts it, in a potential new "distribution of the sensible". Nevertheless, the pressure of a paradox can be felt: in the projects presented here, as in our own political consciousness, we wonder whether it is possible to be immediately historical, that is, to influence our own time with a force that can really change the sense of our age.

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## *Literary Realism and the Significance of Life*

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ABSTRACT. Since the advent of modernity, and particularly Kant, the interpretation of art as mimetic has been mostly rejected such that the prevailing position in contemporary aesthetics is that the artwork should be understood as its own autonomous world, unrelated to “real life,” at least in any significant cognitive sense. In fact, skeptics charge that the search in literature for cognitive value – i.e., what might be considered truth or knowledge of life – is a category mistake. They argue such an inquiry requires an attitudinal shift *toward* the actual world and so *away* from the world of the artwork, which has its own intrinsic values, ones determined not mimetically according to pre-established laws of reality, but rather flexibly and thematically according to its own autonomous, internal values. In contrast, the position put forth here argues for a strong cognitive connection between literature and life by centering upon the faculty of imagination in its capacity to be both an inventive power, demonstrated through literary creation, and a truth-disclosing power, insofar as it reveals something “essential” concerning the human condition or, as it will be called, the *human situation*. It is argued that frequently debates in aesthetic theory draw too sharp a line between art as mimesis (imitation) and art as production (invention). Defenders of this sharp line typically approach the concept of mimesis with an overly Platonic prejudice that distorts an adequate understanding of the notion. An Aristotelian reconstruction or retrieval of mimesis will be presented, specifically as it relates to imagination (*phantasia*) and understanding (*sunesis*). These concepts will be developed in

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dialogue with recent thinkers, particularly Martha Nussbaum and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

## 1. Introduction

The problem of the relation between literature and life has been around since Plato, who rid his ideal republic of poetry since what the poets provide, ontologically, is merely an imitation of an imitation, that is, a pictorial image twice removed from reality. Since the modern period, and particularly Kant, the interpretation of art as mimetic has been mostly rejected such that the prevailing position in contemporary aesthetics is that the artwork should be understood as its own autonomous world, unrelated to “real life,” at least in any significant cognitive sense. In fact, skeptics charge that the search in literature for cognitive value – i.e., what might be considered truth or knowledge of life – is a category mistake. They argue such an inquiry requires an attitudinal shift *toward* the actual world and so *away* from the world of the artwork, which has its own intrinsic values, ones determined not mimetically according to pre-established laws of reality, but rather flexibly and thematically according to its own autonomous, internal values.

Recently, however, attempts have been made to reconceive the concept of mimesis as it relates to art. Frequently these reinterpretations, however, do not conceive of mimesis in the strong cognitive sense in terms of some form of truth or knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there have also been attempts to rethink the faculty of imagination and its connection to life,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Walton 1990 and Lamarque and Olsen 1994.

particularly in regard to its ethical or practical import. These interpretations likewise vary concerning the degree of strength or adequacy of the cognitive impact of imaginative literature.<sup>3</sup> But despite the prevailing theoretical position in contemporary aesthetics, which views art as primarily productive and so free from the laws of life, there persists the humanist intuition that literature, and specifically literary realism, remains very much related to life. For many (if not most) readers continue, like David Copperfield, to “read for life.”<sup>4</sup> Or, as John Gibson puts it, “literature presents the reader with an intimate and intellectually significant engagement with social and cultural reality.”<sup>5</sup> The question remains, though, how precisely to establish the connection between literature and life, that is, how to explain the cognitive link between the imaginative realm as an invented or created world and the ethically relevant real world of flesh and blood human beings.

Although many significant philosophical problems arise concerning the nature of literature and fiction, for my purposes here I will not examine in any detail such questions as what constitutes such concepts as “literature” or “fiction.” Rather, I will assume a more or less common understanding of these terms as they relate to serious works of the imagination, works which typically refer to novels, short stories, dramas, and some poetry (such as epic poetry). Likewise, I will not worry over which texts to include in this category of “serious” but will assume that at least some fictional works are recognizable as such (e.g., *Hamlet*, *Middlemarch*, *A Doll’s House*, *Crime*

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<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum 1990, pp. 54-105, Gaut 2009, pp. 115-126, Currie 2009, pp. 209-221, and Currie 1998, pp. 161-181.

<sup>4</sup> Nussbaum 1990, pp. 230-244.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson 2007, p. 2.

*and Punishment*, etc.).

As mentioned above, the problem of the cognitive relation between literature and life is an old one that goes back as far as Plato: how can an imaginative literary text, particularly insofar as it is admittedly *fictional*, manifest some form of truth or knowledge regarding life, reality, the world, or ourselves? Of course, almost everyone admits fictional works can and often do contain truthful propositions, be they historical, geographical, scientific, philosophical and so forth. However, the much more difficult problem is to explain in what sense a text *insofar as it is fictional* can provide a kind of truth or knowledge. Aristotle, in his response to Plato's critique that poetry is a deviation (twice removed) from reality and truth,<sup>6</sup> does not downplay the role of the creative imagination in the poetic work. Rather Aristotle considers the fictional status of poetic drama as precisely that principle which provides universality such that fictional works are elevated above historical or merely factual works, texts that are less serious because they offer a lower or more contingent form of truth.<sup>7</sup> But if this is the case, the burden is placed upon the cognitivist to explain just how a literary work can convey truth and knowledge *through* – rather than *despite* – its fictional status. Moreover, in doing so, the cognitivist must defend why the capacity to impart truth is not some “add-on” but rather should be considered part of a literary text's overall aesthetic or literary value. Finally, the problem is pushed further still by what John Gibson calls the textual constraint.<sup>8</sup> For it is not sufficient for cognitivists to claim that literary

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<sup>6</sup> Plato 1941, *Republic*, Bk. X.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle 1941, *Poetics*, Ch. 9.

<sup>8</sup>See Gibson 2007, pp. 5-9.

fiction leads to knowledge insofar as the reader applies aspects derived from fiction to the real world. For skeptics frequently concede as much. Rather the stronger cognitivist position must show how the text itself does the work in revealing or demonstrating to the reader whatever cognitive significance (i.e., truth or knowledge) is contained therein.

The position put forth here argues for the strong cognitive connection between literature and life by centering upon the faculty of imagination in its capacity to be both an inventive power, demonstrated through literary creation, and a truth-disclosing power, insofar as it reveals something “essential” concerning the human condition or, as I call it, the *human situation*. Frequently debates in aesthetic theory draw too sharp a line between art as mimesis (imitation) and art as production (invention). Defenders of this sharp line typically approach the concept of mimesis with an overly Platonic prejudice that distorts an adequate understanding of the notion. In contrast, an Aristotelian reconstruction or retrieval of mimesis will be presented, specifically as it relates to imagination (*phantasia*) and understanding (*sunesis*). These Aristotelian concepts will be developed in dialogue with recent thinkers, particularly Martha Nussbaum and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

## **2. Background Aristotelian Principles**

To begin let me identify, without defending here, some of the Aristotelian principles that form the scaffolding of my approach. First, like many literary cognitivists, I hold that the cognitive value of fictional realism is a kind of ethical knowledge. It is important to note, however, that Aristotle and

indeed the classical tradition consider the ethical sphere to be much broader than the modern, narrower construal of morality, since for the Ancients the essential ethical question is “how we are to live.”<sup>9</sup> This more holistic and eudaimonistic approach to ethics does not isolate individual actions and analyze their legitimacy merely according to abstract principles or a rigid methodology. Rather, the Aristotelian approach to ethics recognizes that particular actions, though measured to some extent by universal principles, cannot be entirely divorced from the agents (i.e., characters) as well as from the particular aspects of the concrete situation. In fact, this ethical knowledge can be conceived as a *situational knowledge*, one that is distinct from a scientific or philosophical knowledge of abstract natures, principles or theorems.

Secondly, given the claim that ethical knowledge is a kind of situational knowledge, the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical knowledge (*epistēmē*) and practical knowledge (*phronēsis*) is significant. For the latter kind of knowledge involves concrete perception of particulars (*aisthēsis*) as a constituent part of its cognition. Aristotle makes the distinction in response to the problem of *akrasia* and the insufficiency of the overly rationalistic Platonic tradition which holds that knowledge of the universal is sufficient for the cultivation of practical wisdom. In opposition to this, Aristotle recognizes that while the theoretician may well hold adequate propositional knowledge of ethical concepts and principles, she all too frequently fails to act ethically in concrete situations. The question is: why? Aristotle acknowledges that at times this failure can be attributed either to an ignorance of the universal or to a weakness of will that

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<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum 1990, pp. 3-52.

succumbs to the temptation of powerful appetites or passions that rule over reason, which, in turn, leads to the formation of a corrupt character. In both cases, however, the ethical failure can be attributed, in some respect, to theoretical reason: either ignorance of the universal or a failure to instantiate the theoretical principle in the concrete situation. Significantly, in the modern context, both deontologists and utilitarians would agree, it seems, to this general way of construing ethical failure. Virtue ethicists, however, hold that such failures are frequently caused by another kind of epistemic oversight or cognitive deficiency. This cognitive deficiency is due not to ignorance of abstract concepts and universal principles or to the incapacity to articulate the concepts and principles in logical, propositional form; nor is the deficiency necessarily due to one ignoring or refusing the dictates or maxims of rational analysis. Rather, there exists another possibility for the cognitive deficiency, namely, an incapacity to understand or “read” the particulars presented in the specific situation in an adequate manner. Hence, in this case, the ethical oversight or failure is attributable not to abstract reason but to concrete perception.

Thirdly, the distinction between the two modes of reasonings (theoretical and practical) is also determined by the distinct objects or ends toward which reason is directed. The object of theoretical reason is a general knowledge for its own sake (the conclusion of the theoretical syllogism). The object of practical reason is a concrete decision and in turn a specific action (the conclusion of the practical syllogism). Given this distinction, it follows that the difference in objects is what determines the distinct intentional sphere toward which reason is primarily directed in its cognitive activity. Therefore, we can say the primary sphere or focus of theoretical

reason is the universal. Particulars are typically involved in theoretical reasoning but in service to the universal (as instantiations or empirical evidence, for example). Likewise, universals (as major premises) are involved in practical reason but in service to the particular. So, in practical reasoning, there is a priority of the particular (over the universal).<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is not knowledge *of* the universal that is ultimately sought for in the practical sphere but rather the application of the universal *to* the specific situation. This requires adequate perception of particulars in the concrete situation.

Fourthly, this adequate perception of particulars within the intentional mode of the practical attitude involves imagination and the emotions in a way the theoretical attitude does not. However, for Aristotle, the faculty of imagination (*phantasia*) is not primarily the capacity to create new images, as in modern aesthetic theory; rather *phantasia* is, more originally, the power to perceive and in turn select the relevant and often subtle aspects of concrete particulars (*aísthēsis*). The two capacities are related of course, but here the realist dimension of Aristotle's philosophical psychology comes to the fore. As Nussbaum states, "Aristotle's emphasis is upon [imagination's] selective and discriminatory character rather than upon its capability for free fantasy. Its job is more to focus on reality than to create unreality."<sup>11</sup> A *phronisimos* or practically wise person, therefore, must possess an acute and vivid imagination insofar as she adequately perceives the subtle nuances of a complex situation that enables her to read the situation appropriately. In other words, it is not merely the ability to interpret the signs appropriately,

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<sup>10</sup> Nussbaum 1990, pp. 66-75.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 75.

though this is obviously required. One must first *see* the signs. Such seeing requires an alert sensitivity to particulars both in themselves and in relation to one another. Moreover, the ability to envision or imagine possibilities for the future cannot be divorced from an adequate grasp or perception of particulars, both present and past.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the perception of particulars as concrete cognition involves emotions in a way not required by theoretical cognition. For, in practical reasoning, emotional responsiveness is not detached from, let alone a detriment to, rational cognition. Rather emotional responsiveness is intimately and necessarily connected to ethical discernment. As Nussbaum puts it,

Good perception is a full recognition or acknowledgement of the nature of the practical situation; the whole personality sees it for what it is. The agent who discerns intellectually that a friend is in need or that a loved one has died, but who fails to respond to these facts with appropriate sympathy or grief, clearly lacks a part of Aristotelian virtue. It seems right to say, in addition, that a part of discernment or perception is lacking. This person doesn't really, or doesn't fully, see what has happened, doesn't recognize it in a full-blooded way or take it in. We want to say that she is merely saying the words. "He needs my help," or "she is dead," but really doesn't yet fully know it, because the emotional part of cognition is lacking.<sup>13</sup>

As Nussbaum points out, without the proper emotional response, one cannot

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<sup>12</sup> Currie 2009, pp. 209-221.

<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum 1990, 79.

be said to truly know what has happened. That is, one does not adequately grasp or understand the situation. For the appropriate emotional response to a given concrete situation is both a sign *of* understanding as well as a means *to* understanding. The appropriate emotional response to a loved one's death is not only a sign that the bereaved truly knows the loved one has died; the emotion is also that which reveals to the bereaved the truth that the loved one has died. Therefore, the imaginative, emotional, and cognitive elements are distinct, constituent features intimately integrated within the unified act of understanding (the situation).

### **3. Understanding (*Sunesis*)**

Although the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical knowledge (*epistēmē*) and practical knowledge (*phronēsis*) is well known, what has been less discussed is Aristotle's account of understanding (*sunesis*). In the previous section, we noted some important distinctions between practical reason and theoretical reason. What is interesting about the intellectual virtue of understanding is that Aristotle characterizes it as a kind of hybrid virtue that involves aspects of theoretical reason and practical reason, while remaining distinct from both kinds of reasoning. First, Aristotle points out that understanding (like practical knowledge) is directed toward the concrete realm of particulars. For the intentional sphere of reason in its cognitive activity is contextual or situational rather than general or universal. In Book VI, Chapter 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states, "For understanding (*sunesis*) is neither about things that are always and are unchangeable, nor about any and every one of the things that come into

being, but about things which may become subjects of questioning and deliberation. Hence, it is about the same objects as practical wisdom” (1143a5-8).<sup>14</sup> Earlier in Bk. VI, Aristotle defines practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) as the ability “to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself” and “what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general” (1140a26-28). The intentional sphere, then, that both practical knowledge (*phronêsis*) and understanding (*sunesis*) share is the concern for the good life or “how a human being should live.”<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the object or end of understanding is not decision and concrete action. Rather, its end (like theoretical reason) is *learning*. Hence, its object is a kind of knowledge for its own sake. As Aristotle puts it, “(B)ut understanding and practical wisdom are not the same. For practical wisdom issues commands, since its end is what ought to be done or not to be done; but understanding only judges” (1143a8-10). There is a difference, then, between: (a) the practical knowledge (*phronêsis*) of what should be done in response to a particular situation and (b) an understanding (*sunesis*) of the situation itself. Aristotle goes on to say,

Now understanding is neither the having nor the acquiring of practical wisdom; but as learning is called understanding when it means the exercise of the faculty of knowledge, so “understanding” is applicable to the exercise of the faculty of opinion for the purpose of judging of what someone else says about matters with which practical wisdom is concerned – and of judging soundly; for “well” and “soundly” are the

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle 1941.

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum 1990, p. 25.

same thing. And to be of “good understanding,” viz. from the application of the word to the grasping of scientific truth; for we often call such grasping understanding (1143a11-19).

A few points can be made in light of this passage. First, in judging about “matters with which practical wisdom is concerned,” understanding exercises the faculty of opinion (*doxa*) because the truths of the ethical domain (concerning how human beings should live) cannot be demonstrated with the logical rigor of other modes of inquiry (such as mathematics, physics, metaphysics). At the same time, Aristotle is not a relativist or subjectivist in that one can judge soundly such that good understanding is analogous to the grasping of scientific truth. We can say, therefore, what one understands is the truth(s) of the situation. Understanding the truth(s) of a situation means grasping all the nuances of the particulars and in turn measuring their significance in relation to other particulars and against the backdrop of universal principles and causes. Moreover, an acute imagination is a necessary constituent of understanding insofar as one must perceive (*aisthēsis*) the salient, subtle and significant aspects of the particulars of the situation. Also, like practical reason, understanding involves emotional responsiveness (e.g., sympathy) in a way that theoretical reason does not. Aristotle explains that the person of understanding is one who is sympathetic in her judgments. “This is shown by the fact that we say the equitable (person) is above all others a (person) of sympathetic judgment, and identify equity with sympathetic judgment about certain facts. And sympathetic judgment is judgment which discriminates what is equitable and does so correctly; and correct judgment is that which judges

what is true” (1143a22-24). As with practical knowledge, the correct judgment of a situation requires emotional openness and responsiveness without which one cannot be said to understand the situation and so grasp the contextual truth(s) contained therein.

Furthermore, understanding the truth(s) of a situation is ethical in the broad Aristotelian sense in that it holds practical value in learning how human beings should – or should not – live. The claim for such truths does imply a black and white moralism but rather suggests a continuum upon which slide appropriate and inappropriate actions, behaviors, responses, character formations, relationships, etc. In fact, such truths should be judged qualitatively according to standards of better and worse rather than right and wrong, as when we say X is a good action, person, relationship, rather than a right action, person, relationship, etc. Of course, there will be gray areas that require qualitative analysis and interpretation, but there are also lines that can be drawn and defended. Here we might recall Aristotle’s analogy of how ethical discernment and in turn action aim at the bull’s eye (doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way), which rarely, if ever, is achieved with perfect success. Nonetheless, a successful action, response, character or even overall life can be judged not by whether or not the arrow strikes the bull’s eye but by whether the arrow hits the target or misses it entirely.

Finally, for Aristotle, modeling and imitation are necessary means to ethical knowledge in terms of instruction and learning. For what matters ethically is not merely *what* one does (the action) or even *why* one does it (the principle, rule, maxim, or motive) but also *how* one does it. The how is best learned through models and examples that illustrate and embody the

ways in which appropriate (or inappropriate) actions are performed, good characters and relationships are built (or destroyed), and overall successful lives are achieved (or not).

As concrete cognition that involves imagination, emotion, and reason, then, understanding (*sunesis*) can be considered an experiential knowledge or learning that one acquires through adequate perception and in turn judgment of human situations, one in which the truth (or more typically *truths*) of a situation is not easily articulated in generalized, propositional form. The reason is that often a hasty generalization too swiftly plucks a universal proposition from the contextual particulars thus reducing the supposed “truth” to a rather trivial or banal form. And yet, those who defend this kind of particularism seem to me to exaggerate too far in the other direction. For if we can learn from experience – and by “experience” I mean the concrete lived experience in which we sensitively, imaginatively, emotionally, and cognitively undergo or suffer a particular situation – then it seems there must be something within the experience that is sufficiently generalizable such that the experience (a) modifies our general views and (b) enables us to recognize something similar in other contexts to which we adjust our actions and behaviors accordingly. Such recognition, I suggest, involves a subtle attitudinal or modal shift in the perceiver’s intentional relation to the situation. And here, a few modal distinctions might be made. Insofar as one perceives, examines, and analyzes a concrete situation primarily in terms of its particularity, one remains within a factual or historical modality; insofar as one analyzes the situation, or any of its aspects, as an instance or example of a generalized essence, formula, law, principle, etc. (be it scientific, psychological, philosophical and so forth),

one relates intentionally to the situation in a theoretical modality; insofar as one examines and engages the situation in order to respond or act upon it in some manner, one relates to it in a practical modality. But there is, I suggest, at least one other significant intentional mode in which to relate to the concrete situation, one that has, as it were, cognitive value. It is to identify or recognize the salient and significant features of the situation that render it as specific *type* or *kind* of situation (or action, feeling, character, etc.). For if in understanding a concrete situation we learn something regarding how human beings should – or should not – live, it means the particulars are not so particular they do not represent something beyond themselves as mere particulars. Rather they signify a *kind* of universality insofar as they offer insight into the broad ethical question of how human beings should or perhaps might live. Hence, in understanding, what we learn are situational or contextual truths. Such truths have a higher level of generality than factual or historical events considered strictly as factual, and yet a lower level of universality than scientific laws, logical principles, or mathematical theorems. For understanding of a situational truth evaluates particulars not as concrete factual entities (which make them unique) nor as entities subsumed under a universal category (as nature, essence). Rather it measures the value and significance of the particulars in relation to other particulars, *given the specific kind of situation*. For although the situation is complex and particular, it is not irreducibly complex or irreducibly particular. Rather, there are subtle yet recognizable patterns woven into the particulars. Hence, the truth that emerges relies upon an adequate perception of those relevant features of the situation, given the contextual and relational aspects. Hence, the intentional object of understanding is knowledge of

types or kinds – that is, knowledge of certain *types* of situation, *types* of character, *types* of action, behavior, responses, relationships, even overall lives.

If my account of situational or contextual truth holds, two related aspects emerge. One: narrative or dramatic performance (rather than propositional argument) is the best way to present, model, or *demonstrate* situational truths of various types or kinds. Two: fictional performance is better equipped than factual performance to disclose truths concerning these situational types or kinds. It is in this respect that we can recall Aristotle's famous statement regarding poetry as fictional drama:

(T)he poet's task is to speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which could occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity. . . It is for this reason that poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. A 'universal' comprises the *kind* of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain *kind* of character – something which poetry aims at *despite* its addition of particular names (1451a36-1451b10).<sup>16</sup>

Here we can see that Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, considers the ontological status of poetry as fictional, as opposed to factual, to be a boon rather than a defect to the disclosure of the truths of types or kinds (of actions, situations, characters, lives). For there is a fictional "logic" that unfolds according to probability or necessity. Such probability or necessity is not measured

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<sup>16</sup> Emphases mine.

according to scientific (physical, behavioristic) laws of probability or mathematical necessity; rather it is *ethical* probability or necessity concerning how human beings live. Ethics, as Aristotle emphasizes, is all about characters, actions and feelings: that is, the way individuals act (behave, speak) and react (feel, emotionally respond) in accordance with their characters and the particulars of the specific situation.

### **3.1 Imitation (*Mimesis*)**

The forgoing analysis leads us to the concept of mimesis. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle identifies the origin of poetry as mimesis to two sources: namely, (1) the *delight* we find in imitation, and (2) what we *learn* from imitation (1148b4-15). Horace, of course, echoes Aristotle in his claim that the aims of literature are to please and to instruct. The aesthetic pleasure we receive from literature no one disputes. To claim we learn from literature, however, is to connect it to real life and so give literature its cognitive value. I argue that contemporary critics of the mimetic theory misunderstand Aristotle's notion of mimesis as it applies to fictional realism in two fundamental ways. The first pertains to the intentional *object* of imitation; the second to the intentional *mode* of imitation as fictional cognition.

First, one reason that mimesis has been much maligned is that the object of imitation or fictional representation is too frequently confused with the object of either: (a) factual/historical knowledge or (b) theoretical/scientific knowledge - both of which are the targets in Plato's critique. But what is represented in fictional realism is not what is empirically actual (a concrete particular), nor is it a mere instantiation or

exemplification of an already determined principle or proposition (an abstract universal). Rather, what is imitated are the *kinds* of things that human beings are capable of doing in certain *kinds* of situation, particularly ones enacted by certain *kinds* of character and in particular *kinds* of culture or society.

Secondly, in terms of the mode of fictional cognition, we must not think of imitation in the facile sense of verisimilitude of a copy to its original as if what is presented is a duplicate of the original. Here the analysis of mimesis offered by Hans-Georg Gadamer can be helpful. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that the cognitive significance of imitation lies in recognition (*anagnorisis*). What we recognize or discover within the artwork, however, is not something separate from the work itself, as though the represented content possesses a preestablished existence apart from the work. Gadamer states,

(W)e do not understand what recognition is in its profoundest nature if we only regard it as knowing something again that we know already – i.e., what is familiar is recognized again. The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something.<sup>17</sup>

This leaving out of what is contingent and variable to hone in on what is essential, Gadamer calls the “transformation into structure.” The

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<sup>17</sup> Gadamer 1991, p. 114.

transformation into structure is an “independent and superior mode of being.” So, “From this viewpoint ‘reality’ is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up (*Aughebung*) of this reality into its truth.”<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason, then, “In imitating, one has to leave out and to heighten. Because he is pointing to something, [the artist] has to exaggerate, whether he likes it or not.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the leaving out, heightening, and exaggerating are all part of the license of the poetic realist as she moves, in her creative activity, not away from reality, but closer to it. Or rather, as Gadamer suggests, the poetic realist raises up reality insofar as she structures, shapes, and forms reality precisely by selecting, in her representation, only that which is essential. Through this selection, we recognize that which we previously only dimly perceived.

What, then, is the “thing” or “reality” whose “essence” is being revealed or recognized through the mimetic work? In an essay entitled “Art and Imitation,” Gadamer provides an answer to this question. He states, “As the Aristotelian doctrine rightly seems to suggest, all art of whatever kind is a form of recognition that serves to deepen our knowledge of ourselves and thus our familiarity with the world as well.”<sup>20</sup> Here Gadamer over-generalizes in his claim that all art (and by implication all literature) provides cognitive significance in the strong sense of the term. As I will discuss below, I do not think this is the case. Nonetheless, Gadamer’s suggestion does shed light upon the problem of what precisely is known, i.e., the “real essence” or object that is imitated and in turn revealed through

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>20</sup> Gadamer 1993, p. 100.

some works of literary fiction. He says what is known is *ourselves* and *our world*. Gadamer's phenomenological analysis of play (*Spiel*) explains that "self" and "world" should not be understood as separate substantive entities, but rather as participants or players in the game (of life).<sup>21</sup> Hence, what we grasp through literary fiction is not a knowledge of ourselves or the world as formal entities (i.e., substances or quiddities). Rather, what is revealed is ourselves *in relation to* the world, which means in relation to other people, our society or culture, and even ourselves. It is, in other words, an understanding of our *situation*.

### 3.2 Objections and Responses

Given this Aristotelian account of understanding (*sunesis*) and imitation (*mimesis*), let me conclude by identifying and responding to some skeptical objections frequently directed against a literary cognitivism that argues for the strong epistemic connection between literature and life.<sup>22</sup>

First, there is what Carroll calls the "common denominator argument."<sup>23</sup> This argument claims that what gives literature its value must be that which distinguishes literature as literature. Thus, literature's value is determined by those essential features which constitute literature and so must be exhibited by all works considered to be literature. Clearly there are

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<sup>21</sup> Gadamer 1991, Part I, Section 2.1.

<sup>22</sup> For convenience sake, I borrow from Noel Carroll's helpful classification of the first four objections. See Carroll 2007, pp. 24-42.

<sup>23</sup> Lamarque and Olsen are perhaps the most well-known defenders of this kind of objection. See Lamarque and Olsen 1994.

some works of literature that are not truth-disclosing. So, even if some literary works convey a kind of truth, the characteristic of disclosing truth is not a feature exhibited in all texts that we consider to be literature. Hence, the capacity to reveal truth is not a specific *literary* value. Rather, literary value must be broadened to something more inclusive, such as requiring imaginative engagement in regard to a text's formal elements or to be about a subject of interest in regard to its content or theme (its mimetic aspect). Hence, even if one's grants to literature the capacity to disclose truth, it is not its truth-disclosing function that provides the text's distinct literary or more broadly aesthetic value. In fact, this difference is what distinguishes literature from those modes of inquiry (such as history, science, philosophy) in which the truth-bearing function is a – if not *the* – constituent feature by which we judge the value of the given text.

Clearly it is the case that not all literary works are truth disclosing. What is less clear, however, is why the disclosure of a specific kind of truth, namely literary fictional truth, is not a constituent feature of a certain species of literature. As Carroll argues, the constituent features of a race car are distinct from those of a tractor, even if there are a more limited set of features that make both species valuable as motor vehicles.<sup>24</sup> An excellent race care possesses specific values that are not included within the broader set of values of a good motor vehicle (for example, the capacity to hold a turn at high speed). But it is according to the more specific set of values that we judge the worth of a good race car. Similarly, only literary texts within the specific genre that Carroll categorizes as “realist” should be evaluated according to this truth-bearing criterion. For at least some (and perhaps

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<sup>24</sup> Carroll 2007, p. 31.

many, if not most) literary works seem to aim (and the best ones manifest) the kind of situational understanding described above. Moreover, because literary or fictional truth as understanding has a distinct form (as *sui generis*), the extent to which a literary text exhibits this quality (with a degree of clarity, power, depth of insight, etc.) should be considered part of its overall aesthetic or literary value. As readers, we come to expect a realist novel that presents a complex situation to “bring home the goods,” that is, to provide understanding of how and why this kind of event happened or this kind of character was formed, or this kind of relationship endured or fell apart, doing so in a way that neither simplifies nor trivializes the human situation. Moreover, highlighting a certain shade of ambiguity might be considered part of the content of our knowledge of ourselves and the human situation.<sup>25</sup> At any rate, such fictional truths are driven home only to the extent that we as readers are invested imaginatively and emotionally in the particulars as particulars, while, at the same time, recognizing the particulars as types that re-present possibilities for ourselves, thus revealing the truth(s) of our human situation.

Secondly, the banality argument claims that whenever the critic or general reader tries to articulate the truth revealed by a work of literary fiction, she inevitably is forced into stating the truth in a trivial or banal form. Stolnitz, for example, shows how the problem lies mainly in moving from the particular to the universal.<sup>26</sup> We praise Jane Austen not for her

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Dostoyevsky’s fictional demonstration in *Notes from Underground* that  $2 + 2$  does not equal 4 when it comes to human beings. Dostoyevsky 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Stolnitz 1992, pp. 191-200.

disclosing to us the obvious and generalized truth that “stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart”; rather we praise her work for rendering in fine and specific detail the characters of Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy, among others, as they move about and interact in the particularities of time and place.<sup>27</sup> To reduce the complexity and delicacy of Austen’s descriptive analysis of the particulars to a generalized truism does not deserve the title of knowledge or truth-revealing. In fact, such knowledge is what a reader must bring to the novel as a condition for recognizing the formal, thematic structure that unifies the text.

This objection, I argue, oscillates between a too polarized dialectic of particularity on the one hand (e.g., historical or factual truth) and universality on the other (e.g., scientific or theoretical truth). However, the fictional truths disclosed are situational or contextual, such that a bald proposition or summary assertion of the “truth” can’t help but sound reductive, trivial, and commonplace. Why? Because the constituent features that are involved in the distinct and specific literary cognition of fictional truths (namely, imaginative and emotional engagement) are precisely what is excluded in the abstract universal statement. It is, we might say, a distillation of the literary truth into a purely rational form. But when literary cognitivists (with a gesture toward Aristotle) speak of the “universal in the particular” or also “the concrete universal” what is intended, I think, is the disclosure of a truth of certain type or kind that can only be revealed through the narrative unfolding of the particular type of situation; it requires narrative or dramatic form that is revelatory of ourselves in relation to the world (others, society, etc.) under specific conditions. Although translation

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

of the narrative into abstract concepts and propositions is possible, it does not occur without loss of full meaning. For, as we have seen, understanding (*sunesis*) is holistic. Indeed it is a cognition, but one that is not divorced from imaginative and emotional involvement as constituent features.

Thirdly, the no-expertise argument, which derives from Plato's *Ion*, holds that in the various branches of knowledge we expect the master of that discipline to be an expert in her field of study. But the literary writer, although an expert in her mastery of language and imaginative creativity of form and style, does not have a distinct subject matter about which she has mastered such that she be considered an expert in that field. Our only expectation is that she provides us with a story of interest, one in which she captivates and engages our creative imaginations.

My Aristotelian account of understanding (*sunesis*) argues that in which the fictional realist is an expert is *understanding the human situation*. Such expertise reveals a knowledge of human relations that includes various social, cultural, ethical, psychological, and even philosophical or religious aspects as they play out within lived experience. This understanding, as discussed earlier, is holistic insofar as it involves sensitive and imaginative perception, emotional response, rational analysis, ethical evaluation, and occasionally, perhaps, metaphysical insight. For the fictional realist is not only an expert in rendering particulars with a fine specificity and liveliness of imagination. She is likewise adept at revealing how gestures, tones, comments, actions and reactions *signify*. That is, she shows how these sensible signs disclose meaning, indeed ones that are often unintended consciously by the characters who exhibit them. The expert in the perception of human situations imaginatively evokes sensations that come

alive, but also invests the sensible signs with symbolic significance such that they represent more than themselves as particulars; that is, they represent types which reveals ourselves and our situation under certain conditions. Moreover, in rendering types (of action, character, situation, etc.), the fictional text holds ethical import not by providing abstract rules or principles of how we *do* or *should* act, but by leading us to a sympathetic understanding of how we *might* act under such conditions. In this way, we learn from fictional situations that although only possible, rather than actual, are nonetheless *real possibilities of the human situation*, ones from which we can learn about ourselves and others – what we are capable of and perhaps, at times, how best to achieve or avoid certain types of actions, characters, or overall lives.

Fourthly, the no evidence argument, which is closely related to the no-expert argument, wonders how the one or two cases that a fictional writer explores (i.e., the particulars presented in the literary text) can be counted as evidence in support of a general conclusion about humankind or, as I have termed it, the human situation. Perhaps, at best, the literary text conveys the author's perspective, one that may very well be true, but nonetheless it does not qualify as knowledge, precisely because the perspective is not justified through sufficient evidence. This insufficiency of evidence is problematized further in fictional works, as opposed, say, to personal testimony, because what little evidence the fictional text provides (through exemplification) is intentionally non-factual. Hence, the concrete experiential "evidence" is admittedly distorted in order to imaginatively express, dramatize and unify the text's specific theme. But if this is the case, how can we distinguish

between genuine and putative knowledge?<sup>28</sup> On what basis do we qualify this author's perception as true knowledge and another author's as not? Cognitivists often employ concepts such as sincerity or authenticity, but critics deny these concepts are sufficiently strong to carry the weight required by the demands of knowledge.

Admittedly this is a difficult objection. In response, it can be pointed out that the assumption of this critique seems to be an interpretation of evidence based on the model of empirical science in which particulars are merely particulars such that research requires a certain amount of particulars to be amassed as quantified data in order to justify the general conclusion (thesis). In fictional realism, however, the universal is *in* the particular. That is, readers recognize and anticipate that fictional particulars represent more than themselves as individuals. Emotionally we are frequently moved by our imaginative identification with the particulars as particulars; at the same time, as spectators we analyze and evaluate the particulars and so cognitively learn about ourselves and the human situation insofar as the particulars are real possibilities for us. In this sense, fictional writing seems closely aligned with the descriptive analysis of phenomenology insofar as the power of persuasiveness often originates more from the fine rendering and in turn manifestation of our lived experience rather than from the amassing of quantifiable data or the logical rigor of analytic argumentation. Likewise, the affirmation we assent to in our reading of a literary text (the "yes, this is the way things are") is intuitive rather than analytic. Because the evidence provided in the rendering of particulars is experiential, the truth appeals intuitively to our lived experience. Frequently there are aspects of

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<sup>28</sup> Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 380.

our social situation or cultural experience that remain dark, vague and indistinct until they have been brought into the “light of day” by a clear and distinct expression. Those who demand that knowledge fulfill the requirements set by the methodology of empirical science might not be satisfied by this response, but it remains to be seen whether this is a flaw within a theory of literary cognitivism or the result of an epistemological prejudice, which itself is open to question.

Finally, there is what can be called the “closed world” or “pretense argument.” This too is a formidable argument, which derives back to Frege and more recently to Searle.<sup>29</sup> This argument makes semantic distinctions between sense and reference, serious assertions and pretended assertions, horizontal conventions and vertical conventions, and so forth. The upshot is that in analyzing fiction, we find that although the sense or meanings of the words and concepts expressed in fictional propositions are the same as in factual propositions (for we have no difficulty in discerning their meaning according to ordinary usage), there is no real object (persons, places, states of affair) out there in the world to which the fictional assertions refer. Ontologically they are “airy nothings,” imaginative objects that are merely self-referential within the fictional realm. Since these pretended assertions are intentionally non-deceptive, the normal commitments of illocutionary belief are suspended. When the actor on the stage screams “fire,” the audience understands the term according to its ordinary usage, but within the aesthetic stance no one calls the fire department or 911. For when a play-goer or reader of fiction enters the closed world of make-believe, she merely entertains or imagines the world of play or pretense *as if* it were real,

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<sup>29</sup> Searle 1975, pp 319-332.

all the while suspending true belief. Given this attitude of make-believe, the issue of truth or knowledge has no place. In fact, to try to locate some truth about the real world in the literary performance is a kind of category mistake in that the spectator or reader must divert her attention away from the imaginative world of the text to the real world. In fact, whenever readers find statements within the fictional text that are true, they make these judgments based on knowledge attained through external sources (history, science, ordinary experience, etc.) rather than through the fictional text itself.

I have argued that the species of literature that can be called realism does not aim at disclosing factual or historical truths. Nor does it aim at disclosing truths of human nature that are so universal or general they can be baldly stated in propositional form without loss of full meaning. Rather they disclose understanding of various types of situation – how certain characters act (behave, speak) and react (feel, emotionally respond) in particular circumstances and under certain conditions. Although fictional worlds are only possible, or better yet potential, not actual, they unfold dramatically according to the real laws of human interaction and relationship. Hence, they unfold dramatically or narratively within the logic of probability (or plausibility) and at times, perhaps, necessity. Considered in comparison with history, the fictional statements are merely pretense. Considered in terms of real kinds of human situations and interactions, they are real, and so serious and revelatory. The problem with Searle's analysis is that he equates serious with non-fictional and pretense with fictional. This leads him to the problematic conclusion that "serious (i.e., non-fictional) speech acts can be conveyed by fictional texts, even though the conveyed

speech act is not represented in the text. Almost any important work of fiction conveys a ‘message’ or ‘messages’ which are conveyed *by* the text but are not *in* the text.”<sup>30</sup>

To Searle’s question of how a message is conveyed by the text but is not in the text, my suggestion is that although readers do not interpret a fictional realist text literally (i.e., factually or historically), they do interpret it seriously, that is, as representative or imitative of the kinds of things human beings do in certain situations; hence, they are our real possibilities. In this way, we learn from fictional situations about life – *real life*, which is not reducible to empirical, factual or historical existence. To understand ourselves and our world (i.e., our situation) it is not sufficient to know what has been done or what necessarily will be done (e.g., according to historical fact or to natural scientific laws). To understand fully ourselves and others we must also know what could be done, that is, what might happen under specific conditions. In this way, we better understand our situation and ourselves concerning how we might live.

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***To Chuck or Not to Chuck? Túngara Frogs &  
Evolutionary Responses to the Puzzle of Natural  
Beauty***

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ABSTRACT. What explains the generation of such beautiful natural phenomena as the dances and songs of birds, the iridescent colours of the hummingbird, the twisted horns of the kudu antelope, and the convolutions of mollusk shells? What explains this seeming gratuitousness and variety of beautiful natural forms? This is the puzzle of natural beauty. Evolutionary responses to the puzzle include the Darwin-Prum sexual selection response and the Wallace-Zahavi honest signaling response. I intend neither to weigh the respective merits of the Darwin-Prum and Wallace-Zahavi responses nor to assess the fruitfulness of extending these evolutionary responses to include both the production and preference of beautiful ornaments in nature and the human practices of producing and preferring beautiful objects. Rather, my intention is to critically assess these evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty, with a particular focus on the courtship displays of the túngara frog.

What explains the generation of such beautiful natural phenomena as the dances and songs of birds, the iridescent colours of the hummingbird, the twisted horns of the kudu antelope, and the convolutions of mollusk shells? What explains this seeming gratuitousness and variety of beautiful natural

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forms? This is the puzzle of natural beauty. Evolutionary responses to the puzzle include the following:

(1) The Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response: sexual selection implies that the more attractive individuals are preferred by the opposite sex, there is an exercise of female choice in mating, and a taste for a particular trait by prospective mates may result in that trait being preserved or enhanced (Darwin, 1871).<sup>2</sup> In addition, it may be appropriate to speak of artworlds in nature, whose participants are involved in a process of aesthetic expression, evaluation, judgment, and change (Prum, 2013, Wilson, 2016);

(2) The Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* response: the beautiful or ornamented appearance is taken to be a sign of underlying health and vigour (Wallace, 1889).<sup>3</sup> In addition, it may be appropriate to speak of the beautiful or ornamented appearance as a costly display

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<sup>2</sup> Sexual selection, favouring beauty, may be distinguished from natural selection, which favours such traits as efficient metabolism, strength, cunning, speed, and other survival-related traits. Ronald Fisher (1930) has independently confirmed Darwin's supposition that a heritable trait with no positive correlation to male viability may become exaggerated and widespread.

<sup>3</sup> In certain crucial aspects, the Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* response is anti-Darwinian: Wallace held that sexual selection is implausible, since natural selection is too harsh and rigorous a process to allow for the frivolity of aesthetic preferences. It also stands opposed to the tradition according to which organisms cheat and manipulate when they communicate (Krebs & Dawkins, 1984).

that attracts in accordance with the handicap principle (Zahavi, 1975, Miller, 2000, Dutton, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

I intend neither to weigh the respective merits of the Darwin-Prum and Wallace-Zahavi responses nor to assess the fruitfulness of extending these evolutionary responses to include both the production and preference of beautiful ornaments in nature and the human practices of producing and preferring beautiful objects. Rather, my intention is to critically assess these evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty, with a particular focus on the courtship displays of the túngara frog.<sup>5</sup> Male túngara frogs gather at night in shallow ponds, call to attract females, and compete with other túngara males in these displays. The calls of the male túngara frog vary from the simple to the complex: a whine is necessary and sufficient to attract the female, but chucks make the call even more attractive. To make each mating call more complex, the túngara male may incorporate several chucks for each whine. Furthermore, as each male túngara calls from the water's surface, the body movement creates surface waves or ripples that provide a tactile component to the acoustic and visual components of the

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<sup>4</sup> The governing idea is that traits that are sexually selected for signal that the organism in question has surplus resources that it can squander. According to the handicap principle, beauty can even compensate for certain (genetic) weaknesses that hinder viability. In the human context, the handicap principle explains why artists past their prime reproductive years can still attract young mates.

<sup>5</sup> My account of the courtship displays of the túngara frog will be drawn largely from Halfwerk *et al* (2014). Formerly known as *Physalaemus pustulosus* and now known as *Engystomops pustulosus*, the túngara frog is an amphibian that is native to central America.

courting displays. At the same time, the frog-eating bat (*Trachops cirrhosus*), a predator of the male túngara, can eavesdrop on the acoustic component of the male túngara's call, and the male túngara might stop calling to reduce predation risk and in response to predator cues.

Defenders of the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response could maintain that the male túngara must produce a courtship display that is sufficiently attractive in order to secure a female mate. The more attractive mating calls (with up to seven chucks for each whine) are preferred by the opposite sex, there is an exercise of female choice in mating, and a taste for a particular trait by prospective mates may result in that trait being preserved or enhanced. There is the biotic artworld of which Prum (2013) speaks, whose participants are involved in a process of aesthetic expression, evaluation, judgment, and change. The intended audience is the túngara female, whose preference is for complex calls rather than simple ones. However, both predators (such as the frog-eating bat) and parasites (such as the blood-sucking fly) are eavesdroppers that likewise prefer complex calls to simple ones (Page & Bernal, 2006). In the final analysis, this simply demonstrates the classic conflict between sexual selection and natural selection and no recourse is required to either the *honest signaling* response or the handicap principle.

Conversely, defenders of the Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* response could adopt the following line of reasoning. Since chucks of a lower frequency are preferred, it will be pointed out that lower frequency mating calls are found in larger-sized male túngaras, which in turn correlate with higher fertility rates. Complex calls in which several chucks are incorporated are preferred by the females, not because they are acoustically

attractive, but rather because they are a sign of underlying health and vigour. Furthermore and in accordance with the handicap principle, the male túngaras are demonstrating their willingness to engage in costly displays. In the case of the male túngara, adding chucks could force males into competition with other túngara males and it is only a male that successfully avoids predation by frog-eating bats despite disclosing its location by its costly display that will attract the female (Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997). There is an analogy to be drawn here between the male túngara's courtship display and the peacock's tail, which is otherwise costly and wasteful from a natural selection point of view. The peacock's tail requires resources to build and maintain, attracts the attention of predators, and hinders the ability of the peacock to escape by restricting its flight. Whereas defenders of the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response will claim that the peacock's tail has been sexually selected for because peahens find it attractive, defenders of the Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* response will claim that as the peacock's tail is a wasteful burden, only males of a certain level of health and vigour can afford such a burden (Al-Shawaf & Lewis, 2017). For the male túngara as for the peacock, the handicap is an *honest signal* that the organism is of sufficient quality to tolerate the burden that the handicap places on it.

This is all well and good, except that it remains to be determined whether the courtship displays of the túngara frog count as an instance of natural beauty. I can agree that there is a variety and seeming gratuitousness of natural forms (mating calls without chucks and mating calls with chucks). However, I think that I am well within my means to disagree that these courtship displays are beautiful. After all, these courtship displays are elaborate and multisensory, involving a visual component (the male

túngaras with their conspicuously inflating and deflating vocal sacs), a tactile component (the ripples or water-borne vibrations that reach the female túngara), and an acoustic component (the mating call itself). Emily Brady (2010) provides as an example of natural ugliness the toad, whose face may be judged ugly relative to some norm of human facial beauty. The túngara frog (whose name in Spanish is '*sapito de pustulas*' means 'pustulated toadlet') certainly qualifies as an example of natural ugliness, on the grounds identified by Brady. Even if it is granted that the tactile and acoustic components of these courtship displays have some compensating positive aesthetic qualities, it is conceivable that the overall aesthetic value of these multisensory displays is negative. One might appeal to the familiarity effect: the more familiar we become with and the more time we spend with the túngara frog, the less ugly it will seem to us. However, I find neither the visual appearance of the túngara frog (with its conspicuous vocal sac) nor the acoustic component of the mating call attractive or agreeable, and no amount of familiarity will lead to any positive redemption on the aesthetic front. Indeed, I am in complete agreement with Budd (2000, p. 149) that a grossly malformed living thing (as I take the túngara frog to be) will remain grotesque, no matter how comprehensible science renders their malformation.

One might appeal to the order and harmony of the overall ecosystem of which the túngara frog is a part: while there might be nothing beautiful in particular about the courtship displays of the male túngara, there is a certain beauty that arises when we consider these displays as a key part of a successful, healthy functioning of an ecosystem. This argument is made by Holmes Rolston (1988, p. 241) in the context of a rotting elk carcass that is

teeming with maggots: the ugliness does not subtract from but rather enriches the whole and it is contained, overcome, and integrates into positive overall aesthetic value. There is natural beauty in the túngara frog's display in the context of the ecosystem and there is still therefore a puzzle of natural beauty to be explained. I would certainly rank my aesthetic distaste for túngara frogs as on a par with my aesthetic distaste for a rotting elk carcass that is teeming with maggots. Unlike Rolston, however, I do not believe that the appeal to the ecosystem settles the problem of local ugliness and repulsiveness in nature. After all, both predators (such as the frog-eating bat) and parasites (such as the blood-sucking fly) are a part of this ecosystem, foreshadowing the fact of suffering, death, and killing in the ecosystem of the túngara frog.<sup>6</sup>

One might hold that with increased familiarity and more attuned aesthetic sensibilities, an ideal observer would hold that these multisensory displays (with their visual, tactile, and acoustic components) yield an overall aesthetic value that is positive. This could logically be the case from the human perspective of the ideal observer, but we have no understanding of how, from the non-human perspective of the female túngara, the tactile component of the water ripples integrates with the acoustic component of the call and the visual component of the male túngara's inflating and deflating vocal sac. The first problem with evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty is that they seem to over-generate explanations. Notwithstanding that we are on phenomenologically thin ice with the female

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<sup>6</sup> I am as unsure as Budd (2000, p. 151) is about how the essence of the ecosystem is supposed to guarantee positive overall aesthetic value and natural beauty, despite the best intentions of Rolston.

túngara and lack complete information about how the multisensory components are integrated, evolutionary theorists are swift to draw their conclusions to the effect either that (i) the overall aesthetic value is positive or that (ii) the costly display attracts the female túngara in accordance with the handicap principle. These evolutionary responses can generate explanations for the dances and songs of birds, the iridescent colours of the hummingbird, the twisted horns of the kudu antelope, and the convolutions of mollusk shells (all of which I might hold to be instances of natural beauty). At the same time, these evolutionary responses can equally generate explanations for the courtship displays of the túngara frog (which I hold to be an instance of natural ugliness).

The second problem with these evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty is (paradoxically) that they seem to under-generate explanations. Recall that the body movement of the male túngara creates surface waves or ripples that provide a tactile component. If it is held in addition that the ripples provide a visual component in the multisensory display, I might differ in my final assessment of the overall aesthetic value of the male túngara's display. After all, I have a taste for ripples that are borne along a water-surface. Were these ripples to be formed independently by a gentle evening breeze playing over the shallow ponds, the morning after the nocturnal túngara displays, I would count the visual scene to be an instance of natural beauty. Evolutionary responses, however, cannot explain the beauty that we find in non-biological natural elements (viz. water-features) and in non-biological natural elements interacting with other non-biological natural elements (viz. wind, water-features), given their biological emphasis on sexual selection, mate choice, honest signaling, and

the handicap principle.

The third problem with these evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty is what I term the beauty-agreeableness gap. Certain traits and ornamented appearances, it is claimed, are preserved or enhanced because they are agreeable to prospective mates, whether as stimuli that trigger certain sensory biases (as in the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response) or as honest advertisements of underlying health and vigour (as in the Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* response). In the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response, agreeable traits are traits that have been singled out by the choosing sex, endowed with an aesthetic sense or faculty. In the more utilitarian Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* alternative, on the other hand, agreeable traits are traits that are useful to their bearer and advantageous to the general fitness of the trait-bearing organism.<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, who in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790, §58) identified the puzzle of natural beauty, defends the view that judgments of beauty are intersubjective and have both a social and a cultural aspect. Given the socio-cultural aspect of judgments of beauty, Kant is given to conclude that only human beings are capable of appreciating beauty. I agree with Kant that certain species-specific norms separate the appreciation and evaluation of beauty from the apprehension of mere agreeableness. The peacock's tail is agreeable to the peahen, whereas it is more than merely agreeable to us human beings who possess the concept of beauty. On behalf of the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* response, Wilson (2016) attempts to develop an account of sensory bias, according to which human nervous systems must have enough in common with the

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<sup>7</sup> Hoquet & Levandowsky (2015) have reasonable grounds therefore to conclude that the utilitarian Wallace-Zahavi approach resolves sexual selection into natural selection.

nervous systems of non-human animals, that certain formations (e.g. symmetrical and fractal structures) are both easy for nature to produce and easy for animals to develop a taste for. Given the shared physiological basis for our sensory biases, the origins of the human taste for beauty may be located in animals. Such an account, however, does not dispose of the beauty-agreeableness gap. Why are the peacock's tail and the male túngara's courtship displays agreeable to their prospective mates, whereas the former is adjudged beautiful and the latter ugly? Furthermore, if there is a socio-cultural component to beauty, then will not any evolutionary response to the puzzle of natural beauty be necessarily incomplete?

Given these problems with evolutionary responses to the puzzle of natural beauty, a number of issues remain to be properly addressed. In the first instance, one has to define the scope of natural beauty: are we talking about beauty in nature as a whole, the biosphere, the ecosystem, kinds of natural things, instances of natural things, or even natural events?<sup>8</sup> If non-biological natural elements have to be excluded from the scope of natural beauty (as I suspect that they must, given the biological thrust of these evolutionary responses), then the appropriate justification for this exclusion would have to be afforded.<sup>9</sup> In the second instance, one has to determine

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<sup>8</sup> The same question of scope is raised by Budd (2000) in the context of the positive aesthetics thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Ambitious attempts have been made by evolutionary theorists to extend the scope of natural beauty to non-biological natural elements. According to the savanna hypothesis, human beings have a generalized bias toward savanna-like environments (moderate to large open spaces, the presence of scattered trees, smooth ground surfaces, and grassy vegetation of uniform length), since they resemble the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (or

how natural beauty is framed: how do we determine the boundaries of natural things or events that are then subject to judgments and evaluations of beauty? Whereas works of art are discrete and physically bounded (think of the physical frame of a painting and the stipulated length of a musical piece in the concert program notes), what we select as our unit of evaluation in nature seems arbitrary (Zangwill, 2001).<sup>10</sup> In the third instance, one has to concede that not all things or events in nature, even when they are within the scope and the relevant frame of consideration, are beautiful. This amounts to a rejection of the positive aesthetics thesis, according to which all the natural world and its constituents are beautiful.<sup>11</sup>

As I have argued, the courtship display of the male túngara, while agreeable to prospective mates and perfectly explicable by the Darwin-Prum *sexual selection* or the Wallace-Zahavi *honest signaling* accounts, is in my estimation an instance of natural ugliness rather than natural beauty. This ugliness derives from the visual component of the conspicuously inflating and deflating vocal sac of the male túngara, which may be judged ugly relative to some norm of human beauty. Marcia Eaton (2005, p. 48) has elsewhere provided as an example of natural ugliness the pen shell, which is universally described in shell guidebooks as unattractive and assiduously

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EEA) (Orians & Heerwagen, 1992). For a critical assessment of the savanna hypothesis, see Joye & De Block (2011).

<sup>10</sup> This is known as the frame problem in philosophical aesthetics.

<sup>11</sup> *cf.* Carlson's (2000, p. 73) claim that the untouched natural environment has 'mainly positive aesthetic qualities; it is, for example, graceful, delicate, intense, unified, and orderly, rather than bland, dull, insipid, incoherent, and chaotic'. The strongest version of the positive aesthetics thesis has been defended by Hargrove (1989, p. 177), according to whom nature is beautiful and does not contain any negative aesthetic qualities.

avoided by shell collectors. How might the evolutionary theorist account for these instances of natural ugliness? All things considered, once the positive aesthetics thesis is dropped, we are given to acknowledge that what we encounter in nature are not straightforward instances of beauty but rather instances of aesthetic complexity. While many biotic kinds (flowers, the dances, songs, and feathering of birds) are undoubtedly beautiful, other biotic kinds such as the courtly displays of the túngara frog are aesthetically more complex. There is such a variety and a diversity that is exhibited by natural forms that it would be dangerous to reduce our aesthetic considerations of natural forms to the puzzle of natural beauty. If evolutionary theorists finally come to admit that it is aesthetic complexity in nature rather than natural beauty that they are after, then their account remains incomplete as it stands. As I doubt that the beauty-agreeableness gap can be closed without any recourse to a cultural explanation, I remain highly skeptical that evolutionary responses will be successful on their own.

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# *Epistemic Injustice and the Role of Narrative Fiction*

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I look at the role that narrative fiction – film, television and literature – can play in countering and mitigating testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice, as explicated by Miranda Fricker, occurs when a social agent attempts to tell a hearer something, but the hearer grants them a deflated level of credibility because of prejudice. It depends for its operation upon the social imagination and the shared concepts of social identity within it: what it is to be a man, woman, straight, black, gay, transgender, and so on. My central thesis is that narrative fiction has the potential to influence the social imagination for the better. The paper comprises two parts. In the first section I explore how narrative fiction can combat testimonial injustice, and propose that fiction can put pressure on prejudicial stereotypes in four distinct ways, thus contributing to a broadening of the social imagination. I then argue in the second section that fiction’s unique capacity to actively engage its audience and evoke empathy enables it to capitalize on advantages that more overt or confrontational approaches to resisting testimonial injustice cannot share in.

In her book *Epistemic Injustice*, Miranda Fricker explicates the notion of a distinctive kind of injustice done to a person in her role as a knower, and explores social power’s role in creating and perpetuating such epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). This paper focuses on the narrower concept of testimonial injustice, which occurs when a social agent attempts to tell a

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hearer something, but the hearer grants them a deflated level of credibility because of prejudice (2007, p.1).

I consider the role that narrative fiction – film, television and literature – can play in countering and mitigating epistemic injustice.<sup>2</sup> Of course, fictions can worsen epistemic injustice as well as alleviate it; but this paper comprises a constructive project regarding fiction’s positive, transformative potential. In particular, my interest is in fiction’s potential to influence the social imagination and the shared concepts of social identity within it: what it is to be a man, woman, straight, gay, black, white. Fricker uses scenarios from *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *The Talented Mr Ripley* to clarify her notions of epistemic injustice; I argue that aside from elucidating analysis of our epistemic practices, fiction can also provide epistemic correctives.

In §1 I explicate the notion of testimonial injustice, and propose that fiction can put pressure on prejudicial stereotypes and thus contribute to a broadening of the social imagination. §2 explores the unique features of narrative fiction in this capacity to resist epistemic injustice, and argues that in certain respects it capitalizes on advantages that other approaches cannot share in.

### **1.1. Fricker’s Account of Testimonial Injustice**

Fricker’s central case of *testimonial injustice* occurs when a speaker tells a hearer something, but they are not believed because prejudice distorts the

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<sup>2</sup> I have restricted myself to film, television and literature, but I have no doubt that other narrative fictions – music, paintings, theatre, video games – can serve this purpose also.

hearer's perception of the speaker: the speaker suffers a *credibility deficit* due to a persistent and systematic *negative identity prejudice* influencing the hearer (2007, p.28). A credibility deficit involves a speaker being afforded less credibility than they would have received absent the prejudice, and a negative identity prejudice is a prejudice against an individual on the basis of their membership of a certain social group. The prejudices are systematic in that they track subjects through multiple areas of their lives, and render them vulnerable to a variety of social injustices. And they are persistent since they will exert sway repeatedly, subjecting an agent to testimonial injustice on numerous occasions. Fricker's example of testimonial injustice is Tom Robinson's trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, in which a black man is convicted for assaulting a white woman. Despite plentiful evidence suggesting Robinson's innocence, the white jurors in this novel are affected by racial prejudices and distrust his word. This case clearly involves negative identity prejudice that is systematic and persistent, since being black in 1930s Alabama involved experiencing injustice along multiple axes throughout one's life.

Prejudice in testimonial injustice operates through a mechanism of *negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes*, and such a stereotype is defined as "[a] widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment" (Fricker 2007, p.35). So for Tom Robinson, stereotypes about black people interfere with the jurors' credibility judgements, such that they cannot see Robinson as

anything other than a lying Negro.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, Fricker does not see stereotypes as operating on a conscious, doxastic level; they instead exist in the *social imagination*, and feed into our judgements without our express authorization or awareness. This is particularly clear in cases of implicit bias, where stereotypes influence an agent's judgement despite actively conflicting with her stated, firmly held beliefs (e.g. Saul 2013). The social imagination, then, should be regarded as a collective bundle of concepts, ideas and stereotypes that provide the background assumptions and paradigms within which epistemic interactions take place. This is not to say that it is uniform; the social imagination surely contains contradictory and incompatible stereotypes, but the point is that some stereotypes are dominant, more authoritative.

Central cases of testimonial injustice involve serious harms, and for Fricker the primary harm is that a social agent is undermined in her capacity as a giver of knowledge, which is a capacity essential to human value (2007, p.44). The speaker may also suffer practical and epistemic secondary harms. The practical harms might include career impediments, financial burden, or physical or emotional injury. As for epistemic harms, this might involve the speaker losing faith in their own epistemic ability – as Karen Jones puts it, epistemic injustice can gravely undercut an agent's intellectual self-trust (2012, p.237).

With this picture established, it is clear that to counter testimonial injustice the social imagination must be transformed, since this generates,

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, when I refer to 'stereotypes' throughout the paper I am referring specifically to a negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes, rather than something more generic.

sustains and adapts the identity stereotypes that prejudices feed from. Through the depiction of complex and nuanced narratives, and the thoughtful portrayal of characters from social groups against which epistemically unjust transactions are common, fiction can play an important role in rejecting such stereotypes. I identify four ways in which fiction serves this function – the ideas raised are interrelated, and the list is not intended to be exhaustive.

## **1.2. Narrative Fiction as Countering Stereotypes**

First, narrative fiction can serve a function of *familiarization*, wherein the inclusion of characters from marginalized social groups acquaints an audience with those social groups. This primarily concerns fictions in which at least one protagonist belongs to an identity group that suffers from social injustice, and thus also testimonial injustice. It is important that the characters in question are richly drawn, such that their personalities and actions are not dictated solely by membership of a certain identity group and its associated stereotypes. There are two extremes to avoid. It should not be that a character's being disabled should be the most significant piece of information about them, defining their entire narrative arc; but neither should a fiction treat a disabled character in *exactly* the same way as its able-bodied characters, rendering the disability invisible or irrelevant.

One way fictions can familiarize is through a process of *normalization*. This is the introduction of a character with a social identity that is often portrayed prejudicially in the social imagination, where this aspect of their character is treated as unexceptional – as part of the

character, but simply one of many facts about them. An example of well-executed normalization is the introduction of the gay, black, and working-class companion character Bill Potts in the tenth series of the revived *Doctor Who*, a sci-fi show in which an alien travels through time and space with a human companion. She is an engaging protagonist, and whilst the show openly references racism, Bill's love life and her working-class roots, these identity factors are treated very matter-of-factly. Since *Doctor Who* is a flagship family-oriented BBC show, with a large following and cult status, it is particularly well placed to influence the social imagination.

Another aspect of familiarization is that narrative fictions can be *informative*: they supply information about a diverse range of social groups. A fiction might portray a social group that some particular agent would not have known anything about otherwise. This is especially pertinent regarding narratives that focus on an aspect of social identity that is frequently marginalized. Examples of this are the television shows *Transparent* and *Black-ish* – the former tracks the life of a transgender woman coming to terms with her identity, and the latter takes a comedic look at a black family living in a predominantly white, upper-middle-class neighborhood.

A diverse range of fictional characters challenges stereotypes by showing that membership of some particular social identity does not render somebody wholly different or unrelatable to you. Fictions can directly contradict prejudicial stereotypes in the social imagination – Bill Potts defies the stereotype that lesbians present as either 'butch' or 'femme', and *Transparent*'s Maura defies numerous stereotypes about trans women. Even if depictions of complex characters like these do not significantly erode relevant stereotypes in the social imagination, the hope is that the tension

between rooting for such characters and maintaining the relevant stereotypes creates cognitive dissonance. This lessens the immediate ease with which prejudicial stereotypes might influence a hearer in a testimonial transaction, therefore somewhat mitigating testimonial injustice.

A second way narrative fiction can combat testimonial injustice is by stimulating in an audience a higher level of *self- and other-awareness*: fiction's potential to promote attentiveness to systematic prejudices and the stereotypes entangled with them. Various fictional narratives engage with scenarios of racism, sexism or other prejudice, either as a central part of the narrative, or in some cases simply as a subplot or one-off storyline. Perhaps a protagonist is discriminated against; perhaps the protagonist themselves displays prejudice and must confront this; or perhaps the fiction constructs a world wherein our society's prejudices are amplified to dystopian levels. My contention is that examinations of prejudice in fiction can parallel instances of prejudice in everyday life, and that fictions that engage with such issues not only bring about increased understanding of the struggles that marginalized groups face (other-awareness), but also bring about increased appreciation of one's own positionality regarding such groups (self-awareness).

A prime example is Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, a film tells a horror story about a young African-American man's first encounter with his white girlfriend's parents, but also takes an unflinching look at the minutiae and microaggressions involved in the operation of racism in American society. As the protagonist, Chris, navigates an increasingly ominous family party, the film – both through explicit dialogue and heavy use of symbolism – explores issues such as suburban racism, police brutality and the taboos

surrounding mixed relationships. This is the other-awareness, since stereotypes that constrain how Chris is perceived by white individuals are highlighted. Furthermore, *Get Out* is very critical of a certain white liberal way of treating race, and of the myth of society being post-racial. The ostensibly polite, enlightened partygoers make forced mentions of Obama and Tiger Woods, and fetishize Chris' muscles. This is a targeted call for heightened self-awareness, since it encourages recognition that regardless of any good intent, white Americans are positioned in a particular way vis-à-vis African-Americans. In relation to testimonial injustice, other-awareness increases the likelihood of an agent looking for and recognizing unjust testimonial exchanges in action, and self-awareness makes the agent more likely to catch (and eventually correct) her own judgements involving unfair credibility deficit.

Third, narrative fiction can play a role in countering testimonial injustice by emphasizing *ambiguity*, drawing attention to the difficulty of making clear-cut judgements about scenarios and people. The presence of such ambiguity in fiction might attack our trust in the social imagination's dominant stereotypes, or our certainty in seeing ourselves as dependable judges. Put more constructively, my claim is that ambiguity in fiction can nurture traits or virtues such as open-mindedness and reflectiveness that act as correctives to epistemic injustice.

Regarding epistemic ambiguity, fiction is pertinent when it stresses human fallibility: that we are utterly undependable at making credibility judgements. In *Get Out*, the revelation that Chris' white girlfriend is complicit with her family's sinister plot is a prime example of a fiction demonstrating to its audience that their own assumptions cannot be trusted.

When it emerges that Rose is not an innocent bystander and is instead a conspirator who has lured numerous black men to terrible fates, this comprises a challenge: why was it so easy to presume her innocence in the first place? In thinking this over, the audience is encouraged to fully consider earlier events, background information, and assumptions made or accepted. On the one hand, then, highlighting our epistemic fallibility in fictional cases allows fiction to suggest that we might be just as fallible in everyday instances wherein others try to tell us things. And on the other hand, emphasis on epistemic fallibility urges audiences to be more reflective and to try to ‘see the bigger picture’ when making judgements. In sum, the thought is that ambiguity encourages the practice of epistemic humility in navigating both fictional and non-fictional worlds, thereby mitigating the effects of testimonial injustice.

A fourth way in which I suggest fiction can play a positive role in training our sensibility so as to counter testimonial injustice is through the provision of *representation* for marginalized groups, which plays a part in easing the secondary harm of eroded self-trust. Karen Jones defines intellectual self-trust as “an attitude of optimism about one’s cognitive competence within that domain”, and cashes this attitude of optimism out as a set of positive dispositions towards one’s abilities, methods of inquiry, and actions stemming from inquiry (2012, p.243-244). The idea is that seeing members of your marginalized social group represented in rich and interesting ways in narratives loosens the absolute dominance of prejudicial identity stereotypes in the social imagination, thereby also loosening the grip that the stereotypes have on the very groups that they depict. It is not insignificant to a young black, gay or working-class child that a lead

character in *Doctor Who* possesses all of these identities, or that other such identities exist in fiction at large. Narrative fictions might even offer alternative, positive identity stereotypes. Fiction alone is hardly sufficient to restore and sustain self-trust, but it can at least contribute to blocking pre-emptive silencing wherein members of marginalized groups do not even attempt to give testimony, because they are doubtful that they have anything worth listening to, or that they will be listened to.

## **2. The Advantages of Narrative Fiction**

I now turn to the advantages fiction has in functioning as epistemic corrective. By this I do not mean to say that narratives in isolation are sufficient to tackle epistemic injustice, but just that fictional narratives enjoy certain advantages *because* of their status as fictions.

One advantage fiction has is that it is often perceived as *less hostile* to those who – whether knowingly or not – perpetuate epistemic injustice. Although ‘call out culture’ and public discussions of prejudice and stereotype are becoming increasingly widespread, it remains true that agents tend to respond with indignation or denial to the idea that they are prejudiced. The existence of implicit bias and the pernicious role that the social imagination plays in our everyday interactions are not universally well-known, accepted phenomena, and direct attempts to address epistemic injustice are often met with hostility. Regarding testimonial injustice, then, the thought is that by drawing attention to prejudicial stereotypes in fictional rather than actual scenarios, an audience is less inclined to feel blamed or at fault. Whilst *Get Out* offers a blistering critique of white America’s attitude

towards black bodies and black lives, its status as fiction somewhat shields it from resentment. By *showing* rather than telling in imparting its ideas, *Get Out* not only dampens the possibility for hostile response, but also makes these ideas more easily relatable; I will expand on this below.

A second advantage, then, is that narratives can show instead of simply telling, therefore prompting empathy, sympathy and the engagement of emotion in a way particular to fiction. Key to countering prejudicial stereotypes and thereby eventually transforming the social imagination is interaction with the concrete, complicated details of particular lives. Narrative fictions are exceptionally well-placed to counter epistemic injustice through contact with concrete imagined lives, since they encourage audiences to reach conclusions independently.

A feature that is uniquely emphasized in narrative fiction is that of *perspective-taking*: imagining yourself in somebody else's shoes. *Doctor Who* actively encourages the viewer to navigate the world it depicts through the eyes of the companion character; and in taking Chris as its protagonist, *Get Out* encourages the viewer to side with and therefore imagine yourself in his place. In these cases, and in narrative fiction generally, characters' thought processes and judgements are seen in great detail – and crucially, these judgements are to some extent mirrored by an audience. When Bill Potts struggles with a moral dilemma or is shocked by an instance of bigotry, we the audience to some extent replicate her experience and the judgements she makes ourselves: this is the phenomenon referred to as empathy (Coplan 2011, p.3). Sometimes an agent will not be able to or will not feel provoked to identify with a character this closely, yet will still experience a sympathetic reaction in the form of sustained positive attitudes

or emotions towards the character.

Literature can directly describe characters' mental states, and audio-visual media can achieve a similar effect using narration; a level of insight that is unavailable to many regarding epistemically marginalized individuals. And even without direct access to the thoughts of a character, a fiction can follow their life so closely that nonetheless perspective-taking is made easy. Furthermore, a benefit of narrative fiction is that it enables the consideration of multiple perspectives in a captivating way. In §1.2 I argued that ambiguity lends itself to countering epistemic injustice, since it encourages the thought that it is difficult to make judgements in a clear-cut way. The ability of narratives to show numerous viewpoints – by following several main characters, by alternating between scenes in which characters from different 'sides' interact, by explicitly adopting a multiple first-person narrative style – serves a similar function. Urging an agent to empathize or sympathize with different perspectives encourages nuance and ambiguity.

This exercise of perspective-taking makes narrative fiction particularly efficient in transforming the social imagination to guard against testimonial injustice. Fiction does not promote familiarity by dispassionately informing you about certain lived experiences: fiction encourages audiences to actively engage with those experiences. Likewise, instead of simply describing prejudicial stereotypes, narratives invite agents to vividly imagine scenarios involving such stereotypes. I therefore suggest that for many, fiction is a more compelling way to learn about social identities that they do not come into contact with than, say, reading non-fiction or watching a documentary. On the whole, fiction's ability to engross the imagination gives it wide appeal.

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## *Defining Fashion: Novelty, Play, and Identity*

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the definition of fashion by drawing a parallel between fashion and the aesthetic analysis of games. Specifically, seeing fashion as a performative activity which closely resembles play allows me to respond to two objections that have been leveled against it by Lars Svendsen. The first questions the ability of fashion to truly introduce new and original components; the second challenges the connection between fashion and the establishment of identity. Emphasizing elements such as repetition, interactivity, and episodic playing I defend the aesthetic value of fashion and its potential for introducing original and innovative features while also contributing to who we are, both personally and socially.

On December 14, 2017 Mathew Schneier published an article in the *New York Times* entitled “The Year in Stuff” in which he allowed clothing items to recount the main events of 2017: from the “Pussy Hat” that thousands of women wore while protesting Donald Trump inauguration, to the bathrobe, a sore reminder of Harvey Weinstein’s despicable thread of harassment. Fashion is powerful and, at the end of 2017, it seemed to be the kind of thing that may be used to describe, highlight, and critically inform events that affected and continue to affect us all, on multiple levels.

Yet fashion is not, or not yet, a frequent topic of philosophical discussion and while the attitude toward fashion is shifting, (Wolfendale &

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Kennett, 2011 and Matteucci & Marino, 2015) it has not reached the prominence that it deserves.

In this paper, my focus will be on the definition of fashion; more narrowly, I aim to discuss the performative nature of fashion for, I maintain, while fashion has undeniable objective quality – in the sense in which fashion *is* about fashion items – it is better understood as an activity in line with aesthetic phenomena such as dances, musical performances, and, as I will argue, games.

I am not, it should be said upfront, concerned with the question of whether fashion can be considered art. Differently put, I am not interested in the demarcation between the “artistic” and the “aesthetic,” nor am I trying to position fashion among the arts, thus gauging whether it can be regarded on par with the restricted group of the fine arts, or whether it instead belongs to the popular arts or to no art at all. My interest is instead simply in what fashion *is*, an investigation that is largely within the domain of the aesthetic, but that does not necessarily require the enumeration of the conditions that would make fashion an art.

In the first section of this paper, I will briefly review some historically significant definitions of fashion and introduce, in tandem, Lars Svendsen’s analysis, and criticism, of fashion. In the second section, I will narrow the discussion to two of Svendsen’s most pressing objections: his denial that fashion can be defined as “the production of the new” and his skepticism towards fashion’s ability to significantly contribute to the shaping of our identity. Crucially, my response to these objections is supported by an understanding of fashion as a performance and by what I believe to be a marked similarity between the ways we interact with fashion and the way

we interact with games.

## 1. Philosophy and Fashion: An Overview

The philosophical literature on fashion can be roughly divided in three areas; the first two, the ethical and the aesthetic analysis of fashion – and the questions and concerns they often share – will only be mentioned briefly. I will instead focus more closely, as anticipated, on the definition of fashion.

The ethical discussion on fashion sees it primarily as the kind of object that has a market value: something that can be bought, but also something that can affect personal and social dynamics. The ethical discussion on fashion often targets our overtly consumerist society pointing to how certain items can sharpen existing social and class barriers, but it has also highlighted ways in which fashion can instead be seen as a social and cultural connector, as an anchor for a sense of community and identity. Samantha Brennan, for example, has written eloquently on the relation between fashion and recognition in the communication and display of sexual identity.<sup>2</sup> In her attempt to challenge a certain feminist disdain for fashion, she re-interprets the “personal is political” slogan in light of the fashion choices that can help the expression of sexuality within the LGBTQ community, thus echoing, in a way, Judith Butler’s notion of gender as a series of performances (Butler, 1980: 134)

A different strand in the ethical analysis of fashion is also beginning to

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<sup>2</sup> Samantha Brennan, 2011. “Fashion and Sexual Identity, Or Why Recognition Matters,” in *Fashion: Philosophy for Everyone. Thinking with Style*, Jessica Wolfendale and Jeanette Kennett eds. Malden: Wiley Blackwell: 120-134.

incorporate a reflection on globalism. The fashion world is not limited to fashion capitals and while Milan, London, New York, and Paris are inevitably associated with haute couture, much fashion happens on the sidewalks, globally. Websites such as *Runway Passport* have been monitoring runways that are “away” from traditional centers seeking local labels and independent designers. Additionally, much effort is spent today, by those who work in the fashion industry, in making fashion sustainable – despite the constant rise of fast-fashion. A topic, this latter one, that deserves further exploration and that calls for a collaboration between fashion, philosophy, and the social sciences.

A second area of discussion is the aesthetic of fashion. Two debates deserve to be mentioned. On the one hand, while philosophers have not devoted much energy to the critical and evaluative assessment of fashion items (as in the kind of criticism that typically targets movies, paintings, etc.), they have nonetheless investigated whether fashion can count as an art on par with the established arts or whether it is instead solely a craft. On the other hand, the aesthetic analysis of fashion is tied to the debate on the aesthetics of the body.

Whether fashion counts as art may appear as a trite problem for the interest in such concerns has undoubtedly waned. However, it would be wrong to simply ignore it for it rests on good grounds. To begin with, fashion designers have, historically, aspired at precisely such a labeling of their works. Well-known examples are Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret who, at the end of the XIX century, created the first fashion houses and began to sew a tag with the dressmaker’s signature to their creations, creations that, in turn, were given recognizable names, such as Poiret’s

exquisite 1907 creation, the ‘Josephine’.

A similar desire animates a number of contemporary designers. Think of the emergence of conceptual clothing in the 1980s and of the works of Martin Margiela, Rei Kawakubu, Comme des Garçons, and more recently Iris Van Herpen. Think also, importantly, of the numerous fashion shows hosted by museums such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, of collaborations between designers and museums, as the one between Louis Vuitton and Takashi Murakami, and of institutions blending the two, as the Fondazione Prada in Milan and the Cartier and Vuitton Foundations in Paris.

I will not, in this paper, provide an exhaustive assessment of this debate. While I tend to believe that designers can produce works of high art, I am also aware that examining such an issue ought to involve the consideration of a number of satellite questions, from the aesthetic experience of fashion, to matters of representation, to curatorial efforts – too many, and mostly beyond the scope of this paper.

Attention, however, will be given to the connection between fashion and body aesthetics mentioned above. Body aesthetics is blossoming, thanks, also, to the comprehensive work of Sherri Irvin (2016) and fashion is a good entryway to the debate. Fashion is “to fashion,” an active verb: to discuss fashion is to discuss what we mean by fashioning oneself and the ways in which bodies can be adorned, modified, enhanced, constrained, etc. But to develop this topic, I have to first introduce a third strand in the analysis of fashion – the one on which I will primarily concentrate in this article. I am interested in exploring the definition of fashion: what fashion is.

In approaching this question, one must acknowledge at least two attempts at isolating some of its main features.

The first is fashion's ability to incorporate opposite categories, a feature that underscores fashion's dialectical nature. Clothes are supposed to cover but also reveal; a certain style is chosen in order to promote individual identity while also being tied to group and class identity; fabrics complement the body but they also create new contours (and perhaps a whole new body), etc. (Wilson, 1985). The expression of such oppositions is echoed in the theoretical paradigms developed by sociologists Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieu.

For Simmel, fashion is an example of the dualism inherent to our society, the one that invites imitation – or generalization – by emphasizing the importance of “fitting in” but that can also inspire creativity and allow for differentiation. Bourdieu similarly saw fashion simultaneously as a social demand and as a social divide or, better, as one of the instruments that perpetuate social hierarchies. In ‘Haute Couture and Haute Culture,’ he contrasted the field of large-scale production, which he saw as being entirely dependent on the rules of commerce and therefore for the purpose of profit only, with haute couture and its refined aesthetics, which can instead claim creative and artistic independency (Simmel, 1980).

The emphasis that sociology has given to the dichotomies inherent to the nature of fashion is also present in recent feminist analyses of it. Marjorie Jolles and Shira Tarrant, for example, begin their introduction to *Fashion Talks* a collection of essays aiming at the re-positioning of fashion within feminist theory, by anticipating that the essays in the volume will “grapple with how fashion both *enables* and *constrains* expression in ways

that are uniquely raced, gendered, classed, sexed, and bound to national and cultural histories” [my emphasis] (Jolles & Tarrant, 2012: 1). In her article ‘Stylish Contradiction: Mix-and-Match as the Fashion of Feminist Ambivalence,’ (Jolles, 2012: 227-244) Jolles further explores the issue by looking more narrowly at the topic of “what a feminist looks like.” Here the proposal is to embrace duality: the feminist self, she concludes, may be just as split and contradictory as fashion itself.

One more compelling example pointing to the duplicity of fashion is Richard Shusterman’s account of the fit-model (Shusterman, 2017: 91-106). In a decidedly autobiographical essay (it is worth observing, in passing, that several articles on fashion rely on a markedly autobiographical voice), Shusterman describes what used to be his role as a fit-model in the New York fashion industry. Despite being hidden from the mainstream channels and invisible to the world of runways and fashion magazines, fit models are essential to the fashion industry as they are supposed to epitomize the standard consumer: average height, average weight, average measures. They are the models we are not supposed to see but the ones our clothes tend, for the most part, to be designed on.

The second feature that is typically highlighted when trying to capture the nature of fashion is its ability to constantly produce something new and to do so at a very fast speed. Fashion items come into fashion and go out of fashion very quickly. Every three months fashion houses introduce new collections and every fall is the beginning of a new cycle, as shown by *The September Issue* (2009), R.J. Cutler’s documentary on the legendary 2007 five pounds issue of *Vogue*.

Even when we distance ourselves from the grinding clock of haute

couture and Fashion Weeks, the duo of novelty and speed remains a staple of what fashion is, especially today. Look at fast fashion. Zara, H&M, Uniqlo, and American Apparel, to only mention some of the most prominent, promise to offer design at a very low price and a seemingly interminable streak of new models. In the game of providing something new and fast, fast fashion meets, if not surpasses haute couture. It is not a case, in this respect, that the two are at times known to blend as shown by collaborations between designers of the like of Moschino, Stella McCarthy, Karl Lagerfeld and H&M, and by the fact that top designers like Prada, Armani, and Comme des Garçons rely, for their sales, on what may be described as “fan-base” merchandise. Prada sport, Armani X, See by Chloe, Marc by Marc Jacobs, etc. are secondary lines that offer fashion items at a fraction of the price of the primary line while still delivering whatever sense of satisfaction may come from a logo (and the logo is often, in these cases, rather visible). The fashion trend-setter may look down at secondary lines, but they are both the financial engine of a growing number of fashion firms and what guarantees fashion’s promise of novelty of speed.

These are rather general observations, but just like the contradictory nature of fashion described above, they are also founded on a solid theoretical background. Fashion, Walter Benjamin claimed, is the “eternal return of the new,” (Benjamin, 1999: 544). Fashion is the emblem of modernity where modernity is seen as the curious age, the one that looks ahead and that abides by the Kantian motto *sapere aude*. Furthermore, this forward looking way of categorizing fashion typically sees the new, in fashion, as intimately tied to the shaping of identity. The production of the new gives one the possibility of choice and through the choices one makes

an identity is built. Fashion, differently put, offers us the possibility of manifesting who we are in ways that are fresh while also authentic. Novelty allows one to break away from the past, from already established choices and alternatives, thus opening the door to individual creativity.

I am particularly interested in the connection between fashion, the new, and identity, but it is a contentious one and it has come under the direct scrutiny of Lars Svendsen who has written a popular, while comprehensive, philosophical analysis of fashion (Svendsen, 2006). Specifically, I am interested in two objections. The first is his skepticism toward fashion's ability to produce anything fundamentally "new" - a skepticism that, in turn, jeopardizes fashion's status as a representative of the spirit of modernity. In this respect, Svendsen remarks that the *new* of fashion is not as revolutionary, rebellious, or innovative as one may think (or as it may have been).<sup>3</sup> Today, the fashion industry is hardly interested in the new and it instead relies on both the recycling of previous styles – with designers typically re-proposing old collections<sup>4</sup> – and on a logic of supplementation "by which all trends are recyclable and a new fashion hardly aims at replacing all those that have gone before, but rather contents itself with supplementing them. [...] the old and the new – or rather, perhaps, the old and the old – exist side by side." (Svendsen, 2006: 33).

The second aspect of Svendsen's analysis that interests me is his disillusionment toward the supposed ability of fashion to contribute to our identity. The consumption of fashion is hardly, he argues, selective

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<sup>3</sup> The famed example here is Paul Poirot's haute couture.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted how, at least initially, designer did this to protest the very obsession with new clothes (think of Martin Margiela's work in 1990s).

consumption. Choosing a style is more about conforming to a certain pre-packaged “experience” than it is about defining who we are. Additionally, the mechanism of rapid replacement that characterizes fashion impedes the possibility of a narrative development of the self, privileging, in its lieu, the frantic, fragmented, and irrational chase for a look and for the “spectacle,” to echo Guy Debord, that a new style may offer. Openly embracing Søren Kierkegaard, Svendsen reminds us of the poor fate of the aesthete. Fashion does not contribute to our identity: its pluralism and eccentricity should be unmasked as a sort of repetitive uniformity, as yet another appendix of consumerism.

In the next section, I will consider both objections; their assessment will allow me to introduce the idea of “fashion as play” which, I argue, can contribute to the debate on the definition of fashion while also touching upon its aesthetic and ethical features.

## **2. Fashion, Performance, and Games**

Svendsen’s verdict on the essence of fashion as an aesthetic phenomenon is rather negative. While not entirely disagreeing with his analysis – as there are undoubtedly reasons to question today’s fashion industry – I believe his arguments to be too blunt. In what follows, I will argue against his objections in light of an analysis of fashion that sees it as similar to the kind of performance that characterizes games.

In this paper, I am focusing on fashion narrowly, namely by referring primarily to clothes and accessories. But what kind of objects are clothes? In an immediate sense, an item of clothing is an aesthetic object to a similar

extent to which a discrete item is an aesthetic object. It is inevitable to associate fashion to an item, be it clothing, jewelry, make-up, etc., and there are obviously good reasons for thinking about fashion in this way. To begin with, there is a material counterpart: silk, leather, wool, and so on, a material counterpart that is being manipulated. After all, the discussion on fashion involves a discussion of tailoring and design and both, in turn, depend on an understanding of the fabrics utilized.

There is also the fact that, as objects, clothes can be collected. Displays of clothes collections have made their way into museums: think of as Alex Kalman's installation, *Sara Berman's Closet*, at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and of the collections of style icons – from Marie Antoinette to Jackie Kennedy to Lady Gaga.

Also, as items, clothes are meant to be transported and packaged in interesting ways: examples are folding ballet flats, Longchamp's totes from the Pilage collection, or the 1980s K-way (which is making a come-back). They are meant to move and to move with us. Fashion, in fact, ages with us too. Clothes get too small when children grow, too tight or too loose according to our weigh; they fade, age, and break.

But these considerations, which verge towards the relation between fashion and movement, add a second layer to the discussion of what kind of object fashion can be: for fashion is not just a static object, it is always more than just an item.

Clothes, as I have hinted at above, assume major, or at least connotatively distinct significance when worn; when they become an extension of the body and, with it, of the body's activity: a performance. I have mentioned tailoring above and it must now be added that a central

concern of tailoring is movement: how a blazer will fit shoulders and arms when bending the elbow, the arch of a shoe, the way in which the hem of pants sits on the foot when standing and walking.

The very shape of clothes is often supposed to remind us of movement and of the *possibilities* of movement. By enveloping the body, clothes highlight and modify anatomical structures. Stiletto heels are a frequently mentioned example, but it is interesting to also consider how clothes can expand, as opposed to limit, the boundaries of the body: think of balloon skirts, boyfriend jeans, oversized coats and of course athletic gear which is specifically designed to enhance movement.

Additionally, fashion is closer to a performance because wearing clothes is an everyday ritual, something we set ourselves to do every morning. Getting dressed, changing outfit, adjusting clothes to our body are enormously significant acts.

Lastly, and perhaps less intuitively, I would like to introduce a different characterization of the performative side of fashion, namely that, as a performance, it is close to play. "Play," in my analysis, has a two-fold connotation. First, the concept of fashion as play has to be understood as something engaging, experimental, and even playful. Second, fashion can be seen as a *form* or specific kind of play which shares some of the characterizations that have been observed in games.

I suggest that thinking of fashion in this way can help us assess and respond to Svendsen's objections.

### **3. A Defense of Fashion**

As mentioned, Svendsen has expressed skepticism toward an identification of fashion with the “new” and the production of the new. In his analysis, fashion’s promise of the “new” is broken by the inevitable return to previous styles, by the repetition of something that already exists: a cycle that ultimately leads to nothing more than supplementation. Fashion keeps adding but, in the end, it adds the same thing, over and over.

This is, in part, true. It is hard to ignore a markedly consumerist side of fashion but fashion has not, I believe, entirely forgone innovation and while a logic of supplementation has been embraced, it would be incorrect to see it as the only force driving production and consumption. In fact, I believe that, in the case of fashion, repetition may very well be key to innovation.

It is helpful, to introduce my argument, to look at some examples of how fashion can still maintain the promise of the “new”. A first, and leading one, is vintage.

Vintage is now immensely popular and highly coveted. A vintage Rolex is chic, a new one not so much, and the same can be said for Vuitton trunks and Chanel bags. While vintage is about re-introducing styles, it would be wrong to classify it as a *replication* of previous styles. Vintage clothing does not just supplement new ones. Vintage garments are often to be worn together with new ones because by mixing old and new items the possibilities for a more original look multiply.

But even aside from vintage, the logic of supplementation does not hold. It is interesting, in this respect, to think of the importance of wearing the very same outfit. School uniforms deserve to be mentioned as they are so frequently altered by the children and young adults wearing them,

thereby innovating even when repetition is mandated by institutional codes. Fashion icons are very much aware of such dynamics. André Leon Talley's kaftans, which he started wearing in past years<sup>5</sup> are a testament to these claims. As the former American editor-at-large of *Vogue*, Talley is one of most important names in contemporary fashion; his 'armors,' as he calls them, share similar designs (kaftans, after all, have not changed in thousands of years) with small variations that accentuate his ingenuity and better emphasize his status in an environment, the fashion world, he knows all too well.

The idea of repetition as a form of innovation is the first visible similarity between games and fashion. To be good at a game – and this has been exacerbated by videogames – one has to play a lot. Moves need to be mastered through repetition and playing a given level multiple times is essential to gaming.

In the same vein, the fashion conscious are perfectly aware of the times a certain outfit must be repeated in order to be perfected: from something as minimal as tucking a shirt to more elaborate, layered outfits. Each repetition can introduce something new just as practicing, and repeating, a move in a game leads to more stylish, skilled, and innovative play.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One of the most interesting is the one designed by Dapper Dan which Talley has worn to all the press conferences and screenings for his bio-pic *The Gospel According to Andre* (Novack, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> In a recent article, inspired by Georg Simmel's analysis of fashion, Stefano Marino defends a similar thesis. He sees fashion as a "movement of imitation on the condition of differentiation" thus emphasizing how imitative processes must, in fashion, be

Reflecting on the synergy between repetition and innovation leads us to a further parallel between games and fashion, namely the importance of interactive dynamics connecting the designer's intention and the audience's reception and interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Clothes are designed and so are games, but they require an audience to be "enacted". Computer games such as *Second Life* allow the player a large degree of freedom, a freedom that closely resembles the creation of a personal style. Even more importantly, the style one is able to create by interpreting what offered by the market can reach institutional recognition. Street fashion has long inspired new trends and collections, from the infamous "heroin chic" to the compelling designs of Hood by Air and Opening Ceremony.

An innovative style can then emerge from repetition especially when repetition is coupled with the idea of an interactive practice, one connecting the designer with the public but also the public with different time periods – as in the case of vintage – and with the broader socio-cultural context.

But while my arguments pertaining to the importance of repetition as a means to innovation can save fashion from Svendsen's first criticism and thus effectively prove that fashion is still capable, and can be defined, by the rhetoric of the "new," they are not jointly sufficient to respond to the second

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accompanied by slight variations, modifications, and by the introduction of original features. (Marino, 2017: 12).

<sup>7</sup> The importance of interactivity has been highlighted by several accounts of video games, from Grant Tavinor (2009) to Aaron Meskin and Job Robson's concept of 'self-involving interactive fictions'. More should be said about the extent to which fashion can be analyzed similarly and specifically if the kind of interactivity offered by fashion is immune to Dominique MacIver Lopes' rejection of collective authorship, but I will not, here, touch upon this debate.

criticism he has leveled against fashion: that it cannot contribute to the shaping and display of identity and that if a sense of identity is indeed afforded through fashion, it is ultimately superficial, vacuous, and lacking a narrative component.

In this case as well, I find Svendsen's assessment to be anxiously conservative. Specifically, Svendsen overlooks a more nuanced sense in which clothes participate in the establishment of identity: they allow us to play with it. Fashion may at times be superficial, but it is undeniably fun, and while identity is often, and rightly, related to a sense of integrity and moral authenticity, it would be mistaken to deprive it of a certain experimental quality or, I would go as far as saying, a certain frivolity.

This element of play is, needless to say, another parallel between games and fashion. In games, play allows for the embracing of different identities, as in the case of avatars, of course, but also in children's role playing. And those roles are significant because they teach social dynamics that allow one to contemplate and experiment with different sides of who we may be, want to be, or pretend to be. Fashion is, in this respect, highly comparable.

Virtually everyone experiments with fashion: changing outfit allows for the contemplation of potential incarnations of oneself thus making it a promoter of self-discovery. And changing looks has tangible effects: it is empirically true that a different outfit can lead to different psychological reactions and that they can affect social and ethical responses in others as well as in ourselves. Fashioning oneself is, in a way, fashioning the

character one can be.<sup>8</sup>

The construction of identity also brings us back to the body and to how identity is constructed through physicality. Fashion makes us aware of our presence, of the space we occupy, and of the boundaries that the shape of a body inevitably establishes. It is informative, in this sense, of a conception of identity that is not limited to life events and thought processes - typically the focus of philosophers working on the topic.

There is a third observation to be made in relation to fashion and identity, in addition to the importance of play and to the ability of fashion to make us reflect on identity as something that is also fundamentally embodied that I care to highlight as it further allows me to respond to Svendsen's criticism. For one of the justifications he summons up in order to deny a connection between fashion and identity is that fashion does not provide us with the sense of continuity that is a staple of narrative identity. What makes fashion unable to convey identity is that fashion is episodic as opposed to being based on a narrative construction, and that narrative construction is, in Svendsen, what is ultimately needed for a sense of identity and accompanying authenticity.

But is it? And, more broadly, is narrative a necessary vehicle for the establishment of identity?

While I will not attempt to introduce a comprehensive analysis of narrative theories of identity here, I believe that the idea of fashion as a performance, and as a performance that resembles a game – the idea, as I labeled it, of fashion as play – can provide us with a glimpse into the

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Eva Hagber Fisher "How I Learn to Look Believable: Sometimes All You Can Control is What's on the Outside" *The New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2018.

limitations of a narrative approach to identity.

Narrative conceptions of the self emphasize the importance of “weaving,” to borrow James Olney’s expression, experiences together (Olney, 1998). Marya Schechtman’s “Narrative Self Constitution View,” which champions this approach, argues, for example, that the expression of identity requires narrative and diachronic connections in order to fulfill the four essential features for personal existence: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation (Schechtman, 1996).<sup>9</sup> Accounts of narrative differ from each other, with stronger positions such as Schechtman’s and more moderate accounts, as Peter Goldie’s “narrative thinking” (Goldie, 2012). But despite their differences they all tend to highlight the importance of connecting the events of a life into a whole, the importance of giving them a structure, whether based on causal or on emotional connections or on a blend of both. Those connections are to lead to a sense of closure, an ending, and that ending is likely to be charged with moral significance.<sup>10</sup>

Svendsen, in his analysis of fashion, appears to endorse a similar view. Fashion’s failure to convey a stable sense of identity resides in the inability, of fashion, to unify and weave the events of our life in a coherent

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<sup>9</sup> Schechtman has published several versions of her argument. In her most recent book, *Staying Alive*, she sees the need of building our lives as a narrative as being mostly implicit but she maintains the importance of seeing our lives as diachronic wholes.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this approach to the notion of the self has come under scrutiny: from the risk, emphasized by Peter Lamarque (2007) and to some extent by Peter Goldie, of treating our lives as the lives of fictional characters, to Galen Strawson (2005 and 2015) who altogether rejects the notion of narrative identity in favor of an episodic understanding of the self.

narrative. And to this extent, he is not, I believe, mistaken. Fashion and games are more easily associated with an episodic, as opposed to narrative structure. We begin and end a game, we allocate a limited amount of time to it, and we see our participation in the game as a distinct segment in our everyday activities. When thinking of fashion as a performative act, the similarity becomes apparent. The wearing of an outfit can be seen as an episode in our life, as one side of our identity. There is a work outfit, a Friday night outfit, the Sunday at home outfit, and the gala outfit. And more.

But these episodes are significant on their own and can have important effects on the construction of identity. Different outfits can be associated with distinct moments of our lives which, while not necessarily connected, are charged with both aesthetic and ethical value. Practices such as choosing the “right” outfit for a given event or the way in which we translate our interests, bodies, age, and social status into a look may very well be limited to episodic occurrences, but they should not be downplayed when considering the overall question of identity.

Provocatively, the “episodes” afforded thanks and through fashion can be seen as ways of experimenting with identity, of playing with it. More radically, fashion can be seen as a costume and one that is not too far from the stage costumes we encounter in theater. Festivals such as Burning Man, certain electronic music concerts, and at times large art events such as Art Basel (in its multiple locations) seem to encourage one to perform, to act, to dress to play a part. They are often colorful, abstruse, and irreverent; one would be pressed hard to see how such outfits could fit into an everyday schedule of days at the office. But they nonetheless create a sense of collective identity coupled, in some cases, with cultural and political

statements. These outfits are also, it would be wrong to deny it, liberating. They allow for play. For identity may need a strong sense of authenticity but it also needs escapism and the frivolity I mentioned before. Fashion is not the only way of investigating this portion of identity, but it certainly is one.

Identity is not just about authenticity and about reaching a certain solidity in our actions and self-assessment. It is also about how we may get there and about all the missteps and improvisations. Fashion allows us to think of identity as something that includes and is based on such experimentations, tentative moments, on mistakes, no matter if the outfits chosen are wildly original or rigidly conservative or utterly mundane. There is a lighter self and a lighter sense of identity that we want to begin to contemplate, one capable of play, and one that, through play, points to an ongoing and performative way of looking at who we are. Fashion is key to the exploration of this approach to identity and the self.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In this paper, I argued in favor of the aesthetic value of fashion by responding to two criticisms leveled against it by Lars Svendsen. By relying on the similarity between games and the idea of fashion as play, I justified two assertions. The first is that fashion can indeed suggest something new. It can, if we understand fashion as a practice that creates by way of repeating, practicing, and imitating. Such a movement resembles the act of playing a game and it also supports the idea according to which both games and fashion rely on something close to a form of interactive intentionality that sees the audience as an active component in the shaping of the game/outfit.

The second assertion I defended is that fashion can convey a sense of identity. It can because identity, and with it a conception of the self, can be treated episodically and because identity allows for play, for the wearing of different masks, for the contemplation of being someone else. Fashion is a form of play, a repeated performance which affords a high degree of emotional involvement and affects the self profoundly: self-discovery, transformation, and the contemplation of alternative identities are games we play each morning – when we get dressed.

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## *Art avant la Lèttre*

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ABSTRACT. Art eludes definition. The heterogeneity of what counts as art, especially taking into account contemporary conceptual art, poses difficulties for any ‘internal’ definition which imposes substantial conditions on what artworks have to be like to be eligible as artworks. Hence it is tempting to settle for an ‘external’ definition which avoids such substantial conditions and refers exclusively to common practices of treating things as artworks. It has been noted that such a definition has difficulties with primordial art. Primordial art arguably precedes the practice of treating artworks as such. I argue that, for this practice to figure in the definition of art, it does not have to be cotemporaneous with the art it is used to define. Our present-day practice may determine what art was all along, just as our experts determine what our common word ‘whale’ referred to all along, although people using the word in former times were not in the know.

After Altamira, everything is decadence, Picasso.

Art eludes definition. The heterogeneity of what counts as art, especially taking into account contemporary conceptual art, poses difficulties for any ‘internal’ definition which imposes substantial conditions on what artworks have to be like to be eligible as artworks. Hence it is tempting to settle for an ‘external’ definition which avoids such substantial conditions and refers

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exclusively to common practices of treating things as artworks.<sup>2</sup> I shall discuss a problem for an approach along these lines and outline a new solution to this problem.

Tempting as an external approach is when we confine our attention to the most recent developments in the history of art, it leads to difficulties at the other end of the timeline. At some point, people must have begun to make art. As a paradigmatic but defeasible candidate for earliest art, one may think of upper Paleolithic cave paintings. Whatever their original context and purpose may have been, there is nowadays a near-consensus to classify them as cave *art*. But the creators of that primordial art could not rely on an established practice of treating it as art. One may doubt that people at that time had anything like a concept of art.<sup>3</sup>

Stephen Davies has drawn the consequence that a definition exclusively referring to established practices can only be partial. He thus integrates such a definition as one disjunct into a more comprehensive characterisation:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the internal-external distinction from Carney (1994) without subscribing to his way of drawing the boundary.

<sup>3</sup> These observations weigh against Dickie's claim that 'the creator of the representation cannot recognize his creation as art and that, therefore, it cannot be art.' (Dickie 1984, 55)

<sup>4</sup> Davies formulates the characterisation as a sufficient condition, but I guess the disjunction is intended to be a necessary condition as well. Robert Stecker (1986, 129) suggests to account for some primordial art by qualities like 'expressive power'. But expressivity does not make an artwork. We need to add 'aesthetic expression' or the like, which leads to Davies' proposal.

something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention.(Davies 2015, 377-378)

In this definition, (b) is the part referring (among other things) to established practices of treating artworks as such. (a), in contrast, is the part taking care of primordial art. I have some misgivings about (a). (a) makes reference to aesthetic goals. It is challenging to generally tell what the relevant aesthetic goals are. Moreover, there are doubts as to whether primordial art was made with aesthetic intentions or goals. Some authors conjecture that these works were created in a trance state, which might be incompatible with intention-guided production (Whitley 2009). A more realistic alternative is that primordial art was only meant to signify the depicted objects without any aesthetic ambition. My main misgiving about Davies's definition is that it is unnecessarily gerrymandered.

I contend that, as far as primordial art is concerned, we can do without (a). Primordial art can be handled within an account exclusively referring to established practices. To be sure, the practices referred to cannot be practices of creating or appreciating art established before art was first

created. Instead, we have to refer to *our contemporary practices of creating and assessing art*. Primordial art is not art as judged by standards that were prevalent when it was created –there were no such standards, or so I shall assume. Primordial art is art as judged by *our* standards, standards established by making and assessing art in our linguistic community. It seems plausible that, in using the word ‘art’, we defer to ‘experts’, members of the artworld who are socially authorised role models of dealing with art. They are authorised by our present linguistic community. Cave art is art, the reason being that it is acknowledged as such by these experts. To put it in terms of Davies’s (b), cave paintings ‘fall under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition’, viz. our own tradition of painting, including wall painting.

I shall address three potential objections:

First, there is one great concern which prevented philosophers of art from pursuing the option I propose. Take a hypothetical primal scene of primordial art-making imagined by Levinson:

Consider a solitary Indian along the Amazon who steals off from his non-artistic tribe to arrange colored stones in a clearing, not outwardly investing them with special position in the world. Might not this also be art (and note, *before any future curator decides that it is*)? (Levinson 1979, 33, m.e.)

Levinson plausibly insists that earliest art is art ‘before any future curator decides that it is’ (pace Carney 1994). But how could that be if our curators

*later* set the standards which make primordial art count as art in the first place?

The concern can be dispelled by distinguishing two different kinds of relativity. Our concept of art is relative to what counts as art among experts in our linguistic community, but it is not relative to the *present time*. Primordial cave paintings or stone arrangements did not *become* art when present-day curators decided to call them art. Curators did not make them art but contributed to establishing the notion of art that is prevalent in our community. According to that notion, earliest art was art *all along*.

I draw a comparison to natural kind terms. Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a famous judicial controversy as to whether whales were to be classified as fish (Sainsbury 2013). Whales did not *cease* to be fish when the controversy was settled in favour of our present belief that whales are not fish. Judged by the standards of our concept *whale*, they never were fish in the first place.

My comparison to natural kind terms is limited, though. In the case of *whale*, one may argue that even before the deep structure of whales was detected, the concept aimed at this deep structure. I doubt that the same goes for *art*. The very rationale of going for an external definition was the following: there are no substantial conditions independently of a practice of appreciating art which artworks have to fulfil in order to be eligible for being treated as artworks. Present-day experts did not *detect* what art lovers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century could not have known: conceptual art like Duchamp's *Fountain* is art. In classifying conceptual art as art, the experts we defer to shaped our concept of art. Earlier aficionados would not have been wrong in

saying ‘conceptual art is not art’.<sup>5</sup> They would have been right in light of the concept of art prevalent in their linguistic community, which determined their use of ‘art’. But their word ‘art’ somewhat differed from ours. In the same vein, we are right in affirming that conceptual art is art –by the standards prevalent in our linguistic community. Notwithstanding the disanalogies to natural kind terms, my point stands: our practices can settle what was art before our time.

Second, there is a general concern that accounts of art referring to *artistic practices*, *art genres*, and so on are circular or at least uninformative. One has already to know what art is, it seems, in order to identify these practices (Stecker 1986, 128). This general concern seems aggravated when primordial art is not embedded in established historical practices of producing art but defined exclusively by reference to our practices of calling it art.

In reply, my aim was not to defend an external definition of art but to show that it can deal with primordial art. Still I shall say some words about circularity: even without presupposing any initial understanding of the concept of art, one can identify the practices which are relevant to determining the concept. Consider a situation of radical translation: a field linguist may use heuristic criteria of identifying the institutions we defer to in our use of ‘art’. She may begin by counting the frequency of ‘art’ being used, thereby identifying both a word cluster and a social group especially

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<sup>5</sup> This example is only for illustrative purposes. Depending on how the counterfactual is spelled out, I can well imagine that 16<sup>th</sup> century connoisseurs might have acknowledged contemporary conceptual art as art.

relevant to the use of the word, refine the results by applying broadly sociological criteria for key scenes of authorised talk of *art*, thereby identify a range of uncontested applications of the concept, and then proceed to settling the more interesting cases. The result is not a *real definition* capturing the essence of art, but the very rationale of defining art in terms of practices of treating it as art is to avoid giving a more substantial definition. Third, my proposal seems faced with a dilemma. The first horn of the dilemma is *chauvinism*: it might seem unduly self-centred to define art by what *we* call art. This horn can be avoided by relativizing the concept of art to a linguistic community without privileging ours. The ‘privilege’ of the latter is only that *we* are bound to it. As a consequence, we seem to be driven on the second horn: *relativism*. Concepts of art established in different communities are incommensurable without there being any room for interesting cross-cultural discourse on art. As a consequence of relativism, any disagreement seems to become merely verbal, drawing on incommensurable concepts. But we can imagine a genuine disagreement between us and earlier art lovers who might have said ‘conceptual art is not art’. This dispute is not simply settled by giving a translation scheme à la: ‘art’ by 16<sup>th</sup> century standards is ‘art’ by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, but excluding conceptual art.

In reply, even if there is a certain incommensurability, there is a large overlap and a strong historical and even cross-cultural continuity in what is classified as art. This overlap ensures that the different notions can be called concepts of *art*. As for the suspicion that disputes about art become merely verbal, one may adopt a stance which resembles a Carnapian (1956) position

in meta-metaphysics: there are broadly pragmatic reasons for choosing one concept of art rather than the other. These pragmatic reasons have to do with the social role of art. Different ways of dealing with art and corresponding concepts of art compete for roughly the same social role. The dispute therefore is not *merely* verbal in the sense of having no impact on social practices of dealing with art.

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# *Against Hazlett's Argument: Musical Works Qua Types are Modally Flexible Entities*

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to offer a defence of the type/token theory in the ontology of music against the argument presented by Allan Hazlett (2012). The type/token theory has been defended as the best explanation for musical works' repeatability. The conclusion of Hazlett's argument is that musical works are not repeatable. Consequently, the type/token theory would not be a good explanation of the ontological nature of musical works. It will be shown that, although the premises of Hazlett's argument are true, the conclusion does not follow from them. Hazlett's argument is invalid because it rests on the false assumption that the modal inflexibility of abstract objects –and hence, of types– is incompatible with the modal flexibility of musical works. The thesis that will be defended here is that musical works *qua* types are modally flexible. In particular, it will be argued that the modal inflexibility of types is compatible with the modal flexibility of musical works in virtue of David Lewis' counterpart theory. In this sense, we can identify musical works with types even if we maintain that musical works are modally flexible and that types are modally inflexible.

## **1. Introduction**

Musical works are said to be repeatable to the extent that they can multiply

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occur through musical performances in different places either simultaneously or across time. Beethoven's *5th Symphony* was premiered in Vienna in 1808, and it was performed again by the New York Philharmonic in 2015. By means of these performances, this work is taken to manifest in Vienna and New York at different times. These performances are not copies but occurrences of Beethoven's *5th Symphony* in which we can hear, encounter, experience and have access to the very same work composed by Beethoven. Repeatability is a feature that we ascribe to musical works attending to our intuitions concerning them in our musical practices (cf. Dodd, 2007; Rohrbaugh, 2003; Levinson, 1980).

Repeatability has been considered a crucial feature to determine what kind of thing a musical work is (cf. Goodman, 1968; Wollheim, 1980; Wolterstorff, 1980; Levinson, 1980; Kivy, 1983; Rohrbaugh, 2003; Dodd, 2007). It is a feature that has been taken to characterize them as multiple artworks, by contrast with pictures or sculptures, which are regarded as singular artworks. The thesis that musical works are types has been defended as the ontological account that offers the best explanation of musical works' repeatability (cf. Dodd, 2007; Davies, 2003; Levinson, 2011; Wollheim, 1980). Musical works *qua* types are abstract objects that are instantiated in musical performances, which are regarded as tokens of those types. A type is an abstract and generic entity that becomes instantiated when a token holds a certain set properties. Tokens are concrete particulars. The relation between types and tokens is usually taken to be that of exemplification: a token is not a copy that resembles a type, but an exemplar of it where the type is manifested. Accordingly, Beethoven's *5th*

*Symphony* is a type, and its properly formed performances are sound-sequence events that satisfy the set of conditions to be tokens of that type, and hence events in which we can hear, encounter and experiencing the whole thing that Beethoven composed in 1808. By this way, type/token theories offer a simple and clear explanation of musical works' repeatability.

However, recent accounts rejecting the idea that musical works are types can be found (cf. Hazlett, 2012; Bertinetto, 2012, 2016; Rossberg, 2012; Kania, 2012). This paper is focus on the argument defended by Allan Hazlett (2012). Hazlett assumes that type/token theories offer the best explanation of musical works' repeatability. His strategy, nonetheless, is to reject the idea that repeatability is a feature of musical works, and hence derivatively to reject the thesis that musical works are types. Accordingly, his argument is not strictly an argument against the thesis that musical works are abstract objects, i.e. types, but an argument against the idea that musical works are repeatable. The argument is presented in the following way (Hazlett, 2012, p. 162):

- (i) If there are repeatable artworks, they are abstract objects.
- (ii) No abstract object has any accidental intrinsic properties.
- (iii) Would-be repeatable artworks have at least one accidental intrinsic property.

- (iv) Therefore, there are no repeatable artworks.

The conclusion of Hazlett's argument is not that musical works are not abstract objects, and hence types, but that musical works are not repeatable. In this paper, it will be shown that Hazlett's argument does not serve to this purpose. It will be argued that, although the three premises of Hazlett's argument are true, the argument is not valid because the conclusion does not follow from the premises. The thesis that will be defended here is that musical works *qua* types are modally flexible entities. In particular, it will be argued that the modal inflexibility of types is compatible with the modal flexibility of musical works even if we identify musical works with the ontological category of types. The solution will be given by modal realism and David Lewis' counterpart theory, although it seems not to be the only option available, as it will be shown in the final part of this paper. With this aim, this paper is divided in four parts. The next section will assess Hazlett's argument examining the truth of its premises. The third one will be devoted to present the compatibility between the modal inflexibility of types and the modal flexibility of musical works even if we identify them with types. The fourth one will consider two possible objections. And the final one will be devoted to sketch some alternatives that elude a commitment to the counterpart theory and modal realism.

## 2. Assessing Hazlett's Argument

Hazlett's argument appeals to the notion of essences and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. These notions may add unnecessary difficulties to the issue that is being addressed here. Nonetheless, the argument may be presented in an equivalent formulation that avoids the use of those notions. This formulation will be preferred here to the original one, and it runs as follows:

- (i) If there are repeatable artworks, they are abstract objects.
- (ii\*) Abstract objects are modally inflexible entities.
- (iii\*) Would-be repeatable artworks are modally flexible entities.
- (iv) Therefore, there are no repeatable artworks.

Claim (ii\*) is regarded here as equivalent to claim (ii). In (ii), Hazlett states that abstract objects have all their intrinsic properties essentially. According to Hazlett, essences play two simultaneous roles. On the one hand, they individuate the things that they are essences of: 'the essential properties of  $x$  are meant to distinguish  $x$  from other things' (Hazlett, 2012, p. 165). On the other hand, they provide the persistence conditions of the things of which they are essences by constraining the properties these things could have in other possible worlds: 'the essential properties of  $x$  are meant to tell us the

ways in which  $x$  couldn't be different from how  $x$  actually is' (Hazlett, 2012, p. 165). The properties an object essentially has are the properties that it has in all possible worlds. Accordingly, if abstract objects have their intrinsic properties essentially, they have their intrinsic properties in all possible worlds. In other terms, abstract objects are modally inflexible to the extent that they could not have been different from the way they are in our actual world. This is the sense in which (ii\*) is equivalent to (ii). The reason of this phenomenon lies, according to Hazlett, on the fact that 'the existence of (...) abstract objects (...) makes no demands on the world (...). There is nothing the world must be like for it to be the case that (...) abstract objects exist' (Hazlett, 2012, p. 166).

Meanwhile, claim (iii\*) is regarded here as equivalent to claim (iii). Hazlett posits that musical works do not have all their intrinsic properties essentially. For instance, Hazlett claims that *Pictures at an Exhibition* 'could have not included the reprise of the 'Promenade' between the sixth and seventh 'picture', had Mussorgsky not included it' (Hazlett, 2012, p. 168). *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and all musical works in general, have in other possible worlds intrinsic properties different from the ones they have in our actual world. In other terms, musical works are modally flexible to the extent that they could have been different from the way they are in our actual world. This is the sense in which claim (iii\*) is equivalent to claim (iii).

The defenders of type/token theories would be prone to say that the argument is incorrect because (iii\*) is false (cf. Dodd, 2007). However, it seems plausible to say that musical works could have been different from

the way they actually are. If we attend to our musical practices, we can find that composers are externally constrained by deadlines, specific requirements of a commission, limitations in the instruments available for performance, and so on. For instance, Sibelius composed the 1915 version of his *5th Symphony* with hurries of all sorts. Different comments in his diary evince his worries to finish the work on time for its premiere, the 8 December 1815 (cf. Hepokoski, 1993, pp. 41-2). It makes sense to think that, if Sibelius had had more time, his work would have been different. Therefore, (iii\*) seems to be right according to the intuitions involved in our musical practices.

By contrast, those views that regard that (iii\*) is well established by our musical practices would be inclined to say that (i) is false (cf. Rohrbaugh, 2003). However, there seems to be no good alternative account to types in order to explain musical works repeatability. Perdurantist accounts, which regard musical works as continuants ontologically dependent on their incarnations –scores, performances, recordings and so on–, do not offer a suitable explanation of repeatability. From the fact that an entity is ontologically dependent on others, it does not follow that the latter are occurrences of the former (cf. Dodd, 2008, p. 1128). Moreover, if performances are temporal parts of musical works, what we hear in a performance is just a part of a musical work, but not the musical work *in toto* (cf. Dodd, 2007, p. 157). The action-token theory, meanwhile, also fails to explain repeatability because it considers musical works to be events, and events are not repeatable (cf. Dodd, 2008, p. 1124). Musical nominalism, in turn, has to face some worries regarding the individuation and existence

conditions of unperformed works, as well as regarding the explanation of our talk about musical works when this not reducible to our talk about performances (Dodd, 2007; Davies, 2003). Therefore, (i) seems to be also right.

Finally, (ii\*) seems to be right, not just considering abstract objects in general, but also regarding types. Types are ontologically thin entities –they are individuated by the condition to be satisfied by their properly formed tokens (Dodd, 2007, p. 54). A possible change of a type entails a change in the condition for something to be an instance of it, which results in a different type. Therefore, a type could not have been different from the way it is in our actual world. Consequently, the puzzlement with Hazlett's argument is that its three premises seem to be true and, however, we would be reluctant to accept its conclusion because it denies a musical work's feature, repeatability, that corresponds to a familiar and widespread intuition assumed by a broad number of projectable hypothesis that we make in our musical practices. Accordingly, this intuition concerning the nature of musical works should be accommodated by a reasonable ontological account unless there were good reasons to justify its revision.

### **3. The Solution to the Puzzlement: Lewis' Counterpart Theory**

In the two responses offered above against Hazlett's argument, the main assumption in which this argument is grounded has not been questioned,

namely, that the modal inflexibility of abstract objects –premise (ii\*)– is incompatible with the modal flexibility of musical works –premise (iii\*). This assumption is false, at least concerning types, and this is the reason why the conclusion does not follow from the premises, making the argument invalid. The defender that musical works are types has a way to show that musical works *qua* types are not modally inflexible entities. A solution to this puzzlement is given by Lewis' counterpart theory about modality, and it is inspired by the strategy followed by Caplan and Bright (2005) to defend that ordinary objects *qua* fusions are modally mereologically variable even if fusions are modally mereologically constant.

According to Lewis, a world includes all the things that are at any distance or time (Lewis, 1986, p. 1). The limits of a world are given by the maximal sum of spatiotemporal relations between its members. If two individuals are spatiotemporally related, they are inhabitants of the same world. As Lewis claims, 'nothing is so far away from us in space, or so far in the past or the future, as not to be part of the same world as ourselves' (Lewis, 1986, p. 70). The consequence of this idea is that possible worlds are isolated from one another. Since a possible world comprehends anything that is at any distance or time, there are no spatiotemporal relations between different possible worlds (cf. Lewis, 1986, pp. 70-1). Consequently, the same thing cannot be in different possible worlds (Lewis, 1983, p. 27). Since possible worlds are isolated, the individuals belonging to a possible world are confined to that world. What happens then with our modal talk? It involves considerations about possible worlds. With a modal claim we are saying how things could be in a different way than they actually are. What

am I doing when I claim that 'Nemesio could have been 2 cm taller than he is'? If possible worlds are isolated, my claim is not that there is a possible world in which Nemesio –the very same individual to which 'Nemesio' refers in our actual world– has different properties, in this case the property of being 1,70 cm tall. Alternatively, what I claim is that there is a possible world (W) in which an individual  $x$  of W is 1,70 cm tall and that  $x$  is a counterpart of the individual referred by 'Nemesio' in our actual world (@). Hence, the individual referred by 'Nemesio' in @ and the individual  $x$  of W stand in a counterpart relation. In Lewis' words, 'to say that something here in our actual world is such that it might have done so-and-so is not to say that there is a possible world in which that thing itself does so-and-so, but that there is a world in which a counterpart of that thing does so-and-so' (Lewis, 1971, p. 205). Therefore, to say that Nemesio could have been two centimetres taller is to say that there is a possible world in which Nemesio has a counterpart who is 1,70 cm tall.

Given this framework, two observations are to be made. The first one is that our modal predications are *de re*, and not *de dicto*, predications (cf. Lewis, 1971, p. 204-5). Regarding a specific modal claim, we are not considering what happens to it in different possible worlds. For instance, we are not considering whether the dictum 'Nemesio could have been 2 cm taller' is true by looking for a possible world in which the individual denoted in that world by 'Nemesio' is 1,70 cm tall. Rather, we are considering what happens in other possible worlds to the thing denoted in our actual world by the term 'Nemesio'. Modality is modality of things, not of expressions. However, since possible worlds are isolated, we cannot

consider the way in which the very same individual denoted in @ by 'Nemesio' is in a different possible world. Instead, we are considering the way in which the counterpart in that world of the individual referred in @ by 'Nemesio' is.

The second observation is that a counterpart relation, Lewis argues, is a relation of similarity, the only kind of trans-world relation available given the isolation of possible worlds (cf. Lewis, 1983, p. 28; 1986, p. 71). Accordingly, the former relation inherits the indeterminate character of the latter. Lewis enumerates four aspects in which the counterpart relation is indeterminate:

- (1) As to which respects of similarity and difference are to count at all,
- (2) as to the relative weights of the respects that do count, (3) as to the minimum standard of similarity that is required, and (4) as to the extent to which we eliminate candidates that are similar enough when they are beaten by competitors with stronger claims (Lewis, 1983, p. 42).

Accordingly, Nemesio's counterpart may be sometimes a French horn player, but other times may be a Benfica's football player, a prime minister or even a gorilla. Which one the relevant counterpart of Nemesio is in a given possible world depends on how items (1) to (4) are determined by the context in which the proposition 'Nemesio could have been 2 cm taller than he is' is uttered. The resolution of the vagueness of the counterpart relation is context-dependent, and it may be resolved in very different ways in

different contexts (cf. Lewis, 1983, p. 43). Consequently, a variation in the relative relevance of the different aspects of similarity and dissimilarity results in the selection of different counterpart relations (cf. Lewis, 1971, p. 208). For instance, as Lewis puts it, two aspects of similarity between human beings are personal traits and bodily traits. If the conversational context puts the focus on personal traits, the relevant counterpart of Nemesio in a possible world *W* will be surely a French horn player, regardless of whether that French horn player is very different from Nemesio in bodily traits. However, if the conversational context highlights bodily traits, and in *W* there is other individual who, in spite of not being a French horn player but a prime minister, resembles much more Nemesio in bodily traits, the relevant counterpart of Nemesio in *W* will be the prime minister.

The counterpart theory provides a way to reconcile the modal inflexibility of types with the modal flexibility of musical works. If the thesis that musical works are types is right, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is identical with *T* in @ –being *T* a type of sound-sequence events whose tokens are the properly formed performances of that work. Accordingly, ‘*Pictures at an Exhibition*’ is substitutable *salva veritate* by ‘*T*’ in all claims about that work in @. For instance, the claims ‘*Pictures at an Exhibition* has 15 movements’ and ‘*T* has 15 movements’ are both true. The relevant point is that ‘*Pictures at an Exhibition*’ and ‘*T*’ are not substitutable *salva veritate* in modal claims. While the claim ‘*Pictures at an Exhibition* could have not included the reprise of the ‘Promenade’ between the sixth and seventh movements’ is true, the claim ‘*T* could have not included the reprise of the

'Promenade' between the sixth and seventh movements' is false. The reason is that the use of each one of these terms gives rise to different contexts that select different counterpart relations, even if *Pictures at an Exhibition* is identical with T in @. In a modal claim, while the use of '*Pictures at an Exhibition*' selects a *musical work counterpart relation*, the use of 'T' selects a *type counterpart relation*. Let us consider a possible world W in which the counterparts of all movements of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, with the exception of the 'Promenade', are disposed in the same way as they are disposed in @. Let us call T\* the type of sound-sequence events that obtains in W from the counterparts of all the movements of *Pictures at an Exhibition* with the exception of the 'Promenade'. T\* is a musical work counterpart of *Pictures at an Exhibition* in W. Accordingly, *Pictures at an Exhibition* could have had different movements than it actually has and, consequently, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is a modally flexible entity. By contrast, T\* is not a type counterpart of T, and any type that does not have counterparts of all the movements that *Pictures at an Exhibition* has in @ is a type counterpart of T. The type counterpart relation only selects as counterparts of T those types of other possible worlds individuated by the same condition that individuates T in @. Accordingly, T could not have had different movements than it actually has and T is thus a modally inflexible entity.

In conclusion, musical works *qua* types are modally flexible entities, even if types are modally inflexible. Identifying musical work with types is thus compatible with regarding musical works as modally flexible entities and types as modally inflexible ones. The type T with which we have

identified *Pictures at an Exhibition* in @ has different counterparts in other possible worlds depending on the relevant counterpart relation determined by the conversational context in which a modal claim is uttered. In the next section, two main objections against the view developed here will be considered.

#### **4. Two Possible Objections**

A first objection against the view proposed in the previous section stresses a particular feature of the counterpart relation. The counterpart relation is a relation that holds between inhabitants of possible worlds. A relevant worry that might arise at this point is whether types are inhabitants of possible worlds. According to Lewis, inhabitants of possible worlds are things that are at any distance or time. Are types things of this kind? On the one hand, an affirmative answer trivially follows from those views that regard types as *universalia in re*, i.e. as existing in space and time (cf. Armstrong 2010, pp. 7-16; Rodríguez-Pereyra, 2011; Swoyer and Orilia, 2011). Nonetheless, this view of types offers different sorts of difficulties regarding the persistence and existence conditions of musical works, and has been rejected as suitable explanation of musical works' ontological nature (cf. Rossberg, 2012). On the other hand, the answer is not so clear for types conceived as *universalia ante rem*. In addition, the worry introduced by this objection is specially pressing concerning the platonic view of types, according to which types have no temporal origin and are neither created nor destroyed. Types that exist outside their instances and that, in addition, have no origin are more

difficult to be regarded as inhabitants of possible worlds, i.e. as things that fall under spatiotemporal relations.

However, the Platonist has a way to accommodate types as inhabitants of possible worlds. Two explanations have been given for their characteristics of lacking temporal origin and the impossibility of being destroyed. The first one regards types as timeless entities, i.e. that types exist outside space and time. The second one is that types, *qua* abstract objects, exist outside space, but are eternal, i.e. they exist at all times. As Dodd has noted, the first option is problematic because it cannot explain the epistemic availability of types in virtue of which we can think and talk about them. In the case of musical works, it cannot explain how we can hear, experience and encounter musical works *qua* types in their performances as tokens of them (cf. Dodd, 2007: 59). For instance, if I go to listen to a performance of *Pictures at an Exhibition* tonight, 27th February of 2018, the work has to be available to be heard at that time. Considering types as eternal entities rather than as timeless ones helps us to explain our epistemic access to them by means of their tokens. But if types are eternal and hence exist at all times, they are inhabitants of possible worlds, and the counterpart relation applies to them. Therefore, musical works *qua* types are modally flexible, even if we accept the platonic intuition that types have no temporal origin and that they are neither created nor destroyed.

A second objection against the view defended in this paper can be posed in the following terms. Given the isolation of possible worlds, a counterpart of a musical work T of @ in other possible world W is a different object from T, namely, T\*. The counterpart relation will always

assign as a counterpart of *Pictures at an Exhibition* an object different from the object it is in @. Consequently, if we follow the counterpart theory, what we obtain is not that the modal inflexibility of types is compatible with the modal flexibility of musical works. What we obtain, rather, is that premise (iii) is false, i.e. that musical works are not modally flexible.

My answer to this objection is that this phenomenon does not arise only for musical works, but for any modally flexible or inflexible object under the counterpart theory. For any object O –musical works, persons, medium-size physical objects, etc.–, when we say that O could have been different (i.e. that O is modally flexible), we say that O has counterparts in other possible worlds with properties different than O's properties. Modal flexibility just means this under the counterpart theory. Alternatively, for any object O –musical works, persons, medium-size physical objects, etc.–, when we say that O could not have been different (i.e. that O is modally inflexible), we say that, for any object O\* that is the counterpart of O in a possible world  $W_n$ , O\* has the same properties than O has (this does not imply that O\* cannot hold relations with other inhabitants of W different from the relations holding between O and the inhabitants of @). Modal inflexibility just means this under the counterpart theory. Consequently, even in the case of modal inflexibility, the counterparts of O in other possible worlds are objects that, despite having the same properties as O, are different from O. Therefore, the objection is misguided because it is grounded on a misunderstanding of the counterpart theory and modal realism.

Accordingly, none of the two objections seems to be right and they do

not defeat the thesis defended in this paper. We can still hold that the modal flexibility of musical works is compatible with the modal inflexibility of types even if we identify musical works with types. Hazlett's argument does not justify the revision of the intuition that musical works are repeatable, and hence it does not constitute an objection to the thesis that assigns to musical works the ontological category of types.

### **5. A Third and Awkward Worry**

Finally, it might be argued that the compatibility between the modal flexibility of musical works *qua* types and the modal inflexibility of types offered here depends on the assumption of modal realism and the counterpart theory. In this sense, it might be objected that the defence of the idea that musical works are types rests on too strong assumptions. One might be tempted to reject the idea that possible worlds really exist and that they are spatiotemporally isolated, holding between them only counterpart relations. Accordingly, accepting that musical works *qua* types are modally flexible entities would lead us to an ontological inflation concerning possible worlds via the assumption of modal realism.

An immediate answer to this objection would be that to prove that Hazlett's argument fails requires just showing that there is at least one way in which the modal flexibility of musical works and the modal inflexibility of types is not incompatible even if we identify musical works with types. This is enough to prove that the conclusion does not follow from the premises of the argument. And this is precisely what has been done in this

section. The objection concerns a different issue from the one addressed here. It points to the discussion of what the ontological framework about modality that we should embrace is, which is something outside the scope of this paper.

Nonetheless, in an attempt to respond to this worry, we will try to briefly sketch the plausibility of the thesis that musical works *qua* types are modally flexible entities under an approach that presupposes neither the counterpart theory nor modal realism. Such an account is the one provided by Armstrong (1989). Armstrong maintains a combinatorialist view of possible worlds, according to which a possible world is any conjunction of possible atomic states of affairs, and mere possibilities are non-existent recombinations of actual elements (Armstrong, 1989, pp. 47, 54). In Armstrong's ontology, the world contains individuals and universals (properties and relations), which only exist as constituents of states of affairs. In this sense, the state of affairs *a's being F* is the truthmaker of 'a is F'. Consequently, there are no uninstantiated properties or relations. Armstrong follows the principle of instantiation of properties, according to which a property begins to exist only when it is instantiated or, in other words, only when it is the constituent of a state of affairs. Armstrong argues to this extent that 'a possible property or relation (...) is not ipso facto a property' (Armstrong, 1989, p. 43). In Armstrong's framework, mere possible states of affairs are non-existent recombinations of actual elements, i.e. mere logical possibilities (Armstrong, 1989, p. 48). Accordingly, possible worlds are all the conjunctions of atomic states of affairs. This view leads Armstrong to defend a fictionalist view about possible worlds in

which 'the merely possible worlds and possible states of affairs do not exist, although we can make ostensible or fictional reference to them' (Armstrong, 1989, p. 49).

Within this framework, the plausibility of the thesis that musical works *qua* types are modally flexible entities can be understood as follows. Let us consider again the modal claim '*Pictures at an Exhibition* could have not included the reprise of the 'Promenade' between the sixth and seventh movements'. A performance of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is a state of affairs constituted by a set of individuals (physical sounds) disposed in a specific relation R, a universal that might be regarded as a type. *Pictures at an Exhibition* is R (a type) that only exists in the states of affairs that it constitutes. *Pictures-minus-Promenade* would be the type R\*, which would determine the same relation between physical sounds in performance except for the Promenade. However, according to Armstrong's fictionalism, we just make fictional reference to *Pictures-minus-Promenade* (R\*), and hence we do not make any ontological commitment to this entity in our modal claims. Consequently, we speak about how *Pictures at an Exhibition* could have been in a way different from the way it actually is without identifying it with another type –and hence with another musical work– different from R, namely R\*, because while R exists, R\* does not exist. R\* is just an alien universal, something that is neither identical with actual (instantiated) universals nor has as constituents actual universals (cf. Armstrong, 1989, p. 54-6). In other words, R\* is a fiction that results from the recombination of the atoms that are constituents of the states of affairs in which R exists.

Therefore, in our modal claims concerning *Pictures at an Exhibition*,

we are not identifying this work –which in the actual world is identified with the type R– with other types different from R. In this sense, there is no ontological impediment to regard *Pictures at an Exhibition* as a modally flexible entity, given Armstrong fictionalism about possible worlds. The idea that the modal flexibility of musical works is compatible with the modal inflexibility of types, even if we identify musical works with types, is plausible under an ontological approach to modality that escapes modal realism and the counterpart theory. This plausibility has been briefly sketched here without going into further details, but it should be enough to reassure the objector on this point.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has been devoted to defend the type/token theory in the ontology of music against the argument addressed by Allan Hazlett. This argument aims to show that musical works are not repeatable entities. It is grounded on the assumption that the modal flexibility of musical works is incompatible with the modal flexibility of types if we identify musical works with types. It has been shown that the counterpart theory and modal realism provides to the type/token theorist with a tool to overcome Hazlett's objection. In our modal talk about musical works, the relevant counterpart relation is a musical work counterpart relation that may associate a work *w* with a type belonging to a possible world *W* that is individuated by a condition different from the one that individuates the type with which *w* is identified in @. This possibility is not open for type counterpart relations.

Finally, it has been shown the plausibility of musical works *qua* types being modally flexible entities under other modal accounts free of the assumptions of modal realism and the counterpart theory.

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## *Material Authenticity in Conservation Theory*

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ABSTRACT. In September 1997 a strong earthquake shook the Italian regions of Umbria and Marche, in central Italy. The 13<sup>th</sup> century *Basilica of San Francesco of Assisi* was harmed, the precious frescos on its vault reduced to wreckage. The work of restoration began immediately. Hundreds of conservators scoured the rubble for remnants of the paintings. This painstaking work of retrieval led to the recovery of thousands of tiny fragments, most of which no bigger than a one-euro coin. Analysing the fragments and relocating them to their original position took years. In 2006, however, the restoration was finally completed. Though this is certainly a heartening story, it is also a surprising one in many respects. The question is, particularly, why the restorers put such effort to recollect the frescos' original pieces, no matter how scattered and unrecognizable they were. In this paper I suggest that their reason for doing so was based on a widespread interest in art appreciation for what I call 'material authenticity'. What is this interest from a philosophical point of view? And how does it affect decisions regarding conservation? My contention is that our concern for material authenticity, whilst culturally-dependent, is based on some deeply entrenched ideas we have about what artworks are ontologically. These ideas, placing great value on the substance of which artworks are physically composed, have informed conservation in the past, and despite recent challenges, continue to be the main principle behind conservation theory today.

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## 1. Introduction

On the night of September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997, at 2:43 a.m., a 5.6 earthquake on the Richter scale shook the regions of Umbria and Marche in central Italy injuring one hundred people and causing massive material damage. The 13<sup>th</sup> century *Basilica of San Francesco of Assisi* was damaged, its vault severely cracked. Only a few hours later a team of technicians and conservators was at work trying to secure what was at risk. Sergio Fusetti, a restorer who was there, recounted what happened that morning. He was standing in the central nave next to the altar when the doors of the church suddenly flew open. Looking up he saw thousands of minuscule fragments falling from the ceiling like confetti in the bright sunlight. It was 11:42 a.m., and a second violent earthquake was taking place. Large parts of the ceiling fell killing two technicians and two friars. Fusetti managed to find shelter, and recalling those moments, said “I heard voices but could not see anything through the dust, so I thought the entire vault had collapsed”<sup>2</sup>. In fact, not everything had collapsed that morning, but a huge part of the vault had come down. The frescos of Saint Girolamo and the Four Doctors, attributed to the young Giotto, Cimabue’s St. Matthew and the Four Evangelists, the 19th century starry vault over the altar, as well as many other decorations on the counterfaced arc were reduced to minuscule pieces.

The work of restoration began immediately. Conservators from the *Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione e il Restauro* (ISCR) under the

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<sup>2</sup>See: Basile (2007a). My translation from Italian.

guidance of art historian Giuseppe Basile, scoured the rubble for remnants of the frescos. This painstaking work of retrieval led to the recovery of thousands of tiny, almost unrecognizable, fragments, most of which were no bigger than a one-euro coin<sup>3</sup>. Analysing and cataloguing the fragments and relocating them to their original position took years, in what seemed an impossible undertaking. Despite growing scepticism, on the first anniversary of the earthquake the figure of *San Rufino* was re-established in its original position, more than 20 meters above the floor. In 2006, the restoration was finally completed: “At the end of this long and difficult task”, Basile commented enthusiastically, “we can say that we have achieved our goal!”<sup>4</sup>

This may seem just a heartening anecdote, yet it is also a surprising one in many respects. Why did the restorers take on the task of collecting the original pieces of the Assisi frescos in spite of how scattered, fragmented and unrecognisable they were? What drove them into it? Consider also that the frescoes are so high on the vault that even before the earthquake ‘merely a blur of colour’ could be seen by the many pilgrims, churchgoers and art lovers who visited the basilica.<sup>5</sup>

My suggestion is that the Assisi case provides a compelling example of one element that most of us find essential when relating to artworks, namely, the significance of experiencing authentic material art objects as

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<sup>3</sup>To be precise, the fragments from the entrance vault with the *San Girolamo* and the Eight Saints fresco were almost 80,000, while the number of those from the vault above the altar exceeded 200,000 in total.

<sup>4</sup>See Basile (2007b). My translation from Italian.

<sup>5</sup> Compare with Leech (1999).

opposed to reproductions, however good they might be. But why is dealing with authentic artworks so relevant to us? Is our caring for *material authenticity* reasonable at all?

These are complex questions involving an intricate web of philosophical, historical and cultural questions. In this paper, I will try my best to unravel at least a part of this web. I will contend that our penchant for material authenticity is grounded on a widespread conception of what an artwork is ontologically. According to this conception, a work of art is primarily a physical object whose identity depends on the material that composes it. The greater the physical integrity of the object's material, the greater the authenticity of the work. Relevantly, this has consequences upon how the aim of conservation is interpreted.

## **2. The Problem of Material Authenticity**

The Western civilization has always set much store by preserving the material of art objects. Recent historical evidence, for example, has shown that the Etruscan already cared much about conserving the authentic material of potteries they considered aesthetically valuable, such as those attributed to important masters like Euphronios, working in the VI century B.C. (Pergoli Campanelli 2016, p. 26). Ancient Romans, on their part, devoted many decrees of the *Ius Civile* to settling the issue of how best to

protect the original material of monuments and buildings.<sup>6</sup>

Today, in the era of mass tourism, people are willing to travel distances to view some authentic art objects, even if they wouldn't be able to distinguish them from reproductions and even if reproductions could offer a more rewarding experience. Wouldn't we be able to appreciate Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* better by viewing a good full-scale copy of it without a crowd of tourists vying for a front-row position to photograph the painting with their smartphones? However logical this may sound, the answer is negative. The fact is that most of us would prefer to view the authentic artwork no matter how good a copy might be and even if it is indistinguishable from the original. This helps explain the monetary worth of originals. In the Louvre bookshop, a poster of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* only costs around 20 euros, yet the actual painting is priceless.

Why is viewing originals so important to us? This question has been at the core of a long-standing philosophical quarrel centred around art and authenticity, significantly started with Goodman's discussion of authenticity in Chapter III of his *Languages of Art* (1968). While some theoreticians have argued that our preference for originals is justified (Sagoff 1976, 1978;

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<sup>6</sup> An interesting figure of this regard is Cassiodorus, living between the V and the VI centuries. As renown, Cassiodorus took an interest in philology, which he coupled with a concern for ancient monuments and artworks. His writings demonstrate a surprising awareness of the relevance of restoration, both in its theoretical and practical dimensions. A whole vocabulary of specific terms such as *reparare*, *innovare*, *serbare*, *reficere*, *conservare*, *custodire*, *roborare* is employed to indicate the kinds of interventions to be executed when preserving various monuments (see Pergoli Campanelli 2015).

Levinson 1987, 2004; Farrelly-Jackson 1997; Dutton 1979, 2003; Korsmeyer 2008), others have retorted that it is just fetishism, sentimental attachment, or, at its worst, plain snobbery (Lessing 1965; Zemach 1989; Jaworski 2013).

## **2.1. The Aesthetic Relevance of Authenticity**

Among the many philosophical justifications that have been advanced to our preference for material authenticity, I will here survey three representative examples offered by Mark Sagoff, Denis Dutton and Jerrold Levinson.

Mark Sagoff (1978; 1976) claims that we assess ordinary things (artworks included) not only for their visible features, or for their effect, but for what they are and for how they were created, namely, for what he calls their “history of production” (Sagoff 1978, p. 456). Because of their history, we believe that works of art are valuable in a distinctive way, *per se*, thus irreplaceable. We treat artworks differently from ordinary objects: we would never accept the idea of a replacement for a fresco like Cimabue’s *The Four Evangelists*, in Assisi; conversely, if we lose a pen a replacement is precisely what we want, and we feel no regret since most pens are perfectly interchangeable to us. This, on Sagoff’s view, demonstrates that when it comes to appreciate art we seek more than just (aesthetic) gratification: [people] “value a work of art in itself: they recognize the goodness of art as inhering in it rather than as arising in an experience produced in them; they admire the work, then, as being the particular subject of these

characteristics, not the characteristics, as it were, detached or detachable from their subject.” (Sagoff 1978, p. 463). According to Sagoff, we cannot appreciate a work of art simply for the sake of its appearance or for the feelings it induces: “one must appreciate the work itself” (Sagoff 1978, p. 453), since the identity of the object is crucial to its aesthetic value. An artwork’s being authentic is thus *necessary* to its appraisal, for only insofar as authenticity is established can an artwork be aesthetically evaluated.

A second influential view defending the value of material authenticity is supported by Denis Dutton (1979; 2003). Dutton holds that we value authentic artworks as the result of unique creative human acts. Our assessment of an artwork, according to Dutton, is related to the intuitions we have about the actions that gave rise to its existence. In this regard, all types of artworks, including visual works such as paintings, represent the end point of special types of performances (Dutton, 2003). From Dutton’s point of view, thus, art may be conceived of in line with any other sort of performing activity, including sport. In all these domains, we care how the obtained results have been achieved – whether they have come out from natural vs artificial skill, for instance. This is because, according to Dutton, how an artistic achievement is produced is key to its aesthetic evaluation (Dutton, 1979). This information is critical to assessing the final achievement, which in turn bears upon aesthetic value. From Dutton’s point of view, thus, the authentic frescos in Assisi (fragmented as they might now be) are different from any possible reproduction because they represent the end-point of a unique type of performance. Our appreciation would be harshly affected if we were to discover that those frescos are in fact just a

replica produced through sophisticated modern copying techniques.

Jerrold Levinson (1987; 2004) also famously supports the role that authenticity plays in our experience of art. The reason why most of us feel that there is virtue in an authentic object that a copy cannot possess, Levinson argues, is not because of any intrinsic property the original displays, but because of its particular history and its relation to the creative activity of a certain artist: “Creativity and originality, thought and work, process and history, all of which reside in – are embodied in – the unique painted canvas” (Levinson 1987, p. 282). We value Cimabue’s original frescos as the *embodiment* of his creative activity and his expressive invention – that is to say, as the actual site of his artistic accomplishment. In this sense, the authentic material artwork gives us direct access to the artist’s achievement: “Interacting with the original ‘puts us in touch’ with the artist in the way the duplicate cannot, because of the different causal/historical properties of the two, those non-observable, extrinsic, relational properties [...]” (Levinson 2004, p. 16). Of course, reproductions and replicas can perform useful service in allowing us “to renew or deepen our acquaintance with them” (Levinson 1987, p. 281), but this is no reason to think that such copies could ever *displace* the authentic objects. After all none considers a visit to the Grand Canal in Little Venice, Las Vegas, the same as a visit to the true, historical Venice!

## **2.2. Authenticity as Fetishism**

Taking a rather opposite view, other philosophers (Lessing 1965; Zemach

1989; Jaworski 2013) have argued against the aesthetic relevance of material authenticity. Although their arguments vary somewhat, they all contend that the great store we set by material authenticity is unjustified when it comes to assessing the aesthetic merits of an art object. The allegedly ‘special value’ we attribute to authentic material artworks, they argue, has nothing to do with *aesthetics* per se. Indeed, a work’s being authentic or not doesn’t make any difference to its aesthetic value (Lessing, 1965). If what we admire in an artwork are its aesthetic properties, and aesthetic properties, whatever else is true of them, are perceptible – they can be seen or listened or otherwise perceived by reading off the surface features of the object – then who cares by whom and how the object was produced? The discovery that a work is a copy, so the argument goes, does not alter its perceivable qualities, and hence shouldn’t make any aesthetic difference to us. Knowing that an object is materially authentic is only a piece of extrinsic information<sup>7</sup>. The fact that most of us would be willing to pay an enormous amount of money for an authentic artwork, and instead would have no interest in a reproduction which we could not even tell from the original, only demonstrates that we are fetishists, sentimentalists or simply snob: “Considering a work of art aesthetically superior because it is genuine, or inferior because it is forged, has little or nothing to do with aesthetic judgment or criticism. It is rather a piece of snobbery”. (Lessing 1965, p. 461) We cherish the original object for no other relevant reason than

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<sup>7</sup> This stance has been famously termed by Gregory Currie (1989) ‘aesthetic empiricism’.

because it is *that* object (Zemach 1989, p. 67). Especially when the authentic artwork is badly damaged, as in the Assisi case, “the only reason to cherish the original is sentimental; it is a veneration of the kind that moves us to visit tombs of great men.” (Zemach 1989, p. 70) Indeed, “there simply is no art-relevant feature that *all* originals have in common, that make *every* original better than a duplicate, a copy.” (Jaworski 2013, p. 13) Of course, there are cases in which viewing originals may result in a more valuable experience, but that is because reproductions generally fail to capture significant nuances of the authentic work. This, however, doesn’t imply that authentic artworks are always preferable *per se*. To use a musical example, there can be very bad live performances that do not allow us to enjoy the work, and very good recordings that do the job excellently (Zemach 1989, p. 70).

If it seems hard to discard the thought that something about authentic material artworks makes them more valuable than any copy, however, it is because we consider them blessed with “the Midas Touch” of the artist (Jaworski 2013, p.14). In other words, what binds us to material authenticity is a bias rooted in what anthropologists call the *law of contagion* (Newman & Bloom 2012), the belief that through physical contact materials can take on special qualities. An original fresco by Giotto is particularly valuable to us because Giotto actually touched it, and Giotto is an important artist. In contrast, a duplicate does not ‘contain’ anything of his special essence.

The very idea that the authentic material object is valuable because it somehow ‘embodies’ the creative achievement of the artist is troublesome in many respects (Pouivet 2004, pp. 17-19). What does this notion of

embodiment mean? Taken literally, it seems to appeal to a serious question of faith: the creed that there is some magical energy lurking, so to speak, in authentic works of art, granting us the possibility of entering into direct relationship with their artists (Réhault 2004, p. 17). Less dramatically, it may imply that the work involves physical signs of the artist's intentional activity, insofar as it *exemplifies* this activity – just as, according to Goodman (1968), artworks appear to exemplify features they do not actually possess (feelings and emotions, for instance). Nevertheless, even if one interprets embodiment in this sense, there is still a problem involving viewers of works of art: how can they perceive an artist's activity as embodied or exemplified in the authentic material if it is not discernible to their eye?

However one tries to justify it, it seems that our interest in authenticity has little to do with aesthetics and much to do with cultural, anthropological, social values. It is because of these values, not because of any purely aesthetic consideration – that we choose to preserve the original material of art objects, even when, as in the Assisi frescoes, the results are physically undiscernible. But the fact that “the realm of art should be so infested with non-aesthetic standards of judgment that it is often impossible to distinguish artistic from economic value, taste or fashion from true artistic excellence, and good artists from clever businessmen” is, according to these philosophers, both “serious and regrettable” (Lessing 1965, pp. 463-464).

### 3. Culture and Material Authenticity

To be sure, that our aesthetic responses are culturally affected is a matter of fact. Different cultures shape what people believe about art, and their attitude toward it, in ways that can be strikingly different from one another. The Western-European demand for material authenticity, for example, seems largely a heritage of a Christian-informed tradition in which physical matter is interpreted as the receptacle of God's creative efforts and the substratum through which he reveals himself to the world (Pergoli Campanelli 2015).<sup>8</sup> Relevantly, we tend to treat authentic material art objects the way we treat relics: as the tangible repository of an intangible value. When a work of art is revealed as a forgery its appearance doesn't change, but it lacks its sacral value (we may call it 'aura', to use Walter Benjamin's term), and consequently we lose our interest<sup>9</sup>. Philosophical echoes of this approach can be found in Hegel's aesthetics. One way the spirit has of understanding itself, Hegel claims, is *in* and *through* objects that have been made for the purpose by human beings. Through the creation of these material objects – stone, wood, metal or paint – the spirit is given

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<sup>8</sup> An axiom by Tertullian is eloquent in this regard: *caro cardo salutis*, flesh is the pivot of salvation. Without embodiment there is no eternal salvation, since Christians believe that at the end of time they will be revived in their actual bodies.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that our attitude to art is shaped by a relic model also makes sense makes sense of a certain way we have of thinking of the art connoisseur, as someone whose main job is to pursue traces left on a canvas back to its historical origin, just as a detective follows up on fingerprints.

*embodied* expression: such objects make the freedom of spirit visible. But once inorganic matter is transformed into an expression of spirit via a process that Hegel calls “the forming of the inorganic” (Hegel 2014, p. 209) it becomes a sort of relic – a material witness to our process of self-expression and self-understanding, and, as such, something to be cherished and preserved.

Contrariwise, it is renown that material authenticity is not a priority for a large part of world cultures. In less ‘materialistic’ social contexts, ritual experiences and ceremonial practices connected to art are more important than the preservation of physical objects over time. Most Asian countries, for instance, interpret what is to be aesthetically valued in terms that are not reconcilable with our cult of originals. “The Chinese”, claims historian David Lowenthal “endorse tradition in language and ideas, but discard material remains or let them decay. Revering ancestral memory, they disdain the past’s purely physical traces; old works must perish for new ones to take their place.” (Lowenthal 1994, p. 63) This explains why many sanctuaries in the Far East are cyclically rebuilt, reconstructed, replicated, and relocated: in the context of local religiosity it is the *aspect* of the temple not its material configuration that hosts the divine force. The most famous example is the sanctuary of Ise, in Japan, whose two main shrines, *Naikū* and *Gekū*, mostly wooden, are completely rebuilt every twenty years on an adjoining site, in a long-standing renewal process called the *Sengu*<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> For an interesting cultural analysis of the Ise Shrine, see Nitschke (1993). “Natural time (time perceived as the eternal return of the seasons) is renewed by the cyclic

Referring to the case of Ise, the Korean-born philosopher Byung-Chul Han points out “a total inversion of the relationship between original and copy [...] The copy is more original than the original, because the older a building is, the more it distances itself from the original state” (Han 2017, p. 64). This is because the Far East, Han explains:

does not know the cult of the original. There, quite a different technique of preservation developed, which should be more effective than conservation or restoration. It is achieved by continuous replication. This technique totally overrides the difference between the original and the replica. One could also say that originals are preserved through copies (Han 2017, p. 67).

This discrepancy in cultural values has also led to a number of misunderstandings between China and Western museums. The Chinese, Han refers, often send copies abroad instead of originals, in the belief that they are not essentially different from the authentic artworks. The rejection that then comes from the Western museums is perceived by the Chinese as an insult (Han 2017, p. 64).

In fact, different approaches to art authenticity existed in our Western culture as well. Until the Renaissance, it was commonly assumed that

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reconstruction of Japan’s supreme sacred space, the shrine grounds of the imperial ancestors”. This process “resolve(s) the ultimate ‘disease’ of time, both historical and natural: the yearning for sacred authority and sacred architecture to be extremely ancient, yet always pristinely fresh.” (Nitschke 1993, 10)

excellent copies preserved the quality of the originals. Art historian Alexander Nagel reports a revealing anecdote in this regard. When asked by the art collector Vittoria Colonna for a painting in her possession, the noblewoman Isabella d'Este replied that she would be happy to send it once she had found enough time to get a copy made for herself (Nagel 2014, p. 27). This suggests that in 16<sup>th</sup> century even the most sophisticated art collectors still dealt quite naturally with the idea that great works could exist in copies. In that setting, copying was not a crime and forgery not even possible.

#### **4. Ontology, Authenticity and Conservation**

Though intercultural comparison can help shed light on the complex and stratified nature of aesthetic appreciation, I think that the social-constructionist way of setting the question of authenticity only thinks through half the issue. Our preference for authentic material art objects cannot be merely explained by reference to cultural, religious or sentimental values, as some contend. Of course, if we didn't have the values we have, restorers in Assisi would have never wasted their time reconstructing the puzzle of Cimabue's frescos, since conservation science – as *we* understand it – wouldn't exist as a practice in the first place. Rather, what renders the problem of material authenticity particularly relevant from a philosophical point of view, is that it is not only a contingent matter of beliefs or tastes, ancestral attitudes, fetishism or spiritual creeds – it has to do with our idea of what an artwork is in itself.

Here ontology comes into play. It seems that a strong connection exists between our demand for material authenticity and some deeply entrenched ideas we have about what artworks are ontologically. These received ideas can be seen as forming a ‘standard ontological view’ of artworks: a widespread set of notions which provide us with general answers to questions like: What is the mode of existence of works of art? What is their identity? – thus helping us find our way when it comes to appreciating art<sup>11</sup>. We can identify three concepts that figure as basic creeds in this standard view: the notion of the ‘artwork as a material object’ (1), the concept of the ‘original state’ of the artwork (2), and the notion of ‘change as damage’ (3).

Let us consider an example: take Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*. This painting is a very traditional instance of what we think a work of art is, i.e., in the first place, a *material object* – a singular, distinct, enduring artefact able to persist over time (1). We think that its existence as an object – a painted canvas – enables its existence as the corresponding work of art – *Mona Lisa*. As a consequence, we assume that the artwork can only remain consistent to itself, thus preserving its identity, as long as the object’s material components (the canvas, the oil paint) in their arrangement (the form and design) are preserved intact. ‘Intact’ means here as closest as possible to the alleged *original state*, the initial conditions the object had once the creative

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<sup>11</sup> What I am interested in are the presuppositions behind the way we think and act and that ground our experience with traditional art. This repertoire of intuitions embedded in our everyday artistic practices is what I mean by ‘common sense’.

act of its author, Leonardo, was completed (2), while the term ‘state’ refers to a description of the intrinsic, objective, measurable qualities of a work – primary qualities in John Locke’s sense. These qualities determine the identity of the artwork understood as the object’s material conformation. With reference to this original material conformation or state, all changes and material alterations the object is subjected to in time (pigments that tend to yellow by exposure to light and air, formation of the patina and so on) are considered a potential damage, a threat to the identity of the artwork that preservation science has the duty to fight against (3).

Clearly, the standard view puts much focus on the physical state of the artwork as an object and, therefore, on its material conformation. The original material of the artwork is indeed interpreted as that which contains evidence that enables the artwork’s authentication by providing us with a tangible trace left by a particular past. The relation between the artwork’s authenticity and its material depends on the following equation: that the better the materials are preserved with regard to the original state of the object, the more authentic the object will be, since authenticity *resides* within the work’s original material. Minimizing change to the material object means therefore minimizing loss of authenticity to the artwork. Alteration is tantamount to falsification.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This approach has found theoretical justification in the works of the Italians Camillo Boito and Giovanni Giovannoni, initiators of the so-called ‘scientific theory’ of conservation (Muñoz Viñas 2005). Boito and Giovannoni considered the safeguarding of the material integrity of an object the central principle of restoration – integrity understood as the physical features and material components of an object.

As a result, conservation is interpreted in the standard view as an intervention primarily aimed at retarding or preventing material deterioration, with a view to conserving the artwork's authenticity by means of preserving its original state as far as possible. Leaving aside all the possible concerns that this conception raises for conservation theory<sup>13</sup>, what is especially worth noting is that there is a clear connection between the underlying ontological framework we use to classify and describe an art object, how we view authenticity and the conservation theory we espouse (Laurenson 2006). If the ontological framework is focused on the material, so will the notion of authenticity. But if the ontological framework shifts, so will our concepts of authenticity. Accordingly, our notion of conservation will shift too.

#### **4.1. A Different Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual shift of this sort is not impossible in the future. In the next decades we might experience increasing confusion even in traditional arts over what counts as authentic, given that technologies may enable a proliferation of perfect replicas and copies. If the copying and reproducing tools for visual arts will ever approach the level of digital sound-transformation techniques, for instance, our interest in material authenticity may thereby be altered. If, for example, a molecule-by molecule 3d-print

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion on the problems engendered by this way of interpreting the role of conservation, see Muñoz Viñas (2005).

could ever be invented, anyone might end up having a Cimabue decorating the living room, and eventually we would come to accept this as normal. Advances in the arts, happened in the recent past, have already forced us to re-arrange our ontological framework. The standard view, for example, does not sit well with contemporary artforms such as installation, performance or conceptual art, which are both intangible and ephemeral. Moreover, given the increasing internationalization of all world cultures, it can be inferred that the European demand for authenticity will be diluted or compromised by competing cultural values.

From the point of view of conservation theory, these changes in paradigm may lead to an increasing awareness that focusing *only* on material authenticity no more suffices in many respects. This, of course, is not to say that conservators could ever ignore the material entity of an artwork. Indeed, there would be nothing left to contemplate if efforts to ensure the survival of an artwork's material substance were to cease. The point is that if a new conception of artworks emerges, along with a different perception of authenticity, the traditional materialistic notion of conservation may no longer appear effective. Relevantly, a change of this sort is already happening. Though the majority of European conservation policies, beginning with the Venice Charter, are still based on respect for the material authenticity of an object, understood "in terms of the very material present at the object's creation and the unchanged microscopic and macroscopic structure of that material" (Ashley-Smith 2009, p.20), spiritual and non-materialistic ideas on how to care for objects are nowadays increasingly present in codes of practice (Weiler and Gutschow 2017). In

the last two decades attempts have been made to move the focus of conservation away from the original material state of art objects. International conservation guidelines such as the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), for instance, have been explicitly drafted to shift the focus of conservation away from preserving original material substance to enhancing the more intangible properties of a work of art, “the thoughts and emotions” (Brajer 2009, 85) it evokes. Conservation is increasingly regarded as a social process: an activity “designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its safeguard and, as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement” (Weiler and Gutschow 2017, p. xxi).

This, however, has created a weird situation in which some monuments are today considered ‘authentic’ as a result of their reconstruction (Petzet 1994, p. 91). One paradigmatic example of this is the historic Old Town of Warsaw in Poland, which was completely rebuilt after its total destruction in World War II to the way it looked in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The thousands of tourists walking every year within the city center *see* the old Warsaw while crossing the late-medieval network of streets, squares, and corners, reminiscent of urban growth from centuries ago (Korsmeyer 2008, p.121). However, whilst wandering around the old city walls, they in fact *look at* an artifact that didn’t exist until the 1950s. There is no principled reason to oppose all this, but, interestingly, we still think that people should be warned that the objects they are looking at are the material outcome of modern rebuilding interventions (something that guidebooks are indeed quite clear about). If they aren’t, we assume that they would be

mislead in their appreciation of the artistic achievement they are presented with.

## **5. Conclusion**

What a society approves or disapproves in its dealings with art – how it understands art appreciation, evaluation, preservation – is largely determined by the cultural conceptions that have predominated in that society. In this regard, insisting on the fact that it should make no difference to us whether an artwork is authentic or not is just wishful thinking: it asks us to turn our backs on our cultural heritage and on the worth our society places on authenticity and the cult of genius. However, more than just a matter of cultural values and beliefs, our interest in material authenticity seems to depend on some deeply-entrenched ideas we have of what artworks are from an ontological point of view. These ideas, placing great value on the substance of which artworks are physically composed, inform our view of aesthetic appreciation and impinge directly on the way in which we interpret the purpose of conservation. At a time like this, when traditional values and ideals are being increasingly called into question by technological advances and intercultural comparison, I believe that we, philosophers, are urged to re-examine this kind of philosophical assumptions. In the future, we might have to completely redefine why and how we keep the objects of the past.

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# *The Unity of Our Aesthetic Life: A Crazy Suggestion*

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ABSTRACT. This paper is divided into five subsections, in the first of which I draw a few distinctions between related questions that fall under the notion of “aesthetic life”, following a brief discussion of the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical domains (using Colin McGinn’s “Aesthetic Theory of Virtue”), as well as the role of the non-perceptual in aesthetic experience. I contrast what I call a form of “conventional wisdom” in aesthetics (confinement of the aesthetic to the strictly perceptual), which I relate with formalism, explaining the difference between it and an anti-formalist stance, with recourse to concrete examples and illustrations. I then move to the final two subsections, where the nuclear ideas of this paper are put forward: drawing on an analogy with Jerrold Levinson’s treatment of the notion of intrinsic value, I propose a way of looking at the aesthetic domain in which 1) aesthetic features are experienced, in the more particular sense of “lived” rather than being “perceived”, 2) the non-perceptual is given at least as much importance as the perceptual, 3) our search for agreement and normative aspirations in aesthetics are given “unity” by connecting each particular instance of aesthetic experience with our tacit evaluations of a “life-being-a-certain-way”. This idea is given content by exploring McGinn’s treatment of “Nabokov’s Formula”: that the experience of beauty “puts us in contact with certain ideals”.

## **1. Unity of What?**

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First of all, a few words of clarification. At least two issues might come to mind when one thinks of “the unity” of some such thing as our “aesthetic life”: on the one hand, the issue of how aesthetics fits into our lives as a whole, what relations it has with other important aspects of our lives, in sum, the unity of aesthetics *and* life. Another way to say this is to ask: in what ways is our “aesthetic life” connected with our “life” under different aspects, for instance, how is one’s aesthetic life connected with one’s moral life? And why such emphasis on the notion of a *life*? Why not simply ask about the connections between aesthetics and morals, or whatever? Can we delimit, in our lives, that part which is “aesthetic” and that which is not? On the other hand, there is the unity of “the aesthetic” itself, that is, the issue of whether there is a unified class of phenomena, concepts, experiences, etc., that we refer to when we employ the notion of “aesthetic”, which is to say: is “the aesthetic” a cohesive notion? Either of these issues is quite a challenge by itself! So, we better draw a few lines if we don’t want to be completely at loss.

## **2. Aesthetics and Ethics**

Allow me to start with a reference from “pop culture”. There is this particular moment in the TV series *Hannibal* (season 3, episode 1) that has lingered in my mind since I’ve seen it. This is the moment when Bedelia says to Hannibal “You have no longer ethical concerns, Hannibal. You have aesthetic ones”, to which he replies, “Ethics become aesthetics”. Several puzzling ideas are evoked by this exchange: is it possible for a rational

being (however much of a sociopath) to have aesthetic concerns while totally devoid of ethical ones? What does it mean for ethics to become aesthetics? Is he agreeing with her statement? Is he qualifying it in some way? Should one read “becomes” as in “it gives way to”, or does it refer to a change in our beliefs, as in our realizing that some connection between ethics and aesthetics was there all along?

Now, I am sure not much thought was put into that combination of words (and why should it?) beyond the fact that it makes for a good-sounding sequence; not unlike one might say of Keats’ poem *Ode to a Grecian Urn*: that it sounds really great (and equally mysterious) to end with “beauty is truth, truth beauty...” even though it is, as Nick Zangwill pointed out, a counter-example to itself, namely, a beautiful false statement – not to imply that Keats didn’t put much thought into it, of course. Likewise, “ethics become aesthetics” could be just that: not a counter-example to itself, but a false statement that sounds good.

However, it also captured my attention the fact that the character Hannibal followed a kind of code in selecting at least some of his victims: these tend to be *rude* individuals or people who end up triggering his murderous dispositions by performing some kind of unsavoury deed or who display unpleasant traits of character. And this in turn is interesting: besides satisfying his ritualistic need for the consumption of human flesh, Hannibal seems moved by a concern to diminish the amount of rudeness in the world, on the one hand, much in the manner that a writer, musician or painter may be concerned with increasing the amount of aesthetic goodness in the world, by removing undesired aesthetic effects from a line of text, a sequence of

music or a pictorial arrangement so that his concern seems eminently aesthetic, but, on the other hand, the target of his aesthetic judgement is... a moral quality or a set of morally relevant qualities. And here, so it seems, is an example of ethics becoming aesthetics! Hannibal as a moral aesthete! The statement doesn't seem so outlandish if there is a firm connection between moral qualities and aesthetic ones, just as there is such a connection between colours, shapes and timbres and aesthetic qualities of pictures or pieces of music. But what could that connection be?

One suggestion that I find fruitful was made by Roger Scruton in Chapter 16 of his *Art and Imagination* and Chapter 12 of his *Aesthetics of Music*. Specifically, Scruton's position is that there is a continuity between the moral and the aesthetic in that complex affair which is the exercise of taste as a "systematic posture in the life of the rational being" (1997, 386), as opposed to mere "refined choosiness" (*ibid*) or "arbitrary preference" (1998, 247). And it is in this notion of the exercise of taste as a systematic posture in *life* that the core idea of this paper finds its expression. The idea is that both aesthetic and moral valuation are properly mediated by the concept of *a life* (so both must be seen as concomitant parts of the same process), and that we fail to grasp the nature and boundaries of aesthetic valuation unless we see it in its appropriate context, as an ingredient of *a life being lived in a certain way* (an idea I take from Jerrold Levinson, as explained further ahead). How this is so is what I expect to have been made clearer at the end. However, it is important to note that Scruton's point is not that aesthetic valuation is moral valuation in disguise; the point is rather that normative attitudes form a mutually sustaining web. Nor does the idea of a

continuity between the aesthetic and moral point of view imply that moral and aesthetic valuation cannot diverge, that “aesthetically discriminating moral brutes and aesthetically blind moral saints” (Zangwill 2015, 165) are conceptually impossible. But let us put such details aside for now.

### **3. “Conventional Wisdom” in Aesthetics and the Role of the Non-perceptual**

In carrying out the aforementioned task, I must draw attention to a book that deals with these issues in a quite unconventional manner, or, perhaps more accurately, sets forth insights and draws conclusions that go against the grain of what I shall call “conventional wisdom” in aesthetics. This book is *Ethics, Evil and Fiction*, by Colin McGinn (2003). There are many interesting aspects to this book, but I want to emphasize only three of them: 1) the Aesthetic Theory of Virtue (ATV), 2) Nabokov’s Formula, and 3) Pan-aestheticism.

Before explaining each of these items, a sketch of what I am calling “conventional wisdom” in aesthetics is in order.

- a) Only things that can be perceived by the senses are objects of aesthetic judgement.
  
- b) Deployment of aesthetic predicates to describe the non-perceptual is not a genuinely aesthetic use of language.

c) Aesthetic experience, if there is such a thing, is detached from the flow of ordinary experience and judgements expressing such experiences take a restricted domain of objects as their “targets”, namely, works of art, and, occasionally, natural objects.

This is more or less an inherited picture of what our “aesthetic life” looks like. What I shall do now is try to show how those three elements I highlighted from McGinn’s book allow us to draw a very different picture of our “aesthetic life”.

Very briefly, the ATV is an attempt at reviving the idea of “beauty of soul” – more precisely, the idea that non-perceptual things like thoughts, traits of character and even persons or minds – “souls” – are as much objects of aesthetic predication as natural landscapes and paintings and pieces of music; Nabokov’s formula is the idea that beauty puts us in contact with certain ideals, specifically, with the ideal of a world where “art is the norm” and thus that to experience some particular object or event aesthetically involves more than just a causal route from perception to pleasure or displeasure; and, finally, pan-aestheticism, in McGinn’s own words, tells us that:

There is a tendency for people to think of the aesthetic in much too narrow terms, as if it included only what is to be found in museums and art galleries, along with natural landscapes. But the aesthetic

permeates almost every experience a human being has, and at many levels. We are aesthetic beings through and through; we apprehend the world through aesthetic eyes. Not only are other people perceived aesthetically, so are animals of other species. Not only are buildings and sculptures aesthetic objects, so are kitchen knives and screwdrivers and stereo systems. Speech acts have aesthetic properties. Ideas and thoughts do too. It is hard to name anything that lacks an aesthetic dimension, positive or negative. (McGinn 2003, 121)

Let us start with pan-aestheticism, which is, in a way, connected with the first item of the three. Now, what McGinn says may be all well and good, but how does it actually work?

This is a very contentious issue, since there is not a single uniquely plausible account of aesthetic experience, and the very notion of aesthetic experience has famously been subjected to sceptic criticism. My intention is merely to give an example of what an account compatible with pan-aestheticism would look like. But before I do that, a few remarks on the notion of “aesthetic property”. One way to characterize aesthetic experience would be as experience *of* aesthetic qualities of things. But what is it for something to have an “aesthetic property” or “quality”? Consider the remark: “Imagine this butterfly exactly as it is, but ugly instead of beautiful” (taken from Wittgenstein’s *Zettel*, 199, in 1970, 36e). This remark hits upon the fact that while we can perfectly well imagine the butterfly being red instead of blue and most likely still beautiful (assuming we experience it as

beautiful to start with), we cannot even start to conceive how it could change its aesthetic qualities without any change in its other properties (colour, shape, texture, etc.) Furthermore, we can experience each of its non-aesthetic features in isolation from each other – the blue apart from its shape, its shape apart from its texture, etc. But there is something oxymoronic in the idea of perceiving its beauty in isolation from its other features. And one possible explanation for this is that, strictly speaking, we don't *perceive* beauty at all, like we perceive the wing-shape and its pattern of black and blue (assume the butterfly in question is a specimen of *papilio zalmoxis*), though we certainly *experience* beauty in some way, and an important element of that experience is the *pleasure* or *delight* we feel in experiencing the characteristics of the object.

Some aestheticians have characterized this aspect of aesthetic experience in terms of supervenience between properties: aesthetic properties supervene on non-aesthetic “base” properties, on which they depend, and two things cannot differ aesthetically without also differing non-aesthetically (a view that ultimately traces back to Sibley (1959), though he speaks there of “concepts”, not “properties” and does not use the term “supervenience” – for a more recent view of the cohesion of the aesthetic in terms of supervenience, see Zemach 1997 and Zangwill 1998). With this way of framing the relation between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, we could diagrammatically represent the contrast between the aesthetic formalist and the aesthetic anti-formalist in terms of what kinds of properties can be taken as non-aesthetic “base” properties giving rise to aesthetic properties. The formalist will typically include perceptual

properties only, while the anti-formalist will also include non-perceptual ones, such as, for instance, features things have in virtue of their context or their history of production, representational properties, and such.

Although a clear-cut distinction between a formalist and an anti-formalist approach is a contentious issue (partly because of the difficulty of discerning “form” and “content”; partly because there are as many stripes of formalism as there are ways of understanding “form”), we can say that formalism tends to focus on what can be immediately perceived on a given work, in detriment of its farther-reaching ties with the world, with life at large, placing “form” within this secluded realm and seeing its boundaries as marking out the aesthetic itself. It was summed up by Clive Bell in these oft-quoted words from his “The Aesthetic Hypothesis”: “The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions.” (in Harrison & Wood 1992, 115)

Formalism notwithstanding, one putative example of the history of production clearly determining the aesthetic quality of the end product is to be found in the world of folk songs. *Shoals of Herring* was composed by Ewan MacColl for a 1960 BBC documentary called *Singing the Fishing*, about the herring fishing fleets of East Anglia and Northeast Scotland. One of the aesthetically relevant features of that song is that MacColl didn’t actually *wrote* its text (according to the story of the song told by Liam Clancy, one of the song’s many well-known interpreters) but rather put together the words of fishermen themselves, out of the many tapes of

conversation with fishermen and their families, that were recorded for the documentary. (“*Oh, we left the home grounds in the month of June, and to Canny Shields we soon were bearin’, with a hundred cran of the silver darlings, that we’d taken from the shoals of herring...*”) From that mesh of words and testimonies, MacColl *assembled* the text of the ballad, the paradigm folk song to fit Oscar Isaac’s description in the Coen brother’s movie *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013): “If it was never new and it never gets old, then it’s a folk song” – and part of this is achieved by its being the result of such a peculiar “production process”. Though a formalist, out of unwavering loyalty for the “conventional wisdom” picture of aesthetics, might want to argue that these facts about provenance do not bear on the aesthetic qualities of the song, I find that impossibly counterintuitive.



**Figure 1:** João Serra, *View of Apatity* (Murmansk Oblast, Russia), *The North as Place*.

To illustrate the difference between the formalist and anti-formalist approaches more fully, I invite the reader to look at the photograph in Fig.1. It is an aerial view of urban landscape in Apatity, a town in Murmansk Oblast, Russia. It was taken by a photographer friend of mine, for the duration of a project called *The North as Place*. Now, without any further information, we can approach the photograph by noting how the central mass of grey buildings functions as a background to that open “wound” of the torn red brick buildings in the front. We could develop such an approach in similar terms, reaching for metaphors and allusions with which to stress and bring forward the aesthetic merits of the image. But consider now the

following extra-pictorial information: the torn red brick buildings date from the Stalinist era and have remained a part of the urban landscape despite previous (failed) attempts at demolition (a rather expensive process); the central “smudge” of grey buildings are from the Khrushchov era; to the right we have a few taller buildings (and of lesser quality) dating from the Brezhnev era; and finally, to the left, hardly visible on the left centre edge of the picture, one can spot a tiny yellow supermarket of the Putin era. Now, I ask the reader: does the image look *aesthetically different* to you, given that information? Why? As far as I’m concerned, it is as impossibly counterintuitive to claim that the information makes no aesthetic difference as it is to claim that it makes no difference for the song in our previous example to have been assembled from the words of fishermen. Maybe even more so. There is no doubting that the image *looks* different to one who knows the relevant information. The photograph as an achievement, and in fact, as an artistic object, looks different depending on what approach we take towards the role played by the extra-pictorial information. There is even an important sense in which the intentions of the artist, which are a non-perceptual element of the situation, might bear on the aesthetic quality of the picture. That the audience is presented with this layered glimpse of soviet history, condensed in this abstracted moment from the life of the present, by an intentional, directed action of the artist, seems to make it a better *aesthetic achievement* than it being the pure outcome of chance (the necessity of the artist being aware of it *at the moment of creation* (in this case, at the moment the photograph is taken), of course, can be the subject of dispute. But whatever our stance on these two examples, they allow us to

see the difference between a “conventional wisdom” approach to aesthetics, that I am here associating with formalism, and a view of aesthetics that widens the scope of what phenomena or aspects of things count as aesthetic or contribute to their aesthetic quality.

These were two simple examples of how the non-perceptual may bear on the aesthetic qualities of an object, when we drop what I have been calling the “conventional wisdom” view of the aesthetic domain. Both are less “radical” examples than what McGinn proposes, but they can all be understood to lie on the same *continuum*: the two examples invite us to enlarge the determination base of aesthetic qualities so as to include non-perceptual features, so that perceptual features in conjunction with non-perceptual ones may be aesthetically relevant. One can accept this while maintaining that perceptual features are always necessary for something to have aesthetic qualities, and that non-perceptual features may or may not be relevant, depending on their connection with perceptual features.

But how serious (and how radically) is pan-aestheticism to be taken? In the previous examples, the changes introduced don’t take place at the “upper level” of aesthetic properties – those remain the same, nothing changes there – but at the “ground level”, in terms of what non-aesthetic features of things will fix their aesthetic qualities, and what kinds of things can be the bearers of aesthetic qualities. The photograph may be more “dramatic” or “ironic” or whatever, for instance, in virtue of the non-pictorial (non-perceptual) information, but this represents no change in the concept of “dramatism” or “irony”; rather it is a widening of scope in the things we count towards the picture’s “dramatism” or “irony” – or any other

of its aesthetic qualities or cluster of aesthetic qualities. In other words, nothing in the concept of beauty or other aesthetic qualities is changed by our applying it to the non-perceptual in some combination with the perceptual.

What clashes with conventional wisdom and may strike one as bizarre in this is the suggestion of ideas, thoughts and minds (or “souls”) figuring as bearers of aesthetic properties, because this is the idea of something having aesthetic qualities without having any perceptual qualities. How strikingly evocative of that same strangeness of imagining the butterfly’s beauty in the absence of its other features! And this strangeness partly explains the reluctance of attributing aesthetic features to the non-perceptual. One may ask, accordingly, what could “beauty of soul” possibly mean, if it means anything at all. But in asking this one is overlooking the fact that neither do we have a clear idea of what “the butterfly is beautiful” exactly means, apart from the vivid phenomenological link between experience of the butterfly’s perceptual properties and the delight we feel in experiencing them. So, on what grounds exactly do we exclude the idea of moral beauty (or moral ugliness) from the realm of aesthetics? People express their character and personality in actions, gestures, utterances, demeanour, and these can hardly be described as things devoid of features that can be appreciated aesthetically. That being so, on what grounds are moral qualities, embodied in concrete gestures excluded from playing a role in aesthetic appreciation? The element of pleasure and displeasure in such qualities as embodied in concrete gestures seems as phenomenologically vivid as the pleasure we may feel in beholding the perceptual qualities of the butterfly. What

precludes our concern with the rudeness of gesture from being as thoroughly aesthetic as a concern with discord, or words and musical notes that seem “out of place”?

One can experience this effect most clearly, I believe, with certain specific examples in artworks, but only because they bring into focus something that is commonly experienced in everyday life. Consider the sequence in the movie by Yasujiro Ozu, *Tokyo Story* (1953), when, during a meal following their mother’s funeral, the eldest sister in the family, Shige, repeatedly asks about clothes she could take for herself as keepsakes, moving to this topic immediately after expressing concern over her father’s solitude. I like to observe this sequence under McGinn’s metaphor of “moral chords”, as somehow a musical sequence, in which some of the notes sound “out of tune”, due to the sense of moral discord they give rise to, a sense of ugliness that cannot be reduced to anything strictly perceptual about the characters and their setting. (The situation is complicated by the fact that the ugliness resides not in the film sequence, but in what it represents, though the film represents beautifully the ugliness that momentarily is brought to our awareness; and this reinforces the idea that beauty is more complex than a matter of pleasurable sensations following perceptual stimuli.) The effect is at once ethic and aesthetic, rather than that of a situation with certain moral properties and certain aesthetic properties, wholly unrelated to each other. Of course, this could be the onset of an endless “war of intuitions”, in which I will be represented by the “other side” as merely begging the question against the “aesthetic autonomist”. And I see no easy way to break the circle, since the deadlock pretty much depends on the notion of the

aesthetic one starts with. So, what we must do, as I see it, is to choose that notion which seems to us more enlightening or explanatory... But even here there is no guarantee that we won't fall back into a circle of "intuitions". Nonetheless, examples like this sequence of "wrong moral notes" generating a kind of musical discord help us make more vivid the key idea that aesthetics is not merely a question of reacting with pleasure or displeasure to perceptual stimuli, but rather lies in the continuous exercise of "taste" as a faculty not akin to mere sense perception or the ability to feel pleasure and displeasure, but something we *do* and *undergo* as subjects of a *life* and that cannot be done nor undergone by any being that is not, in like manner, the subject of a life. What does this mean, however? Surely not the trivial notion that one must be alive in order to experience things aesthetically, since being alive is a condition of experiencing things *tout court*.

#### **4. The Aesthetic: Lived Rather than Simply Perceived**

The relevant notion of *life* to be used here is that of being an individual with a *history*, a history that is as much his or her own as it is rooted in the common history of many individuals, such that each individual history shares certain "structural" properties: we all "develop", go through childhood, become adults, grow old; we share a sense of origin and of our own finitude; we cooperate in maintaining practices, languages, cultures, a sense of shared experience through time – which doesn't mean that much of that shared experience isn't adversarial in nature: it surely is. Still, what I wish to emphasize is that *living one's life* is something that unavoidably

involves joint action, shared goals, cooperation, and not just a sequence of “private” experiences. A life involves experiences, actions, facts, many of which go way beyond the boundaries of one’s own “private” experience. A life is much more than a mere sequence of subjective experiences that a living organism has: it is something that plays a certain role in the lives of others (whose lives play a role in our own) and all jointly play a role in some larger process, far more complex than the life of a single individual. Also, one crucial element in our “aesthetic life” is that we constantly *seek agreement* in aesthetic matters (we have *normative expectations* regarding the aesthetic), and that such agreement *matters* to us at least as much as any pleasurable feeling we might draw from experiencing this or that: “... we speak of what is appropriate only where there exists some established practice (...) with its body of generalities and rules.” (Scruton 1998, 247)

However, to experience things aesthetically is something that always occurs in *individual conscience*, no matter how much that conscience must be buttressed by forms of joint action and shared experience and no matter how crucially important our normative expectations (expectations towards collective agreement) in aesthetic matters are. Aesthetic judgement or experience is something that each one of us both *does* and *undergoes* in the same ineluctably “solitary” way that one must experience both pleasure and pain and any other sensations. Using Nick Zangwill’s words, “We can listen to music together in the sense of going to a concert together, just as we can eat together when we sit down to a meal with each other. This is joint action. But we cannot listen to music together any more than we can taste food together.” (2015, 155)

It is thus as subjects of *a* life, a particular life, namely *one's own* life (though also as examples of the *kind* of beings that are subjects of lives, and thus similar in many fundamental ways), that things appear to us endowed with aesthetic features. This requires us to abandon the idea of modelling “aesthetic properties” in terms of other properties such as the roundness and whiteness of this coffee cup in front of me. As one grows old and accumulates experiences and knowledge, one is able to make many different *associations* between the colour white and a vast array of other things – whiteness acquires a wider range of *symbolic properties* for us, and this may be a relevant ingredient of aesthetic experiences. But our ability to experience the cup as white and round is pretty much the same from the moment we become able to discern objects visually. No matter how much subtler and more nuanced my symbolic associations with whiteness become, my ability to see the cup as white is no different than it was twenty years ago, or since I became able to discern colours. Of course, visual acuity varies with time and circumstances, but this is irrelevant to the experience of whiteness itself – more or less blurred, the experience of the cup as white is essentially the same. By contrast, I know as a fact that my ability to experience things aesthetically is not the same, in this sense, that it was twenty years ago. Sure, my tastes in music and such things did not change radically (they hardly changed at all, despite the fact that I know more of the “genres” that attract me); however, there are many things that I am able to *see aesthetically* that I wasn't before. This is an experience with which people are most obviously acquainted with in the case of literature: the experience of reading the same novel again with an interval of several years.

One example could be that of fully appreciating the irony of a certain passage. Likewise, appreciating the elegance or graciousness of a gesture requires more than visual acuity, or being endowed with the distinguishing features of the “standard observer” in “standard conditions of observation”. The aesthetic faculty, in a way, grows with us, although developing aesthetic sensitivity is not strictly a matter of psychological “maturity”. Aesthetic blindness can perfectly well coexist with psychological maturity: a “fully developed” adult with perfect visual acuity may yet fail to notice how certain colours and shapes fail to “go together”, resulting in an imbalance, for instance. This is what made the gustatory metaphor of “taste” and a sustained exercise of taste over time (the discernment of what “goes together”) so compelling, from Burke and Hume to Sibley and our own times. And yet, the elegance and irony of a gesture must differ so much from the bitterness of an ale or the dryness of Port wine as they differ from the whiteness of the coffee cup, in the same measure that they resemble the bitterness of an expression. The point of the metaphor lies in the fact that the enjoyable qualities of a good meal are, to an extent, the result of a previous history of such experiences.

Anyway, the point here is to try and get the reader to see the inadequacy of modelling “aesthetic properties” on other “metaphysically respectable” properties by appealing to notions of “standard conditions of observation” and “supervenience” or “co-variation” between properties, as if the mere description of the aesthetic realm under those concepts was *the* expedient that finally confers upon aesthetics its so desired epistemic probity. Under this model, elegance is “out there” in the world, emerging

from certain combinations of non-aesthetic properties and accessible to the “standard observer” in “standard conditions of observation”. To see things aesthetically, though, is nothing like seeing the cup as a round white object of a certain volume... in standard conditions of observation. The elegance (or other aesthetic features) of a tea cup or a building, for instance, is a far cloudier matter that involves an active exercise of the imagination, by beings who, like ourselves, are not only capable of forming beliefs about their environment, but also *desires* regarding it and what it contains. Furthermore, we also interpret the appearance of things as impacting our desires in certain ways. (The importance I give *desire* here pretty much echoes what Eddy Zemach says in *Real Beauty* (1997) – see the whole of Chapter 5, “The ontology of aesthetic properties” –, minus the “realist ontology” he goes on to offer, making generous use of the notion of supervenience). Thus, the *sublime* in some earthly or cosmic event, a natural catastrophe or the starry sky, does not issue from some relation of co-variation between properties “out there” – the sublimity is wholly a feature of *our* relation with the world and how it impacts our desires; namely: what defies *our* normal cognitive abilities, our capacities of representation, our normal intelligence, the temporal and physical boundaries of our existence, our lives. Something is sublime in part because of the devastating effect it could have on our desires – desire to know, to overcome an obstacle, to persist in existence, etc. The starry sky is sublime partly because of how small *we* are in comparison and given the limits of our understanding; the Everest is sublime because of its dimensions relative to us. But it is not a sheer matter of relative dimensions; it is crucially a matter of the

*imagination*. The sublimity of Mount Everest does not reside merely in the brute fact that its dimensions greatly surpass that of a human being; it crucially depends on how it engages our imagination, and there are many aspects to that engagement: how climbing it is a feat of human ingenuity, physical endurance and probably madness; how it makes us think of the forces of nature in relation to us generally; and a host of such “imaginative aspects”. A feature such as sublimity could not be in starker contrast to such properties as the whiteness of the coffee cup, whose understanding must include some reference to the structure of our perceptive organs but in no way requires the engagement of the imagination that seeing something as sublime, as elegant or as *wabi-sabi* (or whatever aesthetic feature you can think of) requires, for to interpret the appearance of things in their relation to our desires *is* a feat of the imagination, no matter how spontaneous or “unprimed” it may be. (For a critical view on attempts to base “aesthetic realism” on the notion of supervenience, including Zemach’s, to the effect that appeals to supervenience, as they stand, can be set aside for Wittgensteinian aspect perception, see Benjamin Tilghman’s “Reflections on Aesthetic Judgement” (2006, 161-172)).

## **5. Aesthetic Platonism without Plato: The “Beautiful Life” as Idea of Beauty**

The suggestion I have been making takes inspiration from a paper by Jerrold Levinson (2006) titled “Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life”, in which

the author deals with the issue of what can be the object of “sustainable judgements of intrinsic value” (p. 400). In this paper, Levinson proposes that a certain kind of complex object is the only one susceptible of being the bearer of intrinsic value: *lives-being-certain-ways*. Not the abstract notion of life as such, the idea that life in itself has intrinsic value, but that concrete ways that a richly sentient life unfolds are the only *bona fide* candidates to be bearers of intrinsic value. Levinson divides accounts of intrinsic value into two varieties: object-based accounts and experience-based accounts (*ibidem*), that is, accounts that ascribe intrinsic value to external objects and accounts that ascribe intrinsic value to subjective experiences. His proposal is that due to the impossibility of preserving the value of a thing or experience while detaching it from the context that gives rise to such value, *lives-being-certain-ways* are the only kind of complex, encompassing entities that can really have intrinsic value, because they encompass both objects and experiences, and a robust link to reality that seems to be relevant in the assessment of an experience’s value. Roughly, it is the idea that experiences are episodes in a life, and two lives made up of similar experiential episodes may nonetheless determine a difference of value between such experiences, so that, for instance, two samples of the same kind of pleasure may have widely differing values when inserted in the context of actual lives being certain ways. One corollary of this is that not even beauty or the experience of beauty turn out to have intrinsic value, except when seen in the context of a life being a certain way. The value of beauty is undetachable from the notion of a life which is enriched by the presence of beauty in specific circumstances. There is also a potentially

useful analogy here between object-based accounts and experience-based accounts of intrinsic value being subsumed in the notion of a life being a certain way, and accounts of aesthetic value that focus either on properties of objects in the world or on properties of subjective experiences: it suggests that both suffer from the same one-sidedness that supposedly plague accounts of intrinsic value. The idea is that the aesthetic will only emerge when certain properties of both objects and experiences are *integrated* into something with a wider purpose.

One way, perhaps, of making these ideas somewhat less ethereal is perhaps to think in terms of the mechanism described by Scruton in his paper “In Search of the Aesthetic” (2007), which we can characterize as the mechanism through which “pan-aestheticism” actually works in our lives. In that paper, Scruton describes what he calls a process of eliminating redundancies, those rational choices that are left when all practical and utilitarian decisions have been made. As an illustration of this process, he makes use of the Wittgensteinian example of a carpenter deciding on how to make a door frame so that it will “fit” the environment, associating “door-shapes with specific forms of social life, with ways of entering and leaving a room, with styles of dress and behaviour” (p. 244). This is an instance of the human need to organize our environment so that appearances of things around us are invested with meaning, imprinting our “mark on the world”, so to speak. The practice of art can thus be seen as an extension of this all-pervasive concern in “everyday aesthetic matters”. The purpose of “eliminating redundancies” is that of fitting the appearances in our environments into *styles*, that invest such appearances with meaning, in a

myriad subtle ways. And what I'm proposing here is that such process can perhaps be fruitfully seen as a microcosm version of the more basic process of fitting aspects of our lives into meaningful patterns that make up a style, a meaningful way for a life to be, and that would be a picture that captures the unity or continuity between both dimensions of our acts of valuation: ethical and aesthetical.

Whether he is right or wrong about the nature of intrinsic value, one aspect that Levinson's paper leaves open is that of what the specific ways a life is that make it intrinsically valuable are (there is no presumption of a *single* way a life can be that makes it so, lest we find ourselves staunchly committed to the aesthetics of socialist realism). And the suggestion I'm going to make now will probably have as a consequence that McGinn's ATV will seem, by contrast, much more plausible, in light of the preposterousness of my own suggestion. And that suggestion is a further widening of scope of the things that may figure as bearers of aesthetic qualities and targets of aesthetic judgement. I propose that *lives-being-certain-ways* are, in their turn, the bearers of aesthetic qualities, and that the ways a life can be that make it intrinsically valuable are those ways that amount to... *a beautiful life*. And now that we have crossed entirely into the realm of craziness, I can close by suggesting a possible way of making all this slightly more intelligible (or wildly crazier) by connecting it with the second item in the list of features I pointed out from McGinn's book: Nabokov's formula.

The idea that specific instances of beauty put us in contact with certain ideals, namely, ideals of a world where art is the norm (McGinn 2003, 110)

can be translated into the notion that the ideal of a *beautiful life* (the kind of thing that must, of necessity, include moral beauty) implicitly guides or informs our aesthetic experience, so that our “aesthetic endeavours”, in and outside of the restricted domain of art, can be seen as a fulfilment of Beardsley’s suggestion that “in creating works of art we humanize the earth as we can in no other way, warming it for ourselves and making it a place where we belong” (1982, 370), which in turn connects with Scruton’s remarks on aesthetic interest being essentially tied with the endeavour of making for ourselves a home, a place in the world where we belong. In other words, a beautiful object is more than an occasion for pleasure in perceptual features. The unity of a beautiful object, the cohesion of its aesthetic features, is, in this suggestion, also as if an intimation the unity of a beautiful life, which is, among other things, the idea of a harmonious combination of moral qualities, or in McGinn’s musical metaphor, a harmonious blend of “ethical chords” (2003, 102). We can find roughly the same idea, though in a marxist framework, in Herbert Marcuse (1978): his critique of “orthodox” marxist aesthetics, by which he places “the political potential of art in art itself, in the aesthetic form as such” (p. ix); this “aesthetic form”, a “dimension of truth, protest and promise” (p. xii), as “subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation” (p. xi); in other words: “aesthetic form” as, once again, that which puts us in contact with certain ideals; an “invocation of the beautiful image (*schöner Schein*) of liberation” (p. 6); and the same basic idea could undoubtedly be given many more different, more or less ideologically inflected versions.

Of course, this idea is not without its challenges. Consider the futurist's "aestheticization" of war (in Benjamin's phrase), and their adherence, however troubled and uneven, to fascist politics. When Paul Nash painted *We are Making a New World*, in 1918, a painting which gives us a bleak, desolating image of the outcome of the first world war, an indictment of senseless destruction, did he have the same understanding of "beauty" that Marinetti had while penning the words of the "Manifesto for the Colonial War in Ethiopia", quoted in the epilogue of "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin 2007, 339)? If futurist works put us in contact with any ideals, these do not seem remotely to accord with anything Beardsley or McGinn have described; surely not with the words by Nabokov whence McGinn derived the eponymous "formula": "For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm." (Nabokov 1991, 314) Whatever notion of a life-being-a-certain-way might have given the futurists a sense of beauty in "spirals of smoke from burning villages", in a state of permanent conflict, aggression, and acceleration, to experience more beauty in the roar of an engine than in a winged *nike* of classical antiquity, it surely has little to do with tenderness and kindness.

And with this we are curiously lead back to the original problem: that of aesthetic objectivity, how to ground our normative aspirations concerning aesthetic judgement, our continual striving towards agreement. It seems that to answer the questions of the previous paragraph we must ask this one:

what is *wrong* about those ways a life can be from whose viewpoint the aesthetics of futurism looks and sounds not only a “live option” (in James’ sense), but also appealing and compelling? What is *right* about a way a life can be from whose viewpoint one is put in a position to see it as Nash saw it? So, quite appropriately, as one may see, our aesthetic concerns bring us back full circle to our moral concerns. Both “form part of a continuum of normative opinions which mutually sustain one another” (Scruton 1998, 247). We experience things aesthetically as moral beings, and make moral valuations as aesthetic beings. Like fishes becoming birds becoming fishes, in an M. C. Escher print, “ethics and aesthetics are one”.

## **6. As if Concluding... Though Not Really**

After having made all these observations and “crazy suggestions”, I must also say that their full significance is still, for me, something that is undergoing a process of “being fitted into a meaningful pattern”. I cannot pretend to have a full grasp of the intuitions I have basically hoarded here, and yet neither can I avoid the feeling that they pull us in a fruitful direction... The right direction? Towards... What? I don’t quite know yet. Most importantly, I have literally run out of time to say anything else... For now.

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# *A Critique of Susanne Langer's View of Musical Temporality*

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ABSTRACT. Susanne Langer's idea of the primary apparition of music involves a dichotomy between two kinds of temporality: "felt time" and "clock time." For Langer, musical time is exclusively felt time, and in this sense, music is "time made audible." However, Langer also postulates what we would call 'a strong suspension thesis': the swallowing up of clock time in the illusion of felt time. In this paper we take issue with the 'strong suspension thesis' and its implications and ramifications regarding not only musical meaning, but also the purported metaphysics of music construed as essentially inhering in felt time. We argue that this thesis is overstated and misdirecting insofar as it purports to describe what we experience when we hear music with understanding. We discuss a selection of examples of repetitive formations, from mediaeval music to contemporary music, which show that persistent, motion-inhibiting repetition undermines the listener's ability to identify order and coherence due to a relative inability to anticipate the next occurrence of a differentiating musical event. We argue that Langer's one-sided view of musical temporality, which patently relies on the

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conceptual framework of memory time and the specious present, exemplifies what we propose to call 'the searchlight model of musical understanding,' wherein the constant span of illumination of the searchlight (representing the span of the specious present) moves continuously parallel to, and along, its postulated target, i.e., the music heard, as it 'illuminates' it. We argue that, in the last analysis, memory time conceptually presupposes the publicly identifiable means of chronometric length. One maintains the 'strong suspension thesis' on pain of conceptual confusion.

Susanne Langer's philosophy of art retains an enduring appeal as a thoroughly systematic, beautifully laid out, overarching theory of the arts. In particular with regard to music, her theorizing still stands out in its bold, quintessentially Romantic yet clear-headed insistence on relating what is meaningful in music to organic vitality.

In this paper, we would like to show our indebtedness to Langer's ideas by critically addressing her view of musical temporality, a profound topic that has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention over the last sixty-five years. Profound ideas may show their mettle by giving rise to deep problems, which in turn may become conducive to new and fruitful lines of investigation. We believe that Langer's view of musical temporality is a fine example of this.

Let us begin by offering a precis of Langer's view. In her books *Form and Feeling* (Langer 1953) and *Problems of Art* (Langer 1957), Langer put forward the idea that the realm of music is characterized by the appearance of movement. It is what Langer calls the "primary apparition" of music, which is created whenever tonal materials beget a musical impression. Such

motion—which, Langer maintains, is best captured in Eduard Hanslick's phrase "sounding forms in motion"—is the essence of music. It is the answer to the philosophical question "what is music?" This answer hinges upon a sharp distinction between what Langer calls the *ingredients* or *materials* of music, and the *elements* of music. Musical materials are "sounds of a certain pitch, loudness, overtone mixture, and metronomic length" (Langer 1957, p. 39). Musical elements are "figures, motions, and what we call 'colors,' 'spaces,' tensions and resolutions, resting tones, emptiness, beginnings and ends" (ibid.).

Regarding musical temporality, this sharp distinction between materials and elements entails a sharp distinction between two kinds of temporality: correspondingly, "clock time" and "felt time." For Langer, clock time is a matter of chronometric length, a simple one-dimensional trickle of successive moments. It is ordinary, practical, "commonsense," and in its systematically refined form, it is also scientific. Clock time is public in the sense that "it is the only adequate scheme we know of for synchronizing practical affairs, dating past events, and constructing some perspective of future ones" (Langer 1953, p. 111). It relies on supplementing one sort of experience by another. Hence, it is composite and heterogeneous, and may also seem fragmentary.

On the other hand, felt time is thoroughly perspectival: it is lived time or experiential time, subject-centered, memory-centered, and organic: a realm of pure duration, of the specious present. It is entirely perceptible through the agency of a single sense—hearing—hence it inheres in a unified virtual space. It has a sort of voluminousness and complexity akin to the

passage of vital functions and lived events.

Langer goes so far as to maintain that felt time “is incommensurable with the progress of common affairs” (Langer 1953, p. 109). And not only does she assert such a sharp distinction between these two kinds of temporality, she also maintains that felt time is ontologically prior to clock time. According to Langer, clock time is ultimately an abstraction from our experience of time (ibid., p. 111), and we let it predominate for practical purposes in order to coordinate what is otherwise incoherent temporal data (ibid., pp. 109-110).

The crux of Langer’s argument is what we propose to call “a strong suspension thesis”:

In artistic production, the composer’s materials must be completely swallowed up in the illusion they create, in which henceforth we find only illusory elements, but not—except through technical interest and workmanlike attention—the arrangement of materials. (Langer 1957, p. 39)

Regarding musical temporality, this means that clock time is suspended in musical experience, which, for Langer, is fundamentally the listener’s experience—“For listening is the primary musical activity,” she writes (Langer 1953, p. 148). She emphatically quotes Basil de Selincourt: “Music is one of the forms of duration; it suspends ordinary time, and offers itself as an ideal substitute and equivalent” (quoted in ibid., p. 110). The essence of music inheres solely in the experiential realm of *elements*. According to

Langer, “music is time made audible” (Langer 1953, 110; Langer 1957, 38). In this paper, we take issue with Langer’s “strong suspension thesis” as pertaining to musical temporality, which we find overstated and misdirecting insofar as it purports to describe what we experience when we hear music with understanding. To anticipate, according to Langer’s theory of musical hearing, “what the auditor ought to hear [is] virtual movement, motion that exists only for the ear” (Langer 1957, p. 38). Thus, her ‘strong suspension thesis’ implies a strong restriction on musical understanding and musical meaning. Insofar as we can construe the meaning of music as whatever we understand when we understand the music, musical meaning is (according to Langer) patently ascribed to felt time. We beg to differ.

Yet before we turn to taking a closer look at the viability of Langer’s “strong suspension thesis,” we would like to make some critical comments on the theoretical and practical implications of Langer’s general distinction between “materials” and “elements” in music.

Langer’s dictum that “music is time made audible,” which epitomizes the veiling of materials by the apparition of elements, comes with two counterpart theories: a theory of musical creation, and a theory of musical performance. Langer’s theoretical rationale here is quite clear: to present a unified theory. And theory needs to be unified by aligning all aspects of musical activity with the primary musical activity: listening, that is, musical hearing. According to Langer, the first principle in musical hearing is the ability “to experience the primary illusion, to feel the consistent movement and recognize at once the commanding form which makes this piece an inviolable work” (Langer 1953, p. 147); “The musician listens to his own

idea before he plays, before he writes” (ibid., p. 148). The distinction between materials and elements presupposes this ideal alignment between the tasks, skills and purposes of the composer, the performer, and the listener. Langer requires that all aspects of musical activity should proceed from inner experience to outer manifestation. Yet precisely due to Langer’s need to unify her philosophical theory of music in such a way, her counterpart theories of musical creation and musical performance feature odd biases when viewed against the backdrop of actual musical practices as well as musicological concerns.

Let us briefly consider these odd biases. According to Langer’s theory of musical creation, “the first stage is the process of conception, that takes place within the composer’s mind [...], and issues in a more or less sudden recognition of the total form to be achieved” (Langer 1953, p. 121). “Once the essential musical form is found, a piece of music exists in embryo; it is implicit there, although its final, completely articulate character is not determined yet, because there are many possible ways of developing the composition. Yet in the whole subsequent invention and elaboration, the general Gestalt serves as a measure of right and wrong, too much and too little, strong and weak. One might call that original conception the *commanding form* of the work” (ibid., pp. 121-122).

Langer’s position is actually old wine in a new bottle. It is a pretty straightforward recasting of eighteenth-century theory of composition, as exemplified in the theoretical writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Koch (Baker and Christensen 2006). Langer’s “commanding form” is what these theorists called *Anlage*, the sketch or plan, which is the first of a

threefold process of artistic creation, including also “realization” and “elaboration.” The *Anlage* is the most crucial of these three stages. It is the first burst of inspiration, consisting of the essence of the work. It is a product of genius which contains all the essential ideas and defines the affection to be expressed. Through it the work becomes a coherent artistic expression.

However, it is important to observe that this venerable theory of composition is at odds with the facts concerning actual processes of composition. The most striking counterexample is none other than Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven's composing strategies involved detailed sketches, many of which have survived. Beethoven devoted considerable time to developing elaborate methods of sketching music in great detail. After the long stage of sketching, he did not rely heavily on the keyboard for composing, but instead preferred to complete his compositions by working out most of the details on paper in his sketches. He kept those sketches bound in several volumes. Beethoven scholars generally agree that Beethoven's process of composing involved distinct stages: “concept sketch” and “continuity draft,” and occasionally also “sketches of intermediate length” and “movement plans.”

His sketches for the *Eroica* provide crucial evidence that sheds some unexpected light on the evolution of this work:

1. Early sketches of the piece introduce a different opening as compared to the final score. The sketch suggests an opening on a dominant harmonic rather than the familiar opening of the piece that

appears on the tonic (Nottebohm 1880, p. 6).

2. The order of the musical ideas in the sketch does not correspond to the order in the final score; in some cases, ideas are distributed between movements, and in others, Beethoven insinuates ideas of a subsequent movement and then shifts back to the movement in progress.

3. Several musical ideas are shaped differently in the sketches as compared to the final version. In some cases, the sketch version is more concise, while in others, it is (against our expectations) more elaborated.

4. The finale of the *Eroica* relies on former materials that appeared in earlier compositions. The main theme of this movement, known as the famous *Basso del Thema*, previously appeared in *Creatures of Prometheus* (1801), *Ländler no. 7* (1802), and in *Variations op. 35* (1803).

Regarding Langer's position, the upshot is very simple: in Beethoven's actual composition process for the *Eroica*, one cannot speak of a "commanding form" in Langer's sense without begging the question. The organic final form of the symphony is a result of completely different compositional strategies than the one postulated by Langer uncritically, following classic models such as the ones introduced by Sulzer and Koch.

Langer's theory of musical performance only adds to the bias of her

theory of musical creation. It oddly, perhaps even incoherently, relies on the notion of inward (mental) hearing and its purported relation to actual (physical) hearing. According to Langer, “inward hearing is a work of the mind that begins with conceptions of form and ends with their complete presentation in imagined sound experience. [...] inward hearing usually stops short of just that determinateness of quality and duration which characterizes actual sensation” (Langer 1953, p. 137). “Performance is the completion of a musical work, a logical continuation of the composition, carrying the creation through from thought to physical expression. Obviously, then, the thought must be entirely grasped, if it is to be carried on. Composition and performance are not neatly separable at the stage marked by the finishing of the score; for both spring from the commanding form and are governed throughout by its demands and enticements” (ibid., p. 138).

Inward hearing is a pre-performance practice. It may indeed serve to highlight and explicate hierarchies of the different levels of structure within the piece. Thus, inward hearing may enhance the performer's ability to deliver a clearer articulation of both the formal and the tonal plans of the work. Still, inward hearing cannot be used to similarly enhance the sense of musical time in the piece. Quite to the contrary, the challenge in inward hearing is precisely to preserve a higher level of organization in order to avoid an uncontrollable flow of pitches and rhythmic patterns, which could result in a meaningless series of tones. Furthermore, in inward hearing it is always easier to keep in mind a constant pulsation akin to clock time. The quality of musical time will be absent in inward hearing because it requires

physical and acoustic ques, for example, the attack and decay of the instrument, which not only varies from one instrument to another, but also may vary from one concert hall to another. Such material ques cannot be predicted ahead of the actual playing. The absence of a sense of musical time poses a real problem for Langer's postulation of a seamless progression from the composer's commanding form to its actual execution in performance by means of the performer's ability to hear the form inwardly.

Our general critical point here is this: actual misalignments between the tasks, skills and purposes of the composer, the performer, and the listener serve to weaken the rhetoric which would impel one to uphold a sharp distinction between materials and elements. The "strong suspension thesis" only amplifies all that is inherently problematic about this distinction.

So let us now turn to a discussion of musical examples which show the limitations of Langer's "strong suspension thesis" in her view of musical temporality. The examples are concrete, yet they expose a lacuna in the way Langer describes the primary musical experience, that of the listener, and they impinge on what Langer takes to be the "primary apparition of music," its very essence.

Since early stages in the evolution of music, repetition has served as a device for extending a musical idea. Repetition may be exact or varied; however, its function varies in different contexts along the history of music. With the mediaeval chant, appearing in pre-tonal contexts, a repetitive reciting tone was used as a rhetorical device for elucidating the text. In the non-hierarchical environment of such modal music, the listener will not be

able to perceive the differentiation of musical events necessary for experiencing integral (musical) time, but rather will experience the persistent pulse of clock time.

Repetition in the common practice era relies on the wide range of devices available to the composer, who is relying on the solid force enabled by tonal organization. The “codification” of the tonal organization supports varied devices that contribute to the extension of the germinal musical ideas. However, in cases where excessive repetitions appear an interruption in the functional four-stage tonal circle occurs. We can find examples of this in several of the keyboard sonatas by Scarlatti. As a result, the listener experiences a certain ‘freeze’ in the flow of musical events, leading to a deficiency in the prediction of events and a corresponding experience of disproportion in the musical organization. In such cases, the listener will not be able to perceive a coherent organization. As excessive repeats dominate the sound stream, the metronomic pulse shines through the texture.

In twentieth-century music we find many ostinato patterns, repetitive cells and repetitive ‘sound blocks.’ Ostinato patterns are typical in neoclassical music or nationalistic music. An example is the “augurs” chord in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* or Bartok's *Mikrokosmos*. In such cases, the repetitive ostinato forms result in long moments of persistent ‘blocks’ on the same bass note. Oftentimes, these blocks are combined with an active rhythm that creates a strong sense of motion. Although motion is necessary for the differentiation of events, the lack of change in the bass line is regarded as ‘pseudo motion.’ In such cases, the listener will experience difficulties perceiving any differentiation between events. Moreover, in

many cases the repeated blocks actually appear without any breaks at all. Their lively rhythm encourages the listener to become aware of the persistent pulse, not of any illusory movement.

Other relevant examples appear in minimalist music, which is characterized by reduced musical content and the consistent use of repetitive patterns. *In C* by Terry Riley introduces fifty-three short musical phrases; each phrase may be repeated an arbitrary number of times. Each musician may choose which phrase to play, but the players are encouraged to start the phrases at different times. Although the melodic phrases are given, the performance instructions call for significant freedom for the performers. However, it is expected that one of the musicians will play the note C persistently with consistent eighth notes. This functions as the pulse. Due to the persistence of patterns, unsynchronized transitions from one event to the other, and the lack of harmonic motion, the listener will hark back to the persisting pulse.

Regarding Langer's insistence on the suspension of ordinary time in musical experience, the upshot for all such cases of repetition is that ordinary time—time involving the specification of time-references by means of publicly observable chronology—may become musically important in a way that Langer's theory cannot accommodate: elemental apparition gives way to material manifestation as we hear the music with understanding.

In the remainder of this paper, we would like to offer a broadly philosophical critical perspective on Langer's view of musical temporality. Langer's view belongs to a venerable tradition of thinking about music as an embodiment of time, which began with Augustine's discussion of time in

terms of chanting in Chapter XI of his *Confessions* (Augustine 1948). Philosophies of music, which are shaped and informed by Augustine's view of temporality, share common fundamental features:

1. The primacy of the conceptual framework of memory-time
2. Musical flow embodies the flow of time and the musical present contains time in some sense
3. The particularity of expression patently inheres in musical motion

It is easy to see how Langer's view of musical temporality fits this model. Langer postulated that felt time is ontologically prior to clock time (Langer 1953, p. 109). Her concept of "passage," the sense of transience, precisely captures not only the idea of musical flow but also the spatial idea of "volume" (ibid., p. 110). The essential connection between expression and musical motion is undoubtedly the hallmark of Langer's philosophy of music.

Augustine's conception of time was a subject of Ludwig Wittgenstein's criticism in his writings and lectures in the 1930s. Some of Wittgenstein's points undercut conceptions of music, which rely on the framework of memory-time (Guter, forthcoming). Wittgenstein aimed to show that what generates the Augustinian tendency to reify memory-time, to render it as a substance or in spatial terms, including the very idea of

measurement, is a set of false analogies, which only generate philosophical confusion. Augustine himself seems to have commingled the very different ways in which we measure time and space, as he comes to the conclusion that we measure the specious present in our mind, as if the present is some object in front of him.

Related to this is the idea of the flow of time, which is also the product of an analogy to things like logs of wood floating down a river. Such analogy seems to allure us into thinking of temporal events as fixed points or entities coming towards us as we expect them, passing us by as we experience them, and then flowing away from us as we remember them. We are then tempted to think not only that we can measure, as it were, the distance between these events, but also—as strongly suggested by the picture of the floating logs of wood—that we can measure the length of each event.

For Wittgenstein, Augustine's original puzzlement concerning the nature of time is a prime example of language being seduced by substantives as it runs against its own limits. The very idea of time qua temporal *space*, and with it the captivating idea concerning the flow of time (within that space), sidelines the way we use "time" as a temporal *ordering* of events. "It's just we've used a simile," Wittgenstein wrote, "and now the simile is tyrannizing us. In the language of the simile, I cannot move outside of the simile. Wanting to use the language of this simile to speak of memory as the source of our cognition, as the verification of our propositions, has to lead to nonsense" (Wittgenstein 1975, sec. 49; Wittgenstein 2005, p. 518).

Wittgenstein's point is that we need to observe a limit: we cannot

apply the concept of time, i.e., the syntactical rules as they apply to physical nouns, to the world of mental imagery, where one uses a radically different way of speaking: "For 'time' has one meaning when we regard memory as the source of time, and another when we regard it as a picture preserved from a past event" (Wittgenstein 1975, sec. 49). For instance, saying that we have perception into the past (as we do in the framework of memory-time) contradicts every concept of physical time (ibid., sec. 50). Also, the idea of the specious present invites us to regard the future as preformed in some sense. This is also characteristic of Langer's theory of musical creation, which capitalizes on the notion of "commanding form," as we pointed out earlier. Wittgenstein points out that "there is a point in saying future events are pre-formed if it belongs to the *essence* of time that it does not break off" (ibid., sec. 51). Yet not breaking off is characteristic of the framework of physical time. The present in memory-time is patently slipping away from us.

Wittgenstein's criticism is given striking expression in the context of his consideration of C. D. Broad's theory of our awareness of the temporal extensity of the immediate objects of our experience (Broad 1923). Broad argued that at a given instant we are directly acquainted with a temporally extended sense datum, which occupies a short interval of time "stretching" into the past from that instant. He also argued that the sensing involved in our experience of a long musical tone and the aural-sensum with which we are acquainted are both *continuous*. Thus, our mode of identification of the musical object is, in the last analysis, of the "searchlight" kind (Mabbott 1951). The constant span of illumination of the searchlight (representing the

span of the specious present) moves continuously parallel to, and along, its postulated “target”—the sense datum, in Broad’s case—as it “illuminates” it.

Again, Wittgenstein shows his characteristic move (in his middle period): distinguishing between different kinds of logical or grammatical “spaces,” pointing out analogies and dis-analogies between them, and stressing that what could be said of the concepts which belong to one such space could not meaningfully be said of concepts belonging to another space. Wittgenstein’s point here is that the word “continuity” belongs strictly to the vocabulary of the physical world. When we apply the physical notion of continuity to our immediate experience of a musical tone, we end up precisely with a “searchlight” model of music. According to Wittgenstein, this presupposes the nonsensical idea that there is an intermediate stage in our experience in which we both hear and remember.

The confusion lies in thinking that physical sound and the sense-datum are both continuous. The physical sound is continuous, but the sense-datum is not. The two experiences, hearing and remembering, are quite distinct. You can narrow down the point between where you finish hearing and where you begin remembering, but there will be no point at which you can say you both hear and remember. (Wittgenstein 1980, pp. 71-72)

Wittgenstein makes it very clear that a notion of continuity based on memory-time is nonsensical, and his response—apparently a direct rebuttal

of C. D. Broad's position—undercuts the very foundation of Langer's view of musical temporality: "Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible" (Langer 1953, p. 110).

It falls beyond the scope of this paper to consider Wittgenstein's remedy for the philosophical puzzles generated by insisting on the primacy of memory-time. It would suffice to say that he suggested reversing the Augustinian priorities. For Wittgenstein, what is conceptually prior is a temporal order involving the specification of time-references by means of public, observable chronology, which is implemented not only by means of chronometers and calendars, but also by means of documents, diaries, manuscripts, and other modes of making records or consulting them. Wittgenstein calls this framework "information-time" (see Hintikka 2006; Schulte 2006). This is actually Langer's "common sense" version of time—composite, heterogeneous and fragmentary—a framework for the variegated activity of asking and receiving information, including all the many subtleties of human gesture in actual music making, the time in which music is played together, rather than experienced in the solitude of one's mind.

Whether Langer's philosophy of music could accommodate such a reversal of Augustinian priorities, and how, are questions that we happily leave for another occasion.

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## *La Vie et la Mémoire*

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ABSTRACT. Le présent article traite de la signification et du rôle de la mémoire personnelle dans la construction de la mémoire collective et *vice versa*, à travers l'art. L'art et la science constatent que notre système de mémoire n'est pas un dépôt de souvenirs, mais un processus dynamique, en changement perpétuel. L'homme transforme son histoire et modifie sans cesse ses jugements sur ses expériences. Sa personnalité ne survit pas à l'anéantissement éventuel de sa mémoire. Semblablement, une communauté ne pourrait pas survivre à l'amnésie ou à la suppression de sa mémoire collective. L'anthropologie de la mémoire souligne que la mémoire personnelle et la mémoire collective se manifestent comme un art de (se) représenter. D'après Susan Sontag, la mémoire (la photographie) n'est que personnelle, tandis que la mémoire collective ne serait que la tentative de trouver des cas dignes de rester dans la mémoire d'une communauté.

La mémoire personnelle est la meilleure manière de s'approcher de la mémoire collective : c'est le message par lequel l'artiste français Christian Boltanski (né 1944) se fait connaître. Ses installations rappelant le destin tragique des victimes de la Seconde Guerre mondiale exposent des objets qui suscitent l'empathie envers des souvenirs collectifs par l'appel à la mémoire affective (vêtements usés, photographies anciennes, livres, etc.). De l'autre côté, les toiles d'Anselm Kiefer, peintre allemand (né 1944, lui aussi), évoquent la Seconde Guerre mondiale à partir de la mémoire collective (les grands récits germaniques) et à partir de ses sentiments personnels d'après la

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guerre. L'article réfléchit sur la différence entre le réalisme documentaire des témoignages historiques et la possibilité de leur représentation esthétique à l'aide d'une narration imaginaire. À la fin, l'auteur se consacre à la signification de la contemplation esthétique et à la valeur symbolique de l'art.

## 1. Introduction

Dans le présent article, il sera question de la signification de la mémoire personnelle et de la mémoire collective en tant que processus se manifestant à travers l'art et l'esthétique. L'art et la science constatent que la capacité de mémoire n'est pas un dépôt de souvenirs, mais un processus dynamique, en changement perpétuel. Notre système de mémoire transforme sans cesse notre histoire et change nos jugements en fonction de nos expériences. L'homme en dépend entièrement, par conséquent sa personnalité ne survit pas à la destruction de sa mémoire. Semblablement, une communauté ne pourrait pas survivre à l'amnésie ou à la suppression de sa mémoire collective. Pourtant, elle ne cesse de reconstituer son histoire et sa tradition. Cette dernière est le passé réactualisé au présent, mais se légitimant par le présupposé qu'elle ne change pas. Lorsqu'on se rend compte de l'historicité et du caractère changeable de la tradition, celle-ci perd sa valeur et ne reste que l'objet de la nostalgie (Tadié 1999, 132-134).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S. Freud constate qu'un souvenir n'apparaît que dans le contexte d'un moment présent et ne prend son sens qu'en fonction de ce moment présent. Il varie suivant la circonstance qui le déclenche. Le souvenir est l'interprétation d'impressions passées en fonction des circonstances présentes. C'est notre environnement actuel qui donne au

Il est important pour l'art de créer de nouveaux procédés pour dire la vérité, exprimer ses émotions et ses souvenirs. La vérité de l'art n'est-elle qu'une pluralité de points de vue et de souvenirs? Prenons d'abord le cas de la photographie, puisqu'elle est dite la plus objective. D'après Susan Sontag, une photographie, c'est toujours une image choisie : faire une photo, c'est faire un cadre et exclure ce qui n'est pas dedans (Sontag 2003, 38). Le photographe a toujours l'occasion de falsifier une réalité. Inévitablement, une photo exprime une opinion personnelle.

La différence entre la peinture et la photographie serait en ce que la peinture évoquerait le souvenir d'un événement ou d'une émotion alors que la photographie et le film présenteraient la vérité pure. L'intention de la photographie n'est pas d'évoquer mais de montrer ou même de prouver. Pourtant, inévitablement, la photographie exprime toujours une opinion. Elle n'est pas seulement une description mais aussi un témoignage puisque c'est l'homme qui l'a faite. Il n'y a pas de mémoire collective, ajoute S. Sontag, c'est une fiction. La mémoire n'est que personnelle; ce qui se prétend la mémoire collective n'est que la tentative de trouver des cas, dignes de rester dans la mémoire d'une communauté (ou dans les archives culturels, comme disait Boris Groys).<sup>3</sup> Des idéologies créent des archives

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souvenir conscient son organisation, alors que, dans le rêve, le souvenir est désorganisé (Tadié 1999, 53).

<sup>3</sup> Boris Groys examine, lui aussi, la manière dont la mémoire collective se produit. À son avis, les causes sociales et économiques de tout ce qui est valable d'être reconnu sont plus importantes que les raisons subjectives. Toute culture est une hiérarchie, construite de souvenirs organisés et structurés d'événements culturels, porteurs de valeurs différentes.

des images représentatives, renforcées par des preuves (Sontag 2006, 82). La volonté de vouloir éterniser certains souvenirs exprime, paradoxalement, l'effort de les renouveler et de les recréer sans cesse. Le problème est que, de plus en plus, on ne se souvient que des images, des photos, sans compréhension et sans rappel de quoi il s'agissait vraiment (Sontag 2003, 67-68).

Comment l'art nous touche-t-il le plus profondément? Par la mémoire personnelle?

## **2. Le Cas de Christian Boltanski**

La mémoire personnelle, surtout affective, est la meilleure manière de s'approcher de la mémoire collective: c'est le message des œuvres de Christian Boltanski (né 1944), un artiste français qui s'est fait connaître précisément par ce procédé. Une de ses particularités est sa capacité de reconstituer des instants de vie avec des objets qui ne lui ont jamais appartenu mais qu'il expose pourtant comme tels. Ses œuvres ne font que semblant d'être autobiographiques.<sup>4</sup> Il imagine une vie, se l'approprié et tous

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Dans notre culture, ce sont des bibliothèques, des musées et des archives. Ceux-ci acceptent inévitablement des choses nouvelles, appartenant tout d'abord au domaine que Groys nomme l'espace profane (Groys 2008, 30-33).

<sup>4</sup> Boltanski le décrit lui-même : « Oui, une grande partie de mon activité est liée à l'idée de biographie : mais une biographie totalement fausse » (Boltanski 2014, 28). « Je crois (...) que l'artiste est comme quelqu'un qui porte un miroir où chacun peut se regarder et se reconnaître, de telle sorte que celui qui porte le miroir finit par n'être plus rien. (...) On

les objets de ses expositions (photographies anciennes, livres, objets trouvés, vêtements, etc.) sont les dépositaires de souvenirs personnels. Ils ont un pouvoir émotionnel fort, car ils font appel à la mémoire affective. Ces œuvres en appellent au souvenir, du souvenir d'enfance au souvenir des défunts, et se rapportent tant à une histoire personnelle qu'à l'histoire commune de toutes et de tous. Pour traiter un sujet aussi tragique que celui des victimes de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, par exemple dans la *Réserve* (1990), il utilise des vêtements, c'est-à-dire des objets tout à fait ordinaires. Il touche le spectateur en se rapprochant de lui, en lui montrant des éléments « quotidiens » qui ont l'odeur des vieux tissus (Huys, Vernant 2014, 227). Cela l'amène non seulement à une certaine compréhension, mais aussi à une sensation de souvenir personnel et collectif, à la fois. Boltanski manifeste des souvenirs personnels pour lesquels il puise ses idées à partir des souvenirs collectifs de l'histoire (Chalumeau 2010, 165) qu'il comprend comme une somme énorme de destins personnels, ainsi que S. Sontag les considère.<sup>5</sup>

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se reconnaît, c'est autobiographique et collectif » (33).

<sup>5</sup> M. Halbwachs estimait que la mémoire individuelle et la mémoire collective sont entrelacées : « Considérons maintenant la mémoire individuelle. Elle n'est pas entièrement isolée. Un homme, pour évoquer son propre passé, a souvent besoin de faire appel aux souvenirs des autres. Il se reporte à des points de repère qui existent hors de lui, et qui sont fixés par la société. (...) Il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'on ne se souvient que de ce qu'on a vu, fait, senti, pensé à un moment de temps, c'est-à-dire que notre mémoire ne se confond pas avec celle des autres. Elle est limitée assez étroitement dans l'espace et dans le temps. La mémoire collective l'est aussi, mais ces limites ne sont pas les mêmes. (...) Je porte avec moi un bagage de souvenirs historiques. (...) Mais c'est là une mémoire empruntée et

L'art de Boltanski nous incite à éprouver des émotions fortes. En se plongeant dans la contemplation de ses installations, on ne reste pas passif. La contemplation devient une vraie participation, soit émouvante, soit répulsive. Boltanski souligne que son art est devenu de plus en plus émotionnel à partir de l'exposition *Leçons de ténèbres* (1986), ce qui a provoqué une vraie cassure, d'une part par rapport à la plupart des artistes de son temps, notamment les artistes conceptuels qui avaient une manière de penser tout à fait différente, sans émotion, et d'autre part par rapport à tout ceux qui aimaient dans son travail le côté amusant, gentil, conceptuel (Boltanski, C., Grenier, C. 2007, 144). Ses œuvres ont l'air de plus en plus sombres, tristes, douloureuses. Dans l'exposition *Monument* (1985-1989), il se sert des photographies des enfants souriants, des jeunes gens ou des adultes en pleine vie, non pas de vieux ou malades. Il les installe d'une manière commémorative qui nous fait penser que tous ces gens sont morts. Il y a des petites lampes autour de leurs images, dont certaines sont installées sous la forme d'un autel ou d'une maison mortuaire. L'artiste souhaite « de restituer le sentiment que l'on éprouve lorsqu'on traverse une

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qui n'est pas la mienne. (...) Pour moi, ce sont des notions et des symboles ; ils se représentent à moi sous une forme plus ou moins populaire ; je peux les imaginer ; il m'est bien impossible de m'en souvenir. (...) Il y aurait donc lieu de distinguer en effet deux mémoires, qu'on appellerait, si l'on veut, l'une intérieure ou interne, l'autre extérieure, ou bien l'une mémoire personnelle, l'autre mémoire sociale. Nous dirions plus exactement encore : mémoire autobiographique et mémoire historique. La première s'aiderait de la seconde, puisque après tout l'histoire de notre vie fait partie de l'histoire en général » (Halbwachs 1968, 36-37).

église qu'on soit croyant ou pas », sans qu'il soit nécessaire de connaître la nature des cérémonies: « Tu passes, tu sens que c'est une chose importante, mais tu ne peux pas la déchiffrer... et tu ressors. C'est donc ce passage au travers de quelque chose que tu ne peux pas tout à fait comprendre, un ensemble de visions, de gestes, de sons » (131). « Quand je dis que, dans la création, il y a un éblouissement, quelque chose qui nous dépasse, c'est effectivement un discours mystique, auquel je crois réellement dans le cadre de mon art. Mais, dans la vie, je n'ai même pas la prétention de pouvoir imaginer ce que peut être Dieu » (153). Boltanski n'est pas croyant et n'assiste jamais aux rites confessionnels; il ne lie pas l'art à une religion précise, mais plutôt à l'idée du religieux (171). « J'ai osé affirmer que l'art était une chose extrêmement importante, proche de la religion et d'une recherche de la connaissance, et qu'une exposition n'est pas un endroit de divertissement ou de plaisir, mais un endroit où on doit sinon prier, du moins réfléchir » (144).<sup>6</sup> En outre, l'artiste affirmait : « l'idée que l'œuvre doit être une manière d'exprimer les choses auxquelles on croit » et « aucune œuvre n'existait si elle n'était pas sous-tendue par une question posée » (152). L'exposition *Monument* pose la question si l'on a le droit de tuer et Boltanski répond que non car « tout être est saint » (151). Il s'intéresse au christianisme parce qu'il le considère comme une sorte de l'humanisme, en

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<sup>6</sup> Boltanski est surpris par le fait que sa mémoire collective et familiale, son sentiment sur le monde sont proches des pays orthodoxes dont sont originaires ses ancêtres, bien que Juifs, et bien qu'il n'a pas été élevé dans cet esprit-là. Pourtant, les émotions qu'il cherche à susciter par ses installations, suggèrent une expérience, proche de ce que des croyants éprouvent auprès des icônes orthodoxes comme des objets sacrés.

raison du « sentiment de l'importance de chaque être » (154). Il se sent plus proche encore du courant de pensée existentialiste et restera jusqu'à la fin de sa vie marqué par la période inaugurée par Albert Camus (66). Les expériences auxquelles renvoient ses œuvres sont, en dehors du christianisme, avant tout le communisme et le nazisme, liés à l'effroi de la guerre et au mal qu'elle provoque. (65-66). Avec la guerre, la chose la plus importante qui lui soit arrivé dans sa vie est le fait d'être juif, et encore plus la Shoah: « c'est sans aucun doute l'événement principal qui a totalement conditionné ma vie » (21).<sup>7</sup> Des témoignages de la guerre ont suscité « une fascination pour la mort, pour ces images, une fascination morbide » (22), avec les sentiments de perte et de deuil.<sup>8</sup>

Au début de sa création, l'artiste était très attentif au côté technique des moyens utilisés, par exemple au papier servant de support aux photographies (devant être le plus neuf et le plus fin possible) mais, plus

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<sup>7</sup> Ce n'est qu'après la mort de son père et puis de sa mère, qu'il a commencé à s'apercevoir de son enracinement dans la tradition juive. « Il est certain aussi que je me souviens depuis toujours de la honte d'être juif. De mon désir d'être français, plutôt prince, et de la honte très grande d'être juif, ce qui était une chose à cacher, dangereuse et vraiment pas bien » (10). Ses grands-parents paternels « ont quitté la Russie en partie par désir d'abandonner le judaïsme. Ils voulaient venir en France pour s'affranchir, vivre la liberté » (14). Pourtant, son père lisait chaque matin des livres pieux et « était un homme mystique » (15). Sa mère, écrivaine, était corse et chrétienne, catholique, et, après la guerre, communiste.

<sup>8</sup> En tant que fils du médecin, Boltanski accompagnait souvent son père dans l'hôpital où celui-ci travaillait et parfois il se rencontrait avec des malades, des morts, avec une certaine odeur de cette espace-là.

tard, il a constaté que ce type de papier ne procurait pas d'impressions authentiques. Par conséquent, il l'a remplacé par un vieux carton, puis par des boîtes à biscuits, sur lesquelles il a collé des photographies, éclairées par des lampes comme, par exemple, dans les installations *Réserve: Les Suisses morts* (1991) et *Inventaires* (1991). C'est ainsi qu'il a atteint une patine historique. Dans le cycle des expositions intitulé *Vêtement(s)*,<sup>9</sup> En se servant soit de photographies, soit de vêtements, ou, plus récemment, de battements du cœur, le principe est toujours le même: « C'est toujours la présence par l'absence »... « La présence renvoie à une absence du sujet » (185). Tous les objets exposés symbolisent des personnes mortes. Boltanski a « établi une relation entre vêtements, photographie et corps morts. » Son travail porte toujours sur la relation entre le nombre et le gigantesque. Les vêtements sont une façon pour lui « de représenter beaucoup, beaucoup de gens. Comme les photographies » (177). Tout le monde peut sympathiser avec des émotions de l'angoisse de la mort, de la peur de la guerre, bref, des souvenirs pénibles. Si ce n'est pas le cas dans la vie personnelle, c'est au moins au niveau collectif. Ce sentiment de sympathie peut être cathartique. Toutefois, Boltanski ne cesse de souligner combien la mémoire et les souvenirs personnels sont importants dans son procédé artistique. Il les montre comme les siens, même ceux qui ne le sont pas. C'est grâce à eux que son art est si convaincant. L'artiste a pris conscience du pouvoir de la mémoire affective,

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<sup>9</sup> Il s'agit d'une série d'expositions que Boltanski installait dans plusieurs années dans les pays divers : *Réserve : Canada* (1988), *Réserve des enfants* (1990), *Réserve : Le Lac des morts* (1990), *Les Manteaux* (1995), *Les Fantômes d'Odessa* (2005), *Prendre la parole/Spregovoriti* (2005), *Personnes/Osebe* (2010), etc.

c'est-à-dire de la mémoire personnelle, pour créer des œuvres avec un message collectif ou même universel. Boltanski refuse la critique lui reprochant d'avoir abusé de la souffrance des gens pour mieux vendre et qualifiant ses œuvres de pathétiques et pleurnichardes. Il estime que « ce type de réaction limite énormément la compréhension » de son travail. (...) La souffrance existe, le malheur existe, il n'y a pas d'interdit à en parler » (159).

Catherine Grenier considère que »Boltanski franchit un pas de plus dans l'utilisation de la puissance pathétique d'une œuvre fondée sur une participation empathique du spectateur« (Grenier 2011, 72). En choisissant la relique plutôt que l'image et le registre de l'émotion plutôt que la réflexion critique, Boltanski réduit au minimum la distance entre l'art et le spectateur. Il ravive ainsi la conception romantique d'un art efficace, qui met son pouvoir suggestif et émotionnel au service d'un bouleversement de l'univers intime du spectateur. La question de la mort, mais aussi celle du mal, deviennent prédominantes. Le mal, qui n'est pas assigné à une fraction coupable de l'humanité, mais interrogé en chacun de nous. L'art de cet artiste, conclut Grenier, »renonce à sa position d'autorité« (76).

Avec ces expositions vers la fin des années 80 du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Boltanski « devient un artiste de l'espace »:

Je pense que si j'ai amené, avec quelques autres, quelque chose de nouveau dans l'art, c'est le fait de prendre en compte le lieu entièrement et de concevoir l'exposition comme une seule œuvre. Le principe n'est plus de regarder un œuvre après l'autre, c'est d'être à

l'intérieur de quelque chose, où les œuvres se parlent tellement qu'elles ne constituent plus qu'une seule entité (Boltanski, C., Grenier, C. 2007, 143-144).<sup>10</sup>

Il convient aussi d'être attentifs au fait que, dès les années 80 du siècle dernier, Boltanski s'est mis à nager à contre-courant de l'art de son temps, contre le modernisme conceptuel et son culte théorique de la nouveauté et que, paradoxalement, c'est ainsi qu'il est devenu original et célèbre. Dans le contexte de l'autonomie de l'art, il a fait preuve de son caractère extraordinaire également par sa thèse établissant une correspondance entre la contemplation esthétique et la contemplation religieuse sans pour autant tomber dans une fusion antimoderne. « La grande difficulté est de ne pas être moderne, mais de ne pas non plus être un vieux con réactionnaire. La notion de modernité, le fait de vouloir être moderne, est horrible, mais il faudrait en même temps ne pas être antimoderne » (131). Boltanski croit au pouvoir salvateur de l'art, à la catharsis. En ce sens, il reste classique.

En ce qui me concerne personnellement, ses expositions me rappellent des images des vêtements des immigrés dans la Mer Egée ou des images de leurs corps épuisés et couchés sur les rives de la Méditerranée, comme s'ils étaient morts, car on ne voit de loin que leurs vêtements. Et pourtant, il s'agit de la situation inverse: tandis que Boltanski nous montre des photographies

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<sup>10</sup> Boltanski souligne que ses théories principales de l'installation sont nées d'une idée que, avant de monter une exposition, il faut savoir s'il va faire chaud ou s'il va faire froid, savoir s'il y a de la lumière ou pas à l'extérieur, savoir comment les gens vont rentrer, etc. (142).

et des vêtements des gens vivants pour lesquels on s'aperçoit qu'ils devaient mourir, le média nous montre des immigrés comme s'ils étaient morts, alors qu'en fait, ils sont vivants, mais totalement épuisés. On ne sait pas qui ils sont, on ne les regarde pas comme des personnes, mais comme des corps anonymes qui seront bientôt remplacés par d'autres corps.

### **3. Le Cas d'Anselm Kiefer**

Dans le même ordre d'idée, on peut mentionner les œuvres du peintre allemand Anselm Kiefer (né, lui aussi, en 1944), qui évoquent la catastrophe et les destructions de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Il incite les Allemands à repenser l'identité allemande de l'après-guerre, sans refoulement des souvenirs de la Guerre. Il se met à explorer les raisons qui ont conduit au nazisme en examinant de près le patrimoine allemand, à partir des mythes et des légendes germaniques (comme l'a fait Richard Wagner avant lui, mais sans exaltation).<sup>11</sup> Kiefer se met aussi à analyser la pensée des philosophes, poètes et artistes allemands, du XVIII<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui songeaient avant tout à la naissance de la nation allemande, et puis, à sa renaissance encore plus glorifiante dans l'avenir. Certains d'eux adhéraient au national-socialisme, d'autres étaient les victimes de celui-ci.

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<sup>11</sup> « Pour se connaître soi, il faut connaître son peuple, son histoire... j'ai donc plongé dans l'Histoire, réveillé la mémoire, non pour changer la politique, mais pour me changer moi, et puisé dans les mythes pour exprimer mon émotion. C'était une réalité trop lourde pour être réelle, il fallait passer par le mythe pour la restituer » ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anselm\\_Kiefer](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anselm_Kiefer)).

Comme Boltanski, Kiefer a vécu son enfance dans une ambiance qui refoulait la mémoire personnelle et collective, mais dans le sens inverse.<sup>12</sup> Tandis que la famille de Boltanski hésitait à parler de ses racines juives (par son père), la famille de Kiefer se rangeait à côté de ceux qui passaient sous silence le passé nazi de leur pays. Le jeune Kiefer s'est fait remarquer au début des années 70 du XXe siècle par des photographies et des peintures sur lesquelles il levait le bras pour faire le salut nazi. C'est par ce geste provocateur qu'il voulait évoquer la mémoire des Allemands. Matthew Biro estime que c'est de cette manière que Kiefer voulait atteindre la catharsis d'un passé insupportable (Biro 2016, 78). Le milieu culturel a refusé sa manière d'agir, sauf ceux qui ont pensé - à tort - que Kiefer voulait réaffirmer le nazisme lorsqu'il faisait référence à Richard Wagner, Knut Hamuson, Jean Genet, L.-F. Céline, Martin Heidegger, et à quelques autres artistes et philosophes proches du national-socialisme. Kiefer se réfère à Caspar David Friedrich et au romantisme aussi, mais dans un sens ambigu : d'un côté, il se sent proche des motifs romantiques mais, de l'autre, il voit une filiation entre le romantisme et le nazisme.<sup>13</sup>

La création de Kiefer est marquée, elle aussi, par la photographie et les installations, comme celle de Boltanski, cependant l'artiste préfère la peinture. Il s'est singularisé par ses toiles en relief où il utilise des matériaux très variés et originaux: argile, plomb, cuivre, porcelaine, cendre, sable,

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<sup>12</sup> Les parents de Boltanski et de Kiefer ont survécu la guerre. Pourtant, Kiefer a grandi avec ses grands-parents.

<sup>13</sup> I. Berlin avait révélé une thèse pareille en supposant que le fascisme était l'héritier du romantisme.

plâtre, bois, métal, feuilles d'or et d'argent, etc. Il s'approche de la peinture abstraite. Sur ses toiles, il écrit parfois des phrases entières ou des mots singuliers et les noms propres des gens qui ont marqué l'histoire allemande (par exemple, J.-G. Fichte, F. Hölderlin et H. von Kleist, sur le tableau intitulé *Varus*, de 1976). Il consacre quelques tableaux aux artistes qui l'ont inspiré (comme, par exemple, à Paul Celan et Ingeborg Bachmann).

Il s'inspire des motifs mythologiques et mystiques de la Bible hébraïque, des légendes et mythes assyriens et égyptiens (par exemple, une série de toiles *Lilith*, de 1987 à 1990), de la kabbale et de l'empire romain. Il se lie à la tradition juive plus explicitement que Boltanski. Sa grande inspiration est l'esthétique des ruines ; au début des années 80 du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, il se moque de l'architecture monumentale d'Albert Speer par une série de toiles représentant Nouvelle Chancellerie du Reich (par exemple, avec le tableau *Innenraum/Intérieur*, 1981) dans un état délabré. Notons qu'A. Speer lui-même songeait à construire des édifices qui, après plusieurs millénaires, ressembleraient aux ruines de l'Empire (*Anselm Kiefer* 20016, 158). Pourtant, Kiefer les peint comme des ruines abandonnées, dans un état misérable, très loin des vestiges sublimes.

Une des œuvres les plus fascinantes de l'artiste est la scénographie de l'opéra *Au commencement*, (2009), par laquelle Kiefer affronte et commémore « les ruines morales et matérielles de sa nation à la fin de Seconde Guerre mondiale » (Saltzman 2016, 57). Près de son atelier à Barjac,<sup>14</sup> au sud de la France, il a installé « un gigantesque décor de ruines

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<sup>14</sup> A. Kiefer vit en France depuis 1993.

mêlant vestiges antiques archéologiques, folies du paysage romantique et de ses jardins, et décombres des villes allemandes de l'après-guerre, le tout redéployé et revivifié sous la forme d'un immense domaine commémoratif de béton » (57). Cette installation peut évoquer soit l'Allemagne ruinée, soit la démolition des ghettos juifs ou même des attaques actuelles sur les villes (par exemple en Syrie).

Alors que Boltanski s'est servi des objets et des images des gens pour activer la mémoire affective, les motifs de Kiefer se lient à la nature : aux paysages de la lande allemande et française, à la forêt, aux arbres, aux champs de blé et de fleurs, à la terre et au ciel.<sup>15</sup> Il rappelle les horreurs de la guerre par des motifs « des terres brûlées, noircies, désolées », en montrant « un paysage angoissant », « sans aucune trace de vie » (*Anselm Kiefer* 20016, 88). La toile avec le titre *Hanneton, vole!* (*Maikäfer, flieg!*, 1974) est exceptionnelle en ce qu'elle rappelle « le souvenir de l'occupation de la Poméranie par les troupes soviétiques » qui « est resté gravé dans les mémoires comme le symbole de la destruction de l'identité historique allemande » (88).

Bien qu'il utilise des motifs de la nature, « Kiefer ne se considère pas comme un peintre paysagiste » et « ne croit pas qu'un paysage soit beau par nature. Selon lui, le beau nécessite toujours un argumentaire » (131). « Il utilise le paysage comme un élément de base lui permettant d'exprimer un état d'esprit, afin de créer un débat autour d'un lieu, d'un événement... » (132). Les paysages de Kiefer portent un fort message symbolique. Prenons

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<sup>15</sup> En allemand, le mot *Kiefer* signifie « le pin ».

pour exemple une série d'œuvres créées entre 2012 et 2014, intitulée *Der Morgenthau Plan*, où sont peintes des fleurs et des champs de blé. Kiefer ironise sur le plan Morgenthau, par lequel le gouvernement américain, représenté par son secrétaire d'État Morgenthau, voulait « empêcher l'Allemagne de continuer à développer son industrie lourde et de la transformer en une nation principalement agricole et pastorale, dépourvue de toute industrie » (224). Cependant, il est tout à fait possible de contempler ces tableaux simplement comme des paysages fleuris ou couverts de blé avec, il est vrai, des ton foncés et par conséquent, d'un aspect plutôt angoissant.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4. Le Réalisme documentaire contre la Narration fictive**

Comme Boltanski et Kiefer sont nés vers la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, leurs souvenirs conscients d'enfance datent surtout de l'après-guerre. Bien qu'ils ne puissent pas être témoins de la guerre, ils sont encore ses enfants, témoignant des traumatismes dont les gens ont été victimes. Pourtant, l'authenticité de l'expérience personnelle ne suffit pas à garantir la valeur de la création artistique. Richard Kearney constate que les artistes cherchant avant tout à valoriser le sens éthique et documentaire des témoignages historiques rejettent souvent la possibilité de leur

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<sup>16</sup> Dans les années dernières, Boltanski, lui aussi, s'approche de l'esthétique de la nature. Il crée des installations avec des fleurs (par exemple des campanules) et l'herbe (*Animitas*, 2015).

représentation esthétique à l'aide d'une narration imaginaire. Il cite comme exemple Claude Lanzmann, le réalisateur de *Shoah* (1985), un film documentaire consacré à l'extermination des Juifs pendant la guerre, qui a adressé de sévères critiques à Steven Spielberg, le réalisateur du film *La Liste de Schindler* (1993), soulignant que celui-ci a failli à représenter ce qui, à son avis, était unimaginable : le camp de concentration d'Auschwitz. Il pense que ce film n'est qu'un mélodrame de mauvais goût qui banalise le caractère particulier de l'holocauste. Son péché originel aurait été de le montrer à travers une histoire fictive par laquelle le spectateur pourrait éprouver de l'empathie avec un héros et sympathiser avec lui (Kearney 2002, 50-53). Au contraire de Lanzmann, Kearney estime qu'il n'est pas sûr que le réalisme historique soit plus persuasif et cathartique que la fiction (quelques-uns se sont suicidés après leurs témoignages). Il peut arriver qu'on se détourne de la cruauté racontée dans les histoires réelles. En revanche, une histoire fictive, comme *La Liste de Schindler*, a la force d'éveiller la compassion. Le témoignage authentique, encombré de naturalisme tragique, risque de causer de la répugnance. Le spectateur est dans la gêne devant une histoire ou une représentation tragique et trop naturaliste; sa capacité d'empathie risque de sombrer dans l'apathie. D'après Kearney, le film *Shoah*, en représentant les histoires réelles des internés des camps de concentration, ne nous offre aucune consolation ou réconciliation: « Sans larmes pour compatir, sans sensations pour s'orienter, sans extase, sans catharsis, sans purgation » (53).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> À l'original: « There are no tears to feel with, no sensations to orient oneself, no

L'artiste, lui aussi, a pour tâche d'entrer en empathie avec le spectateur et de mettre en équilibre la capacité d'empathie de ce dernier, ses émotions et la réalité ou la vraisemblance de l'histoire racontée ou représentée. L'appel intime de la vérité artistique ne coïncide pas toujours avec ce besoin d'empathie envers ceux qui cherchent à la comprendre.

#### **4.1. La Contemplation esthétique**

C'est l'occasion d'aborder de plus près la nature de la contemplation esthétique. D'après I. Kant, le jugement esthétique doit reposer sur la contemplation du beau dans la nature ou dans l'art. Les œuvres de Boltanski et de Kiefer nous laissent cette liberté par leur message symbolique. C'est à nous de choisir la contemplation désintéressée ou plutôt concrétisée. Si l'on connaît la vision de l'artiste, cela peut nous aider à approfondir notre connaissance; cependant, notre contemplation court le danger de s'appauvrir si le nombre possible des motifs est limité. Il faut trouver un équilibre entre la symbolisation abstraite et le motif concret de l'art. L'art peut nous toucher, que l'on connaisse ou non ses motifs.

Boltanski et Kiefer semblent favorables à la compréhension de la contemplation au sens kantien. Le premier souligne que la mémoire collective doit passer par les souvenirs personnels pour que chaque spectateur puisse s'y reconnaître bien que ses œuvres ne font que semblant d'être autobiographiques. Quant à ses installations, surtout à Barjac, Kiefer

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ecstasy, no catharsis, no purgation» (Kearney 2002, 53).

souligne:

Ces bâtiments n'expriment pas l'illustration d'une idée, mais, à l'inverse, leur réalisation m'a, *a posteriori*, révélé le concept. Cette pensée est à l'opposé de certaines pratiques contemporaines. En effet, aujourd'hui, bon nombre d'artistes ne partent pas de l'acte 'créateur en soi', mais ils procèdent en inversant le processus. S'appuyant sur les théories esthétiques d'Adorno, de Benjamin et de Lukacs, ils les appliquent, tels des modes d'emploi, à leur propres productions artistiques (Kiefer 2011, 32).

Lorsqu'il s'adresse à son auditoire à la Leçon inaugurale, prononcée le décembre 2010 au *Collège de France*, sous le titre *L'art survivra à ses ruines*, Kiefer se demande rhétoriquement si l'œuvre ne devrait pas précéder le discours, passer devant la réflexion esthétique ou la théorisation. « En tant qu'objet, l'œuvre initiale ne doit-elle pas être antérieure à la théorie » (36)? Il est très critique envers Les Documenta X et XI de Kassel et les curateurs qui semblent « appartenir au Moyen Âge: il faut d'abord expliquer la part obscure de l'œuvre d'art, avant de la montrer » (37). Si c'est le cas, l'art « porte en lui les théories paradoxales et dictatoriales de la théologie » (37). Kiefer estime que l'art se dresse constamment contre lui-même. Il ne semble pouvoir exister que par sa propre négation. Grâce à son autodestruction, paradoxalement il procure le bien (51). « L'autodestruction a toujours été le but le plus intime, le plus sublime de l'art. » Pourtant, « quelle que soit la force de l'attaque, et quand bien même il sera parvenu à ses limites, l'art

survivra à ses ruines » (Kiefer 2011, 53).

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# *Everyday Aesthetics and Empathy Development*

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the role of aesthetic experience in acts of interpretation and evaluation. *Everyday aesthetics* focuses on everyday activities while emphasizing the beauty doesn't only belong to the perfect but to everyday imperfections as well. This work will focus on how the aesthetic experience and working on everyday aesthetics can help in enhancing the capacity of empathy to develop a deeper understanding of others in our daily lives. It will analyze concepts offered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger in order to research specific relationships between aesthetic experience, empathy and phenomenology.

## **1. Introduction**

This study examines the role of aesthetic experience in acts of interpretation and evaluation. *Everyday aesthetics* focuses on everyday activities while emphasizing the beauty doesn't only belong to the perfect but to everyday imperfections as well. This work will focus on how the aesthetic experience and working on everyday aesthetics can help in enhancing the capacity of empathy to develop a deeper understanding of others in our daily lives. It will analyze concepts offered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger in order to research specific relationships between aesthetic experience, empathy and phenomenology.

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Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, in their work of detailed analysis of empathy trace the history of the development of the concept of empathy in different branches. The first conceptualization belongs to David Hume (1711-1776) in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) where he argues upon the ability of human beings to sympathize with each other. In *The Theory of Moral of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith (1723-1790) discusses how we come to experience the emotions of others through an imaginative perspective-taking. The term *Einfühlung* [feeling into] has been used as a technical term in aesthetics by Robert Vischer (1879). Later, it was used by Theodor Lipps who discussed how people can experience aesthetic objects and understand each other's mental states. Lipps viewed it as a natural instinct of a process of inner imitation that we would seek to imitate the movements and expressions which we perceive in physical and social objects. Freud claimed to have been influenced by Lipps as well as the philosophers in the phenomenological tradition. Edward Titchener introduced the English term "empathy" in 1909 in his *Elementary Psychology of Thought Processes*, using a transliteration of the Greek word *empathia* to translate *Einfühlung* [feeling in]. The phenomenologists Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Edith Stein (1891-1942) and Max Scheler (1874-1928) discuss empathy in a detailed manner. They used Lipps's ideas to revise them in their own philosophical projects, especially dealing with the problem of intersubjectivity. The relation of concept of empathy to hermeneutics has been established through Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) as he uses the concept of understanding [*Verstehen*] to refer to a form of empathy. In the branch of clinical psychology the concept of empathy has

been discussed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and Heinz Kohut (1913-1981) while they discuss the therapeutic relationship with the client through empathy. Beginning around the 1960s empathy came to be a major topic in developmental and social psychology, involving a variety of methodological approaches for how to scale and develop empathy. Recent works in neuroscience made the most crucial contributions to the study of empathy analyzing the nature of empathy and its role in various experiences as well as the importance of “mirror neurons” (Coplan and Goldie, 2011, pp. X-XXXI).

Ioannidou and Konstantikaki (2008) have done work on the relationship between empathy and emotional intelligence, as empathy is defined as the capacity to share and understand another person’s state of mind or emotions (p. 118). Empathy has been described by Zinn (1999) as the process of understanding another’s subjective experience by vicariously sharing in that experience while maintaining an observant stance. Similarly Keen (2007) proposed that empathy means to recognize another’s feelings and the causes of these feelings and therefore, to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008, p. 119).

In this study, it is argued that human beings have the capacity of “entrance” to the individual sphere of the others. Or to put it another way, to understand the emotions or mental states of others while Hume, Smith, Vischer and Lipps also focused on these relations in their researches. This capacity of empathy shows itself where the boundaries between the self and the other are defined when we transcend the boundary of our “self” to deal

with other's existence. Nowadays, these processes can be explained by the workings of the "mirror neurons." How this ontological connection between self and the other is possible has been a crucial discussion point as the problem of intersubjectivity for phenomenologists like Husserl, Stein and Scheler. The concept of empathy will be analyzed in this work through the philosophical projects of phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger both analyze intersubjective communication at an ontological level looking for the foundations of various emotional modes of human beings, and to understand the interactions of Self and the Other.

In the work of Coplan and Goldie on empathy, different researchers work on the relationship of art and empathy, giving examples from different forms of art as film, pictures, music, and literature. I will limit the discussions in this work to the visual arts. Murray Smith in "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" discusses the role of empathy in representational works of art and in particular, film. He focuses on "other-focused personal imagining" in order to relate to the "emotional frames of the mind of others" to understand emotions and mental states of the characters in a film. Smith relates this capacity to mirror neurons which "fire both when a subject executes and observes an action" (Smith, 2011, pp. 101-102). He defines its relation to understanding: "Such understanding constitutes a 'direct experiential' knowledge of these emotions, achieved by the 'direct mapping' of visual information concerning the emotions of others –in the form of expressions, gestures and posture –'onto the same visceromotor neural structures that determine the experience of that emotion in the

observer” (Smith, 2011, p. 102). Dominic McIver Lopes discusses how empathy is evoked when viewing a picture or a painting. He argues that empathy is a result of a deliverance of an experience which “matches a face-to-face experience of the scene itself” (Lopes, 2011, p. 118). He argues that watching pictures can improve the empathic skill and the component model of empathic response may be taken to support this argument. He argues that for helping developing an empathic skill the pictures should evoke an empathic response (Lopes, 2011, pp. 123-125). According to component model, “pictures exercise components of one type of empathic response by evoking a different type of emotional response if it shares some of the same components. The component model allows for pictures that help refine one type of emotional response by engaging another, different type of empathic response” (Lopes, 2011, p. 125).

In this work, it is argued that enhancing empathy in individuals through aesthetic experience is possible. Interpretations of works of art may evoke a kind of empathic response in understanding, to access the emotions or mental states of the artist, just as the Lopes argues. The perception of a work of art opens lines of communication between artist and observer through an indirect transfer of emotions and reason through the interpretation of the observer, especially through the workings of “mirror neurons” as Smith also denotes. Through art we may have the capacity of “entrance” to the individual sphere of others by transcending the boundary of our “self” towards understanding others. Promoting empathy through aesthetic perception allows for changes in the levels of communication between people and therefore society respectively.

## 2. Phenomenology and Empathy

As a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty has a similar approach when he discusses our perception of objects of art. According to this philosopher, the world is conceptualized to be “flesh” (Barbaras, 2004, pp. 157–158). This terminology of “flesh” stresses that the world is a living, sensible world: “Sense is incarnate, the world is sensible: there is a being of the sense only to the extent that the sense exists as being and as world” (Barbaras, 2004, p. 159). This conception of flesh as communication of the visible parts is put clearly:

My access to a universal mind via reflection, far from finally discovering what I always was, is motivated by the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others, by the blending in of my duration with the other durations (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 11).

In a similar manner, Anya Daly writes on Merleau-Ponty and intersubjectivity, exploring the Self’s relation to the Other as an embodied cognition. She explains the process:

Someone is making use of my familiar objects. But who can it be? I say that it is another person, a second self, and this I know in the first

place because this living body has the same structure as mine. I experience my body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviour and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world: now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. Henceforth, as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and the other person's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomena, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously. (PP:353, 354, PP:412, PP:370, PP:411 ) (Daly, 2016, p. 193).

Daly discusses that Merleau-Ponty's intuitions with regards to the interdependence of self and Other shed a light to the more contemporary discovery of mirror neurons. (Daly, 2016, p. 193). In this sense, empathy can be analyzed in relation to embodied cognition. She puts it:

So too with vision; the other functions as mirror and decentres me. I can see myself from another vantage. I am aware of myself from outside myself and I can take another viewpoint but I cannot see myself as the other sees me. I see the Other and the Other sees me, but I do not experience myself being seen as she or he does; I am always on this side of my body, not on his or her side (VI:147–148, VI:194 ). Both the reversibilities of touch and vision are possible through 'the flesh', the being of which both unites and separates the Other and me.

It is this ‘flesh’ which both guarantees the connection and communication with the Other and at the same time ensures differentiation. Unlike Husserl, who sought to ground the connection in a transcendental consciousness, Merleau-Ponty stresses the carnal nature of the encounter; the flesh of the Other connects but simultaneously resists both actively and passively. (Daly, 2016, p. 80).

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty’s discussions in his paper *The Child’s Relations with Others* in the field developmental psychology are significant with regards to his assertions concerning the development of the capacities to apprehend an Other. Daly argues that Gallagher and Meltzoff, in their paper ‘The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies’ argue that Merleau-Ponty’s interpretations are closely linked with the research of his time, some of which has been superseded and the newborn is in fact, capable of a basic differentiation between self and others (Daly, 2016, p. 81).

The ability to understand and empathize with others has been discussed by Merleau-Ponty as being a phenomenological and ontological ground for existence. Heidegger puts it also in a similar way and he discusses this ability within fundamental concepts found in *Sein und Zeit* [Being and Time]. Frederick A. Olafson (1998) discusses how a theory of morality could be founded on Heidegger’s philosophy, and Heidegger’s relevant concepts would be Being-with [*Mitsein*], solicitude [*Fürsorge*] and Resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] (pp. 3-5). The concept of “Being-with” implies “our being in the world together with one another” where solicitude

[*Fürsorge*] is central to being-with and it implies “one human beings’s caring about another” (Olafson, 1998, pp. 3-4). The concept of “resoluteness”, on the other hand also “pushes us into a caring *Mitsein* [Being-with] with others (Olafson, 1998, pp. 4-5). Heidegger emphasizes that *Dasein is for the sake of others* (Olafson, 1998, p. 4). In addition, he maintains that “Being with others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of others” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 160). “For the sake of” arises from our caring for each other, while Mark Okrent (2007) asserts that “we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of.’ The self is primarily tacitly intended as that ‘for the sake of which’ things matter to us and our activities make sense” (p. 151). Since Dasein is already projected into possibilities in existential structures and Heidegger calls *for-the-sakeof-which* as *projection* on possibilities, there is always purposivity in the understanding and existence of Dasein (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 186-187). Hence, “Dasein is for the sake of others” means that human existence is on purpose and in the direction of living with others. Heidegger argues that “even if one particular factual Dasein does *not* turn to others and supposes that there is no need to contact others or one person manages to get along without dealing with others, *s/he is still* in the mode of existence of *Being-with*. In Being-with, as the existential ‘for-the-sake-of’ of others, these have already disclosed in their Dasein”; this statement occurs because Dasein “with their Being-with, their disclosedness has been constituted beforehand; accordingly, this disclosedness also goes to make up significance—that is to say, worldhood”

(Heidegger, 1996, p. 160).

Heidegger maintains that “the world is always the one that I share with others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. *Being-in* is *Being-with* others. Their *Being-in-themselves within-the-world* is *Dasein-with* [*Mit-Dasein*]” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 155). Being-with [*Mitsein*] others is ontological, while Heidegger maintains that the assertion of “‘Dasein is essentially Being-with’ has an existential ontological meaning” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 155). It corresponds to the fact that Being-with works through the understanding of Dasein which makes the existential-ontological worldliness possible.

Understanding itself is bound to the understanding of others; therefore, the world which is made by the understanding of Dasein belongs to the world of Being-with [*Mitsein*] ontologically. As Heidegger (1996) puts it: “Being-with is such that the disclosedness of the Dasein-with of others belongs to it; this means that because Dasein’s Being is Being-with, its understanding of Being already implies the understanding of others” (pp. 160-161). In conclusion, this understanding is related to the way of Being: “This understanding, like any understanding, is not an acquaintance derived from knowledge about them, but a primordially existential kind of Being, which, more than anything else, makes such knowledge and acquaintance possible” (Heidegger, 1996, pp. 160-161). Heidegger (1996) defines “one’s kind of Being” as Being-with [*Mitsein*] where “opening oneself up [*sich offenbaren*] and closing one’s self off is grounded in one’s having Being-with-one-Another as one’s kind of Being, in its “primarily Being with him in each case” (p. 161). Due to the fact that the truth of *Dasein* belongs to a

world of being-with others primarily, the realization of self cannot be independent from the life of others. Therefore, the concept of solicitude [*Fürsorge*] binds people together in an ontological sense related to Being. Trying to understand the life of others, Dasein “constitutes Being towards others” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 161). Through such a founding of Dasein’s existence and understanding others, the phenomenon of *empathy* is made possible.

Empathy is able to “provide the ontological bridge from one’s own subject, which is given proximally as alone, to the other subject, which is proximally quite closed off” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 162). Heidegger (1996) maintains that empathy is “possible only if Dasein, as *Being-in-the-world*, already is with others. ‘Empathy’ does not first constitute Being-with; only on the basis of Being-with does ‘empathy’ become possible” (p. 162). Hence, the ontological *being-with* opens the possibility of *empathy* where the understanding of others is made possible ontologically. In this common ontological ground of Being with Others, understanding of Others is made possible and empathy can be constituted.

Heidegger (1996) also argues upon the possibility of empathy to be suppressed while genuine understanding may be restrained due to any number of conditions experienced in our daily lives: “The special hermeneutic of empathy will have to show how Being-with-one-another and Dasein’s knowing of itself are led astray and obstructed by the various possibilities of Being which Dasein itself possesses, so that a ‘genuine’ understanding gets suppressed” (p. 163). The fallenness in the world leads Dasein to have deficient modes of solicitude where capacity of

understanding others in empathy is suppressed. Heidegger (1996) implies that “Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with” whereas the other deficient modes of Dasein-with are “Being missing” and “Being away” (p. 157). Heidegger argues that *Dasein*’s way of living is being-with others as it develops empathy in understanding others in solicitude and in authentic care for others which makes the worldhood.

### **3. Conclusion**

To conclude, Merleau-Ponty brings a unitary and unique approach to our capacity to perceive the worlds of others since people are bound to each other as being one “flesh” ontologically. Therefore, the perception of the other is connected to perceiving one’s own self, which opens discussions on the foundation of empathy at an ontological level while we continue to maintain a position with regards to the perceptions of the other. Heidegger offers an ontological analysis of emotional experiences of human beings with his concept of *Mitsein* [Being-with] and *Mitwelt* [with-world]. These concepts offer a reflection upon the ontological foundation of empathy. These thoughts offered by phenomenologists in search of the fundamentals of emotions allow us to research how empathy may be enhanced through aesthetic experience.

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# *From Universalism to Singularity, from Singularity to Moralization*

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ABSTRACT. The thesis of this paper is that ahistorical singularity allows for moral appreciation only, and that the artworld atmosphere has become the atmosphere of moralization. Singularity was introduced and widely accepted as a remedy for generalization (for instance, to introduce dominant artistic historical style) and hierarchy (for instance, to install the leading national culture and produce a scale of artistic late-comers, under-developed and primitive artistic cultures) which can still pretend on universality. Moralization is not the same as moralizing about art; moralization is transfiguring the grand narrative of aesthetic modernism into a singular narrative of moral responsibility as the only way to appreciate art, artists and artworld(s). In the past, this kind of approach to art used to be specific petty-bourgeois attitude towards high-brow culture, but is now becoming dominant approach of the artworld and against the artworld. Aestheticization of everyday (Alltag) is accompanied by moralization of its artistic charisma. As much as modernist art belonged to charismatic and extra-ordinary, contemporary art escapes the aesthetic regime and, by taking responsibility for chosen causes, introduces moral criteria as genuine criteria for art's appreciation. While ethical regime of art is necessary to establish Plato's philosophically structured community, artistic regime of moralization is necessary for global regime of pseudo-collectivity.

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## **1. How to Do Things with Art?**

Long ago now, during preparations for an exhibition, a professor (male) who intended to put some women's work examples on display, asked: »Why have there been no great women artists?« Linda Nochlin who died last year is believed to answer this question:» In the article, Nochlin states that there are no great women artists not because they were forgotten by history but because of the unequal training available to women in the world's art institutions.» That is what we find in the Encyclopaedia Britannica on Linda Nochlin written by Naomi Blumberg. (Blumberg), and it is correct. But this is not the only thing that Linda Nochlin did. Her approach, often misunderstood in women's studies and feminist literature for a sociological one, has been strictly philosophical, even Socratic in questioning the question itself to find out what its presumptions and its tacit knowledge are. She dismissed the temptation to start immediate answering, because that would just mean to name many lost and neglected women artists. Without criticism of the question itself the result still does not reach its purpose: all collected women works cannot satisfy the need for as many excellent female as there are male works of art, and all these arguments for women's artistic merit may not be enough to demasculinize the artworld. Another way to answer is to claim that "there is a different kind of 'greatness' for women's art," (Nochlin, 148) and, in consequence, to build some kind of feminine substantiality expressed in feminine art which has to be evaluated under conditions of female and not male criteria. While it is important to express femininity freely whenever and wherever one wishes to, even in art, this is

still not the crucial answer; but it is the post-modern answer. Postmodernism was not around at a time of writing of her article, but she dismissed the idea to build an artistic “city of women”. “The problem lies not so much with some feminists’ concept of what femininity is, but rather with their misconception – shared with the public at large – of what art is... The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, and free from, given temporally defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned, or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation.” (Nochlin, 149) Why have there been no great female artists, then? To get an intellectually interesting answer, one has to question the question itself by dealing with misconceptions about what art is, and with generalizations and universalism which rule the artworld. Universalism, because it turns Western male Christian heterosexual and ultimately modern artistic ‘habitus’ into universal principle of all humanity, and generalization, because from such fake universalism on it organizes all the world’s art around generalized ideas about what art is, and arranges all artistic cultures of all cultures, nations and races into hierarchical scale where, of course, those from the West stand on top, and all the others follow them in a row which sinks deep enough to include all primitives of the earth. All three answers (that women were omitted and neglected by art history; that expressions of femininity are evaluated under masculine terms; and that women could not get proper artistic education) are empirically true, but they cannot eradicate what is implicit in the concept of art as a field of cultural universalism. Even more: opening this universalism to pluralism and

multiculturalism, for instance, by allowing at least one Inuit's artwork to be presented among great works of art, does not solve the problem. The problem is at the same time social and conceptual; therefore it can't be fully resolved by relativization based on social justice: it needs conceptual deconstruction of the aesthetic hegemony over the artistic field.

When we confirm that engagement in art "involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned, or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation," (Nochlin, 149) we don't just have in mind that women were deprived of entering such systematic learning. The fact that an initiation into moving and changing system is necessary tells that art is a disciplinary institution, i.e., an institutionalization of power.

That dealing with power of and in art calls for historical and social analysis, and at the same time for conceptual deconstruction of the aesthetic understood as the dominant function of (modernist) art was confirmed by postcolonial and decolonial studies. Postcolonial studies in the field of culture initiated by Edward Said (Said, 1979; Said, 1993) had to confront questions like "Why there are no great Arab poets in world literature?" One could, and it has been done already, easily find many excellent poets in the Arab language throughout centuries. One could, and it has been done already, argue that the world literature is organized to accept what white Christian male finds great. One could, and it has been done already, prove that colonialism devastated Arab culture and is still doing it. All these

answers are true, but they do not touch the most relevant point: what kind of concept is literature? – a question which takes into account that literature as a concept is a machine organizing inclusion and exclusion, evaluation and devaluation, and universal hierarchization like so many other machines of modernity. It may be that this concept, or the concept of art get changed into direction of multiculturalism, including the expression of “Arabness” on equal terms with the other expressions of particularity, but among these particularities which are all accepted there is always a hint, and usually more than a hint of universality and hierarchy which organizes multiculturalism into dominant (in relationship with previous monoculturalism) but still dominated field (by criteria of literature evolved and prevailed in the West during second half of the nineteenth century). (Williams, 1983, 182-188; Eagleton, 2003) Relationship between culture and empire produced Imperial Western culture and promoted it into the universal culture as “the elevated area of activity...which seemingly had nothing to do with imperial violence.” (Said, 1994, xiv) Similar questioning of art as a system with hierarchical structure, relationships of domination and especially selective inclusion/exclusion procedure established in favor of an abstract figure of Western heterosexual male arose in other domains and fields, art being no exception. Universal concept of art enforced by colonial imperial power promoted non-Western communities into ‘natives’ and ‘primitives’ and ‘barbarians’. In nineteenth century their artefacts were put in the final room of museums of natural history, later they re-emerged in ethnographical collections and only recently they were accepted in art museums – especially contemporary ones where hierarchical principle

invented by enlightenment disappeared. “What art is?” was transformed from search for definition of art into attack against universalism. Instead of looking for philosophical scrutiny which could relocate universality from its Western radical particularity, multicultural relativism became esthetically, artistically and politically acceptable approach because it seemed to be the only sure way to avoid any universality and get rid of any kind of the Whole, or totality. This tendency is an aspect of re-Westernization, as its results prove. Decolonial aesthetics started in a radically different way: what has to be examined is the place of aesthetics in the colonial matrix. To be able to critically analyze it, one has to break away from European aesthetic distinctions and hierarchies established by generally accepted definition of art (done by Batteux in 1747) and inauguration of aesthetics as philosophical discipline (done by Baumgarten, 1735 and 1750). Decolonial aesthetics does not aim for a new, opposing generalization but it introduces views from ex-colonized locations as positions from where those characteristics of modernity and its art which are invisible from the position of the West as the provider of cultural and epistemic resources come into focus. Decolonial aesthetics makes the position of the colonial subject a universal position from which the Whole of the world system is taken into account. That is how *delinking* (initiated as *déconnexion* by Samir Amin, accepted by Walter D. Mignolo as *delinking* and became quite near to Situationist *détournement*) from the colonial matrix of power on the epistemic level becomes possible. (Mignolo, 2014) Such delinking was not applied with multiculturalism and its relativization machine. Consequently, into evaluation of art was instead of the hegemonic aesthetic introduced –

singularity of artworks and artistic events, because such singularity seems to be the end of universality, but accepted really because singularity allows for power relations of inclusion and exclusion to be active after the aesthetic modernism together with autonomy of art lost its power.

## **2. How to Do Things with Post-Modernism?**

When post-modernism crossed the Atlantic from the U.S.A. to continental Europe, European left intellectual and artistic circles reacted in unison with their American colleagues: post-modernism is reactionary ideological invention which honest leftists should deny any right, not even a proper name. It was not until Fredrick Jameson introduced post-modernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984, 53-92) that these Marxist and post-Marxist circles accepted to use a notion of post-modernism and enter the discussion on post-modernism without an attitude of angry rejection. Nowadays, when many scholars decided to put post-modernism in past tense, introducing contemporary art as the newest label in most of these cases, and when there are more and more museums of contemporary art growing like mushrooms (how many museums of post-modern art are there?), Jameson intervened again, and once more in the favor of post-modernism as still useful tool for understanding of such contemporaneity. (Jameson, 2015, 101-132) In the text from 1984 Jameson insisted on necessity to think post-modernism from the point of view of Marxist dialectics of history against merely stylistic understanding: “The conception of postmodernism outlined here is a historical rather than a merely stylistic

one. I cannot stress too greatly the radical distinction between a view for which the postmodern is one (optional) style among many others available and one which seeks to grasp it as the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism: the two approaches in fact generate two very different ways of conceptualising the phenomenon as a whole: on the one hand, moral judgments (about which it is indifferent whether they are positive or negative), and, on the other, a genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present of time in History.” (Jameson, 1991, 45-46) In 2015, defending his position from 1984 in the same journal (which, however, went in the meantime through as many schisms and changes of opinion as possible on the left), he insists on post-modern singularity as a key notion and concept. To bring what he developed in 1984 up to date, he says that postmodernism needs elaboration of globalization as a process which was not taken into account enough, and elaboration of singularity. His description of singularity goes from introductory notes to historical relations in the economy of derivatives as founding space of singularity, and finally gets at examination of artistic singularity.

There is a difference between individuality and singularity. Individuality is in opposition to distinctive, perfectly adequate representations which are not sensitive and therefore – not aesthetic but conceptual and scientific, wrote Baumgarten when he used the term *aesthetics* in its modern sense as a discipline for philosophical research of the logics of sensitivity and preception. (Baumgarten, 1985, 14-15) Individuality is where poetic function of language can start because it is determined by unending chain of sensual properties; take one away, and

individuality is not just divided but – dead. Singularity is in opposition to plurality as that something which escapes inclusion into multitude of phenomena or events, but can still be conceptualized as literally “one of a kind”, i.e. as a genus with just one and only species. That is why Jameson himself characterizes singularity as “unique”. (Jameson, 2015, 115) In art, singularity means that artwork is born from singular idea which is repeatable to infinity without building collectivity or conceptual unity. Repeating lasts until art starts to signal artist’s name as its proper content. There is a concept, but it is singular, says Jameson. This is undoubtedly a paradox, if not contradiction, even if it is explained as postmodern nominalism. Singularity is temporal in a way of its own, because it comes after modernity which “in the sense of modernization and progress, or telos, was now definitely over,” (Jameson, 2015, 104) which consequently brings about “the notion that singularity is a pure present without a past or a future.” (Jameson, 2015, 113) It comes as another paradox that this unique entity without a future is something alike to – futures, or as they are called now, derivatives. Derivatives, beside their singularity, are produced by decomposing which turns attributes of unity into independent processes, and then play a game with these processes taking into account their random variables. Jameson explains relationship between derivatives and post-modern singularity using Marxist dialectics. One could, however, also introduce a stylistic way of connectedness in the manner of moral judgements, positive or negative, which treat derivatives as speculation and (un)moral game played for uncertain gain, or, as a free play of creativity. Morality of “Anything goes!” could be interpreted then as de-composing of

unity (the Whole, totality) into a game free of rules enforced by grand narratives. Singularity produces unique examples unleashed from unity and universality, exemplifying an excess of meaning which does not allow for inclusion into any concept with more than unique or singular application. Evaluation of such singular specimens from the point of view of grand narratives is not possible because of their randomness, but can use morality for evaluation of events without need for any absolutes, universals, or foundation. For moralization it is typical not moralizing which turns any event into morally suspicious event, but its random choice of judgement between moral sin and moral glory. Typical for moralization are stored samples of body liquids which, at any time when it becomes possible, may decide that heroic winner was in reality a doping villain. Another typical example comes from art itself: artist as genius on the other side of normality has been excused of multiple sins, and his or her artworks were highly appreciated in spite of their sinful lives. In modernity, of course. Now, when an artist (or any other supposed celebrity) is accused of sexual harassment he or she is destroyed by public opinion functioning as moral police before legal process and its possible sanctions take place, and his or her artworks are thrown out of museums where they were included beforehand with a glory. The principles of moralization are not the principles of Magna Charta but principles of “zero tolerance” and of “war on sin”. As a singular gesture or event, artwork remains so tightly connected to its author that it rises and falls together with his or her moral excellence or sinfulness. Discourse on singularity is strikingly similar to a person who would, abhorred by all atrocities of humankind claim that humans are not a species. Reducing time

into everlasting present (which includes past and future into its derivative game as something which is happening just now) brings afore post-modern sort of artwork: “Today we consume, not he work, but the idea of the work...and the work itself, if we can still call it that, is a mixture of theory and singularity.” (Jameson, 2015, 114) More of a stochastic process than aesthetic one, art “produces no future out of itself, only another and a different present – but it is not a continuity: it is a series of singularity events. (Jameson, 2015, 122) Finally, Jameson calls for Utopia to end such state of affairs: “I myself feel that, for the moment and in our current historical situation, a sense of history can only be reawakened by a Utopian vision lying beyond the horizon of our current globalized system, which appears too complex for representation in thought.” (Jameson, 2015, 121)

Fighting generalization with singularity makes moralization powerful; fighting moralization with critique of political economy of financialization makes utopia necessary to re-introduce a sense of history. Read it as you like it, Jameson suggests that without utopian understanding of time there is no history. Such remedy (together with post-modernism) for contemporary troubles of the Western definition of art and aesthetics needs its own medicine: delinking.

### **3. Conclusion**

After it lost its autonomy and position of power in the grand narratives of modernity, the artworld had to introduce another kind of power to enable

inclusion and exclusion process to go on. Artworks cannot be judged as beautiful or not, as novelty or tradition, or as true or false because these once intrinsic parameters do not apply on contemporary art. They have to be judged as singular events by application of criteria external to art. Prevailing kind of criteria are coming from the field of popular morality which measures the acceptability of art's causes, these causes being external to art itself, or, in the same manner as in any other show business with celebrities, scrutinizing the artist as a moral or immoral person. There are so many cases of moral censorship that it is useless to start naming one after another. But that artworks are victims of immoral life of their makers is news. Richard Meyer was accused of sexual harassment, and Sotheby decided to close the exhibition of his works in S2 Gallery in New York; web site informing about his artistic career disappeared as well. The same accusation against Chuck Close caused that Seattle University withdrew his auto-portrait. When each artwork is singular, it invents another definition of art as a reason for its existence, but this definition is activist and moral. Many other interesting cases happened just in the last period of one year, and may be followed at *Artnews* web page: every argument for or against artworks is a derivative of moralization, and the sharpness of their point is not deciding between successful or unsuccessful artwork but about its moral right to be shown and exposed in public, or not. Just to give a direction, I can name the case of Xu Bing which involves live insects and other animals, or, Omer Fast who profiled Chinatown's identity. In all of these and many other cases, I did not find a word about artistic merit of these works, but there was a multitude of moral arguments. Moralization is a product of public opinion

which now, instead of proverbial nostalgic cafés inhabits virtual space of new media where massive and engaged presence of public gives birth to new moral police, new moral judiciary and new moral state of law. What is going on is not that a public machine promotes, on one side, new celebrities, and, on the other side, new culprits. It produces celebrities to turn them in the next moment into culprits. To be famous for 15 minutes means that everyone can become a moral monster the very next moment, and the outcome deletes his or her artworks from the public and even private space. This kind of production I call moralization. That art(ists) are participating in these processes means that art has really become part of culture without any discernible distinction between art and other cultural regions. It is not philosophy now which disenfranchises art under terms of aestheticization. Art is judged under terms of moralization which enable the artworld, or the field of art to remain a field of power after its own autonomous power has left the field. The result is that now curators don't have the first and the last word about it but members of boards who represent managerial community or state apparatus, but in the first place – public opinion of the new media, and do not want to lose their face for the sake of morally questionable activist purpose of the artwork, or because of morally suspicious artwork of morally guilty artist being exhibited.

Is there another power of art which can replace aesthetic modernism and contemporary moralization? Alice Koubova proposes to use Donald Winnicott's "so called transitional space of play as a space where art and one's self get constituted in a complex game of powers." (Koubova, 2018). This space is collective space of art and culture, in-between purely objective

reality which we cannot bargain with, or, following Kant, even do not have access to, and purely subjective intimate self. (Winnicott, 2005) Herbert Marcuse, independently from Winnicott, stated that “Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance.” (Marcuse, 1978, 73) Long before Marcuse or Winnicott, Karel Teige’s last statement of *The Fair of Art* is: “Longing for liberation of poetry, dream, phantasy and love has to take part in the reconstruction of history as well.”<sup>2</sup> (Teige, 1977, 7) Moralization is killing poetry, dream, phantasy and love. It petrifies the world disabling its longing to speak, sing, and perhaps dance. And contemporaneity is a time charged with need to reconstruct history. Philosophy of art, while discarding theological aesthetics of artistic modernism, cannot but fight artistic moralization. Not in the name of utopia but for the sake of poetry, dream, fantasy and love.

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by L.K. Original: »Touha po osvobodzení básněá, snu, fantazie a lásky musí být také účastna na rekonstrukci dějin.« (Teige, 1964, 60)

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*Experiencing the Extraordinary of the Ordinary.*  
*Robert Bechtle and Photorealism*

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ABSTRACT. Through these pages, I attempt to move away from the art-centred theory, exploring the aesthetic character of everyday as it is shown in Bechtle's photorealistic paintings. Firstly, I begin considering the question of what Photorealism depicts, in other words, its everyday contents. Secondly, I deal with the question of how Robert Bechtle's images give heightened significance to the ordinary. This paper is accomplished by a final reflection on the continuity between art and life.

## **1. Introduction**

Everyday aesthetics is a new branch of research which tries to transcend the narrow art-oriented approach, widening the focus of the aesthetics to include objects and activities that had been traditionally neglected. Challenges to the traditional scope, aestheticians of the everyday recognize the continuity between fine arts and experiences from other domains of life and claim the aesthetic character of our everyday life.

This sub-discipline presents new avenues of inquiry and has become a common concern for scholars across the world due to the profound worldwide changes in contemporary culture and art. In the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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of the Finnish Society of Aesthetics Conference, Richard Shusterman provided the distinction between two different ways of understanding the theory of everyday aesthetics. The first one emphasizes the ordinariness of the everyday, the prevailing aesthetic sensibility that permeates everyday objects and activities; while the second one highlights the particular aesthetic character in which ordinary can be transfigured into an aesthetic experience. (Shusterman, 2010, p. 110)

One of the main precursors of this second approach is the American philosopher Thomas Leddy. According to him, the ordinariness is important but rather “the way in which the ordinary can be made extraordinary”. (Leddy, 2012, p. 45) That is, his conception focuses on the everyday experiences which are more intense and extraordinary, the ones that John Dewey called “an experience”. (Dewey, 1987, 42) What is more, this view does not only take into account how ordinary things can become extraordinary but also the ways in which artists have contributed to the understanding and experiencing everyday aesthetic phenomena.

Leddy criticizes how several colleagues in everyday aesthetics, like Allen Carlson and Yuriko Saito, have underestimated the dynamic relationship between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of everyday. (Leddy, 2012, p. 121) In contrast, he remarks that the artists are best able to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. That is, they can take the things of everyday life and transfigure them through art-making. Thus, Leddy presents everyday aesthetics in dialogue with art and defends that art aesthetics is incomplete without understanding its grounding in the everyday.

Following Leddy's view of everyday aesthetics, the aim of this paper is to analyse the relationship between art and life in Robert Bechtle's works. Bechtle is an American painter from the Bay Area of San Francisco and one of the most prominent photorealist who has shown the extraordinary of his ordinary life. He uses photographs of familiar subjects and places to create their paintings of everyday scenes. That is, working in a photorealist style, Bechtle focuses our attention on the marvellous aspects of his life.

Through these pages, firstly, I would like to consider the question of what Photorealism paints, that is, its everyday contents. Secondly, I analyse how Photorealism depicts, in other words, the particular style through which Robert Bechtle's images give heightened significance to the ordinary. Finally, I conclude with a reflection on the continuity between everyday aesthetics and art aesthetics.

## **2. The Extraordinary of the “Ordinary Fare”**

Robert Bechtle is a California artist, who was born in California, is based in California and takes California as subject matter. However, Bechtle's subjects are not the Hollywood movie stars, famous places or awe-inspiring landscapes, but the mundane things of his ordinary life. He began to feel a genuine interest in “ordinary fare” after his trip to Europe in 1961. During one year he travelled through Europe, visiting museums and the main cities of the old continent. This experience had a deep impact on his career for many reasons. Firstly, while he was in Europe he felt the chance to do some works with no one to look at it, and started to be become fairly objective in

simply recording things that he saw, things that he called “postcards”. (Karlstron, 1978-1980) Secondly, he became more aware of the appearances of California; due to the distance, the artist discovered the possibilities and the light for the painting. Thirdly, he visited some Pop Art collections which really impressed the author, as Richard Hamilton’s works or Larry Rivers’ paintings of cigarette packages and French money. Therefore, this trip was an opportunity to develop a particular attitude and look at his surroundings:

You can take a photograph of something but you never possess it because it’s too fast its spontaneous – you’ve got a souvenir of it, so what, you haven’t made any connection with it. If you sit and look at it for a couple of hours, I suppose just meditating on it, you certainly soak the thing in. But there’s something that’s very intense about the experience of sitting down and having to look at it in the way that you do in order to make a drawing, or to make a painting of it in the sense of what visually goes on. By the time you’ve done that for a couple of hours you feel that you’re really understood what you were looking at and also that you’re left a little of yourself there. (Karlstron, 1978-1980)

When he came back to California, his eyes opened to a certain extent of seeing his own environment in a different way. This event marks the transition to realistic style works whose focus was the quotidian; images that are about where and how the artist and his family have lived. That is, his paintings have been characterized by the light and architecture of the Bay Area, taken his neighbourhoods, family, and friends as primary subjects. For

over forty years, the American painter has developed a singular concern about the effects of light and shadows, a suggestive interaction between perspective and surface, creating extraordinary images of ordinary. Thus, Robert Bechtle paints, in his own words, the “essence of American experience”, “the ordinary fare”, showing objects, places or people with a new fresh view.

One of the most reverence objects in his works is the car. From his early works such as *Alameda Camaro* (1967), *61 Impala, from Four Chevies* (1973) *73 Malibu* (1974) or *Alameda Gran Torino* (1974), to his later works, including *Covered Car – Missouri Street* (2002); *20<sup>th</sup> Street Capri* (2002) or *Potrero Golf Legacy* (2012), this is a recurrent topic in his paintings.

Bechtle started to paint cars as a way to be original, to teach himself to paint in a more profound way than he learned in art school. He attempted to get away from the look of the Bay Area figurative painters and begin to do something different. At the time nobody was painting cars, so this topic was a kind of door of connecting what he was doing to the world that he was familiar with. In an interview in 2012 the artist recognizes that the first car came sort of by accident [*61 Pontiac* (1964)]:

It wasn't an idea that I had, but it happened while I was working on a painting. This was back in 1963, I think, when I was living in Alameda. I had a house, a studio that faced out onto the street of a residential neighborhood. I was doing a painting that was like a composition using part of a window, a mirror that was hanging on the

window molding, and a bit of a framed drawing that was sitting next to that. So it was the rectangle of the window, an oval in the mirror, and a rectangle of a framed picture that had glass on it. It was a dark picture that was in there, so it reflected as well. So, there was a self-portrait that was between the mirror, and you'd see part of it reflected on the picture. And there were curtains on the window, halfway up—café curtains. I was basically just painting it from life, what was there. I didn't like what was happening with the café curtain, so I took it off and painted what was out the window.

What was out the window was a stucco bungalow with a Plymouth sedan sitting there. So, I painted that. A little light bulb went off and I thought, "Gee, that was kind of interesting." [laughs] Then I parked my car in front of the window, and painted it through the window from life, as it were. (Kellaway, 2012)

Therefore, the artist used the cars because they were ordinary objects, "there was nothing glamorous about them and that cars really exist as opposed to what the advertisements showed and our imagination about them." (Kellaway, 2012) He chose cars such as Chevrolets, Chryslers, Buicks or whatever—American cars, generally wagons or family sedans. For instance, *46 Chevy* (1965), featuring Bechtle's brother sitting in the artist's own convertible or *56 Chrysler* (1965) set in front of the artist's mother's Alameda home.

The first contact with Bechtle's paintings can transmit a sense of everyday purposelessness. The artist often speaks of the "dumbness" of his subject matter, because they refuse to dictate a social interpretation.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the car is without symbolic meaning, particularly for the California middle class. The painter creates works plenty of visual information which shows in an extraordinary manner modest family cars place in the mundane setting, such as *Agua Caliente Nova* (1975).

As Janet Bishop has defended (2005, p. 23), Bechtle's 1972-74 series of single-car compositions represented the culmination of his treatments of a subject that had occupied him for a decade, but at the same time they offered a chance to "get out of his system" subject matter with which he was becoming too closely identified. Bechtle's structural contrivances can be seen in each canvas: for example in the alignment of the car's antenna with the house's drainpipe in *67 Chrysler* (1973); in the series of parallels and perpendiculars that make up the window, awning, railing, and intersection of yard and driveway in *63 Bel Air* (1973), or in the medium-size painting of *Alameda Gran Torino* (1974). These compositions are based on photographs documenting real-life scenes, but they are anything but accidental or serendipitous. Each is the result of deliberate choices made while taking the source photos and transferring the images to canvas.

Although art history has tended to assign Robert Bechtle a specific niche, the painter has in fact explored a variety of subjects beyond his best-known car paintings. The second topic which I would like to consider in this paper is the buildings. From his beginnings, the artist has paid special attention to usual domestic architecture, like *Kona Kai* (1967) or *Date Palms* (1971), in which the author juxtapose automobiles with buildings from his quotidian. The apartment building in *Kona Kai* is essentially a

group of monotonous and conformist blocks, which Bechtle makes no effort to pretty up the structure, but neither does he attack or criticize it outright. *Date Palms* portrays an even more sterile building at the Kaiser medical campus in Oakland.

These images, as many others, come from Bechtle's usual domestic architecture; they are everyday places that he recorded while he was doing everyday tasks (from his commute or from taking his kids to the doctor). In this kind of paintings, we can identify the architectural style of suburban, middle-class and midcentury, such as *California Garden I* (1972) or *California Gardens – Oakland Houses* (1973).

In this point, I would like to think about the possibilities of relationship between Arto Haapala's study of the everyday and Bechtle's paintings. In his well-known study "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place", Haapala explains that strangeness is the experience we all have in new environments when we experience the surroundings as unfamiliar (for instance Bechtle's experience in Europe). However, as the author explains strangeness cannot be a continual state. In Haapala's words "while we are living in the lifeworld, doing and making things, acting in different ways in different situations, we create ties to our surroundings, and in this way familiarize ourselves with it." (Haapala, 2005, p. 44)

He defends interpretation as a third meaning of the place, the way in which we create a hermeneutic sense of living in an environment and making sense of it by acting there, by creating different kinds of connections. Haapala emphasizes the existential quality of the relation of a

place and a person, defending how the place is an interpretation of an environment by a human existence and I think this is a crucial aspect to understand Bechtle's works.

His paintings are undergoing continuous transformation due to the events that are happening in artist's life. For instance, in the mid to late 1980s we find a notably different way of views in his paintings. The artist's focus on neighborhoods in San Francisco rather than single residences in the East Bay because he moves from the suburbs to the city. Therefore, Bechtle starts to depict new settings of San Francisco's hills and represent the city, without showing picturesque clichés. For example, *20<sup>th</sup> Street – Early Sunday Morning* shows the view of a street from an adjacent street corner or through the window of another car. Other suggesting examples are *Mariposa I* (1999), *Mariposa II* (2000) or *Near Ocean Avenue* (2002).

For that reason, Bechtle's works cannot be considered in contexts that create strangeness, but in the surroundings he is used to, in his normal routines. His paintings show his ordinary contexts, and make us more aware of the pleasurable aspects of the everyday, focusing in things or moments which have not been objects of aesthetic appreciation in the traditional sense. Obviously, Bechtle's paintings can be criticized because they are not a mirror held up to reality; they are not mere imitation of common places. But this is the most valuable part of his work, his skill to interpret his daily life and displays with aesthetic properties. He does not want to represent the reality, but to show his genuine view of his everyday life.

This led me to the last subject matter I would like to analyze, the everyday scenes which the artist paints. From his beginnings, the painter

shows mundane activities from his daily environments. For instance, *Pink Toothbrush* (1966), which depicts a reflection of the artist's face in a bathroom mirror. However, the human being is not the primary focus of attention, but the place (the bathroom) and the daily routine of brushing his teeth.

One of the paintings which exemplify more clearly Bechtle's interest in quotidian moments is *Roses* (1973). This painting does not privilege figures over a background, but he gives equal attention to all areas of the visual field. Two cars in the driveway, the admiration of roses crumbling in the California heat, Bechtle's mother's ensemble of pearls, polyester dress, and sandals. The painting observes the aridity of suburban life. His work is not ironic like Pop art, but neither is it glorifying the ordinary scene. Other illustrative examples are *Watsonville Olympia* (1977) or *Frisco Nova* (1979) in which a man is watering his garden.

Particularly interesting are the watercolor on papers he made in 1996, through which the artist has explored these daily moments through evocative depiction of people at work. Although Bechtle has made watercolors consistently since the early 1970s, there has been no set pattern to their production. In fact, the watercolors are almost unprecedented in Bechtle's oeuvre in their depiction of people at work. The imprecision is used to different effect here; lacking distinguishable likenesses, the figures perform their bourgeois, paternal chores in front of interchangeable suburban homes as we can see in the series of Sterling Avenue: *Sterling Avenue – Washing the Buick* (1996); *Sterling Avenue – Raking the Grass* (1996); *Watering on Sterling Avenue* (1996).

Inevitably, these images come to our mind Dewey's words about how to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens:

The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd, who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the heart and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals. (Dewey, 1987, 11)

### **3. Robert Bechtle and Photorealistic Style**

The first work Robert Bechtle made after traveling through Europe was *Nancy Reading* (1963), a piece that attempts to paint exactly what he was seeing (a view of his wife, sitting at the table with ordinary kitchen objects). Similarly, one year later, the painter made *Nancy Sitting* (1964), features the same figure and setting by day. However, this painting marks Bechtle's first use of photography as a studio aid.

Despite he had copied the proportion of the table and window onto a pair of canvases and intended to complete the painting from life, it was difficult for the model (his pregnant wife) to pose repeatedly, so he decided

to take a reference picture. (Bishop, 2005, p. 18).

It was with a certain sense of going back to my commercial art training”, he explains, “sort of knowing that the use of photographs was a technique that illustrators used all time for those kinds of situations. And so I didn’t give it a second thought... I just said, ‘Oh yeah, I’ll take a photograph and work with that’. (Bishop and Samis, 2001)

This painting is one of Bechtle’s most significant works because of several reasons. Firstly, as the painter asserts, the use of this method supposes a return to his early years as a graphic design student at the California College of Arts and Crafts. From his beginnings, Bechtle did not distinguish design or crafts in contrast to fine art and did not really share the myth of the ‘star’ artist who only produces masterpieces. In contrast, he was interested in this kind of practices because re-establishes the long-lost contact between living people and art as a living thing.

Secondly, Bechtle turned to realism as a way of discarding the influence of other paintings we can find in his earliest work. The photography provides “a kind of structure or system for the painting which limits the choices of color and placement. It allows me to keep some of the traditional concerns of the painter –drawing, composition, color relationships, from assuming too important a role, for they are not what the painting is about. Most of the choices are made when the photograph is taken”. (Meisel, 2002, p. 17)

Bechtle's artistic career began at the Bay Area Figurative movement and the development of his style was influenced by Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, and other Abstract Expressionist artists. As Jonathan Weinberg has defended, *Nancy Reading* painting is still thematically and compositionally derived from Diebenkorn's paintings of figures juxtaposed with windows that simultaneously create deep space and reassert the picture plane. (Weinberg, 2005, p. 52) The work can be compared with the painting of Richard Diebenkorn *Coffee* (1959).

In this painting, we find a woman sits alone, stirring her coffee as if lost in thought. The carefully balanced structure, the richly coloured shapes and the play of the light on the surface depict a moment when everyday details give rise to extraordinary insights. Similarly, the light in *Nancy Sitting* evokes an ordinary foggy East Bay day. The unspecific figure, the goods on the table create a fascinating effect of a daily scene.

In the interview made by the SFMOMA during the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Woody Allen's film *Manhattan*, Robert Bechtle recognizes that he found Diebenkorn both fascinating and intimidating. He explains how the structure and subject matter of Diebenkorn's paintings influenced his own very different work; despite he never actually took a single class from him. (Bechtle, 2010) What is more, Diebenkorn's works were rooted in the outside world; he captured his surroundings on canvas, although he didn't represent them literally.

However, Bechtle turned to realism and used the photography as a way of discarding the influence of other paintings. Despite he had assimilated the expressive movement of Richard Diebenkorn and his circle

of Bay Area painters, in 1963 he attempted to free himself from those influences and began to paint his environments as accurately as possible. In Bechtle's words:

Realism seemed like a way of having no style at all. It was a way of freeing myself from the need to even think about it, to be concerned with what needed to be more basic problem of seeing, and then letting the kind of mark that would be made be based on observation... In a sense, it was choosing Realism as a non-style. (Weinberg, 2004)

Therefore, for Bechtle, the photograph provides "a kind of structure or system for the painting which limits the choices of color and placement." (Meisel, 2002, p. 17) That is, working directly from the real thing, as in *Nancy Reading*, Bechtle effectively produced imitations of other artists' work; it is when he seemed only to imitate a photograph that he succeeded in finding his own voice.

The second work which marks an important point in his career was *56 Cadillac*. In 1966, the artist was struggling with a composition of a black Cadillac parked in a Berkeley driveway. He couldn't get the proportions right, so in desperation, he projected the photography on the canvas to see what corrections could be made. The result had an impact that the painter would have imagined:

There was a Cadillac parked in someone's driveway in Berkeley. I had a black-and-white photograph of it and I also had taken a slide, which

I intended just to use as a color reference... I was drawing it and the car wasn't very close to you – it was up in the driveway and it was quarter view and [there was] heavy-duty foreshortening... I had a terrible time trying to get that just right, and I guess that is the clue: trying to get it just right. So out of desperation I projected the slide onto the canvas, which had all been drawn out freehand from the black-and-white photograph to make corrections, and the corrections worked. And I thought, 'Wow. That was a good thing to do.' But I also felt very guilty. (Weinberg, 2004)

Bechtle felt guilty because he was going against his art-school training (because working from photographs was forbidden by his painting teachers). Nevertheless, projecting the slide directly onto canvas helped him to discover new painterly strategies that would, over time, make him one of the most significant figures associated with the Photorealism. The painter works from photographs, which provide Bechtle with detailed scenes of particular moments. Nonetheless, despite their photographic inspiration, he does not merely represent or copy photos but gives heightened significance to the ordinary.

Jonathan Weinberg has explained this aspect showing how the physical characteristics of paintings differ from those of photographs and highlighting that the artist makes subtle changes and modifications. Take, for example, *61 Pontiac* (1968-69) which looks like an enormous photograph. Nonetheless, a closer examination reveals areas that are composed of paint. "The physicality of paint", asserts Weinberg, "makes the

figures and objects in the picture seem more present than they would in a photograph.” (Weinberg, 2005, p. 53) For that reason, his works cannot be reduced to a mechanical transference onto a canvas; they are original approaches to artist’s everyday life.

Using his brush and his colour palette, Bechtle builds up textures and surfaces which traps an ordinary scene such as *61 Pontiac* (1968-1969) or *Portrero Table* (1994), showing its exceptional qualities. Through this paper, I wish to focus on the creative process of painting. Over his career, Bechtle has completed on average four to five paintings per year. He creates each painting in slow time, making all the necessary changes to achieve what he saw in his daily perceptions.

For most of his career, Bechtle’s paintings have pulled our focus from observable details that make the ordinary things extraordinary. “I’m just painting what is available to me, some of the peculiar things that catch my eye”. However, as Michael Auping explains, what the artist finds peculiar in any given scene is often not readily apparent to others. (Auping, 2005, p. 37). He discovers the inspiration while walking or driving the neighbourhoods near his home in San Francisco. Then, he returns with his camera to take photographic “notation”.

The next stage continues at the studio, when the painter projects the photography onto canvas and outlines the contours of forms with a pencil. After that, Bechtle starts a long process of translating that perception of his peculiar eye. Firstly, the artist works with diluted brown paint to establish the presence of various forms. In its early stages, as Michael Aupig explains, paintings look less like a graphic reality than a light-infused

apparition, as we can see in this photograph of the work *Alameda Intersection* in progress. (Aupig, 2005, p. 38) Next, he adds other colours to obtain the bright intensity which characterizes his works, as we can see in the final result.

Through a hard-won process built up over time, brushstroke by brushstroke, the artist paints different layers which gives the apparent uniformity. Therefore, Bechtle uses photographs for the bones of his compositions, but then he creates paintings which try to show how the artist sees things. In order to achieve this, Bechtle uses brushes of various sizes (from 0.3 centimetres to 3 centimetres) and types (from sable to bristle).

Now, it is important to highlight that the process cannot be reduced to mere technique. In an interview made by the SFMOMA in May 2004, the artist recognises that the intensity of the works come from the level of concentration. He defends that this aspect is one of the crucial distinction between creating a painting and copying a photograph. (Bechtle, 2004) Thus, a technique is indispensable but each act has to be consciously, intentionally performed. Bechtle's discoveries are connected to his awareness of his everyday life. His paintings pull our focus from observable details that we absorb unconsciously in daily perception.

The artist fuses technique with thought and feeling, bringing the extraordinary of the ordinary to the surface, subtly magnified, as we can see in his works such as *Sunset Intersection – 40<sup>th</sup> and Vicente* (1989) or *Jetta* (2003). According to critics of Photorealism, the painter objectively reports the way the world really looks, stripped of the distortions of symbolisms or emotions, using photographs both to structure the image and to describe.

Nevertheless, as I try to expose, and the own artist defends, he does not merely depict reality: “There were times when I would put a disclaimer: I’m not a photorealist.” (Weinberg, 2011, p. 159) He does not want to represent a photograph, but he plays with the light and colour creating an atmosphere in which ordinary objects or buildings have an intense presence. As Michael Auping asserts “Bechtle’s buildings not only catch light but seem to absorb it, giving them a comparably numinous presence”. (Aupig, 2005, p. 39) In contrast to traditional aesthetics his art does not represent contexts that create strangeness, but instead, he makes us more aware of our daily surroundings and focuses our attention on our normal routines and objects through photorealistic style

#### **4. Conclusion**

Contributing to the lively debate about the boundaries of everyday aesthetics, I saw the nature of art is not one of knowing how to separate art objects from non-art objects. Rather, I present the experience of Bechtle’s works in terms of a relationship between artist, art object, audience and the surrounding environments of each. Thus, my findings attempt to establish a dialogue between everyday aesthetics and art aesthetics, analysing the aesthetic character of everyday as it is shown in photorealistic paintings.

This is a difficult task because, as Thomas Albright has asserted, the paintings that Robert Bechtle introduced at the Berkeley Gallery in 1968 were sometimes hard to accept. (Allbright, 1985, p. 209) His works seemed

to be blatant imitations of photographs – some of them as indifferently composed, carelessly cropped, and lacking in focus as an amateur’s snapshot. Despite it is undeniably his technique, the projection of slides on the canvases can reduce his paintings to mere mechanical reproductions as a photograph itself. Moreover, his particular style can be criticized for being unreal and not accurate. It is difficult to find empty streets as we can see in Bechtle’s paintings.

Besides, many specialists defend the aesthetics of everyday as an independent and separate discipline. They try to overcome the narrowing attention to fine art and liberate aesthetics from an exclusive focus on beauty and other Modern western characteristics. For that reason, they think that this kind of relationship supposes a fail in the research and development of this field. However, as I attempt to expose, this kind of dialogue does not only help us to understand Bechtle’s work but also to pay attention to daily objects and phenomena, to those qualities that pervade everyday experiences.

In Leddy’s words, Robert Bechtle is a true expert in the aesthetic of everyday life, taking pleasure in being in his surroundings and displaying the hidden extraordinary of the ordinary. (Leddy, 2012, p. 51) His work shows those facets of our everyday life that are so familiar we fail even to see them. Regardless of whether we think that he makes extraordinary his quotidian, as Thomas Leddy defends, or he makes an interpretation of his familiar surroundings, his paintings draw upon an experience of lives that are no notable, glamorous or object than our own. Bechtle is interested in real life, and he restores the continuity between art and life by means of

suggesting images of his daily life.

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**Gloria Luque Moya**

*Experiencing the Extraordinary of the Ordinary*

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# *Do Animals Make Art or the Evolutionary Continuity of Species: A Case For Uniqueness*

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ABSTRACT. When Władysław Tatarkiewicz wrote that there are only two things that can be said about art: that it is a human activity, not a product of nature, and that it is a conscious activity (or its product), adding that every statement about art different from the ones mentioned above was always finally overthrown (Tatarkiewicz 1980: 37), he probably did not think that the first claim could be questioned by anyone. In the following paper, I will trace the history of observations of “artistic behaviors” that were made by animal ethologists and then processed by evolutionary art philosophers who may lead to the hypothesis about the validity of assigning artistic abilities to animals. I will also demonstrate that the question whether, and in what sense, animals create art is in fact a question about a definition of art that could include this type of intentional animal acts.

## **1. Introduction**

The contemporary discussion about the possibility of the existence of animal-made art (animal art debate) originates from the letter of Julian Huxley to *Nature*, in which the British naturalist describes a London zoo gorilla tracing the outline of its own shadow. Because, as Huxley notes, the

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gorilla did it at least three times, he recognizes in it “possible sources of human graphic art” (de Wall 2001, Morris 2013). Nadia Ladygina Kohts, who in the 1920s investigated the perception of color and shape in young chimpanzees, observed the enthusiasm with which they draw with pencil on paper. In turn, Paul Schiller in the 1940s conducted simple experiments where chimpanzees completed ready-made patterns on a piece of paper and did so in a way that indicated a sense of symmetry and ability to control the composition. The real breakthrough, however, was the experiment that a student of Nikolaas Tinbergen, Desmond Morris, conducted at the Zoological Society of London in the years 1956-58 with the participation of a chimp named Congo.

According to Morris, the author of such books as *The Biology of Art* from 1963 and *The Artistic Ape: Three Million Years of Art* from 2013 as well as, among others, *The Naked Ape* or *The Human Zoo*, we should look for the earliest sources of art in events of special importance for the community such as festivals and rituals like, for example, a successful hunt, birth, rituals of initiation (e.g. entry into adulthood), marriage act, war expeditions, death (burial), as well as remembrance of the dead and fear of superstitions. Morris refers here to Ellen Dissanayake’s concept (1995, 2000, Morris 2013), although it can be said with a high degree of probability that he had some influence on its development during their scientific cooperation in the late 1960s. According to this concept, the main reason for the emergence of art in the evolutionary history of humankind was the need to emphasize and highlight special and exceptional moments and events, but also make everyday events more unique (*making special, artification*).

Recalling the experiment with the chimp Congo, Morris also claims that some higher primates, if properly taught, can create images that fit into the criteria of aesthetic perfection of human art.

## **2. Congo Called Artist**

As the British anthropologist notes, at the age of 3 Congo had plenty of physical energy, was very curious and impulsive. A striking feature of his behavior was that when he received a pencil and began to draw, his excessive energy levels dropped. Morris, who studied many aspects of Congo's behavior, saw that it had its favorite shape: a beam of scattered, radial lines spreading out from the bottom of the page in every direction.

One of the surprising aspects of the drawing sessions with Congo was the intensity with which he worked. He did not receive rewards in the form of food, and creating drawings in itself was a reward for him. He was not interested in analyzing finished works but the act of creation fascinated him. He also knew at what point drawing should end. When he was being persuaded to continue, he refused, but when he received a new piece of paper, he immediately began to enjoy the opportunity to take on a new challenge. During several sessions in which, for some sudden reason, one needed to interrupt his work or interfere with an unfinished drawing, he reacted with screams and even temper tantrums. As Morris writes, "It seemed extraordinary that a chimpanzee should be so upset when attempts were made to stop an activity as specialized as picture making. (...) Why on

earth should it have such a powerful appeal for an animal that shows no inclination to perform anything like it in the wild?" (Morris 2013: 28)

The drawings made by Congo belonged to three categories: drawings on an empty piece of paper, drawings on pieces of paper with geometric shapes and paintings on colorful cards. From the first moment he got the brush, it was obvious that Congo considered painting as more exciting than drawing with a pencil. Congo's drawing activity went through a total of three stages. In the first one the chimpanzee became acquainted with a new painting medium, in the second he gradually took control over brushes and was able to paint a thickened shape resembling a beam. In the third stage, which was broadcast live on the television, despite the distraction caused by the presence of the television crew, the chimp was very excited about the act of painting and creating images. Approximately during the 14<sup>th</sup> painting session Congo showed that he had fully mastered the new medium and painted in a completely sure way. When observing him, it became clear that his every sign and line was placed exactly where he wanted it. The initially simple shape of the beam became more and more complex. Each line was carefully placed in relation to the others and the whole composition was designed to fit in a place intended for it. When on the next day Congo once again performed live on television, he was so confident that he painted a large and complicated beam shape (Morris 2013).

Approximately around the 22<sup>nd</sup> session that took place on September 2, 1957, Congo reached the peak of painting competence and control. No random sign appeared then on his paintings. Every line painted on the paper was put exactly where he wanted it to be and he used the available space

with the dash of a professional human artist. He played with his beam pattern, tilting it one way, making a dotted version of it or splitting it into two parts. (Out of the ten paintings created that day, all were sold to private collections in Europe and North America, for example, Pablo Picasso and Joan Miro bought one painting each.)

In the following weeks, Congo continued to create abstract works of quality which had not yet been observed in any animal. Each time, he also explored new variations. He created a tilted beam, an additional beam, a beam with a curved base and 3 separate beams marked in the central part with a yellow, black and blue point respectively. He particularly liked the typically human aesthetic game, namely thematic variations. “Those who watched him during this stage simply sat in amazement, unable to believe what they were seeing”. This peak period of Congo’s artistic creation lasted until the end of 1957. Up to this point, he had created over 30 high-quality works. In 1958 he entered the third stage in which, despite the persisting boldness and self-confidence, his level of interest in the activity of painting began to decrease. Many of his works of this period were created quickly and intensively, but with less attention to detail. Energetic vertical shapes and spontaneous loops slowly replaced the developed beam patterns.

### **3. Animal-made Art – Capitulation of the Aesthetic Theory?**

Morris claims that the experiment with the chimpanzee Congo proves that not only humans but also other primates, if properly taught, can create images that demonstrate the ability to adhere to several basic aesthetic

principles: feeling satisfaction with the very act of painting (the chimpanzee did not receive any reward); compositional control of the painting (Congo was able to limit his painting to a designated outlined space and maintain the compositional balance of the overall layout of the lines and pattern variations); calligraphic variation (on a completely basic level, with a much lower intensity than in young children); thematic variations and optimal heterogeneity of the image (neither too few nor too many shapes, lines, etc.) Although compositions drawn by chimpanzees are in fact better when it comes to the sense of rhythm and balance than compositions drawn by 2-year-old children (Kellog 1955), unlike them, the chimpanzee never reaches the imaging stage which the child enters at the age of 3-3.5, when he or she starts to represent his or her mom, dad, cat and house.

So, can Congo's paintings, as Morris wants it, be considered art? The greatest advantage of the analyses of the author of *The Artistic Ape* (apart from his thorough knowledge about primates), namely the excellent expertise in artistic theory and practice (the author is a recognized expressionist painter), also constitutes its weakness. The author is aware of the importance of contemporary painting practices and deliberately applies the definition of art taken from impressionism when referring to art in general. This makes it much easier to classify Congo's exceptional achievements as artistic (he calls Congo's style abstract lyrical impressionism). However, if we look at the nature of these achievements a little closer, it will turn out that they do not go beyond the aforementioned theoretical horizon.

#### **4. “A Lot Has Happened in the Meantime, both to Their Family and to Ours”**

In his essay published in one of the Edge.org volumes Denis Dutton writes: “Consider Wittgenstein’s gnomic, seemingly profound claim, “If a lion could speak, we could not understand him.” Oh yeah? That’s a deeply mischievous idea, and Wittgenstein would have profited from getting to know an animal ethologist or two. If a lion could speak, the ethologists would be pretty clear about that he’d be talking about: annoying other lions, and members of the opposite lion sex, tasty zebras, and so on. People who live with animals can understand them, sometimes rather remarkably” (Dutton 2011: 55).

Dutton, the author of the monumental *The Art Instinct*, treats the issue of animal-made art rather marginally, devoting it a total of one paragraph in the *Introduction* and a small but significant piece in *Art and Human Reality* where he states that chimpanzees have fun scribbling or plotting vertical shapes. Still, the pleasure consists in simply filling the white background with a solid color and does not differ much from the pleasure of creating contrasts, which most of us have while smearing with our fingers or during first painting attempts at school (Dutton 2011:55-56). However, it cannot be said with certainty that he includes in the *marginal cases*, together with the works of Duchamp, Schonberg’s compositions or the final match of the soccer World Cup. While he successfully applies the criteria of his *cluster concept of art* to Dadaist and conceptual art or atonal music and the

spectacle of a soccer final, the status of chimpanzee painting is settled quite clearly: “To call this art or proto-art underestimates and misunderstands what human art is” (Dutton 2011: 56).

According to Dutton, people who claim that there is such a thing as intentional artistic creations of chimpanzees are usually not aware of other aspects of primate behavior. First of all, the typical vertical shape that usually appears in such images is not really reproductive because the chimpanzee is unable to present it upside down. Second, if the caretaker does not take a piece of paper away from it in advance, the result of playing with the brush will inevitably be a dark brown spot, as the chimpanzee has no idea when to stop. It is also difficult to discern any purpose, sense of an action plan or an end point to which the work is heading. It only appears to have these qualities because the trainer took it from the chimpanzee in advance before it became a shapeless stain. Finally, and most meaningfully for Dutton, when chimpanzees finish painting or when a piece of paper is taken from them, they never come back to look at their work. Chimpanzees like to stain white paper with colored spots but it does not make them creators of art works, Dutton seems to say. “There is no cultural tradition within which chimps are working. There's no criticism—art talk or evaluation of any kind—with the chimps. There's no style in the sense that it's a learned way of doing it, though there are uniformities in the output for muscular reasons”. And further: “It is seems to me that anyone who says, "Yes, chimpanzees have art," is making a mistake” (Dutton 2011: 56).

This position of the author of *The Art Instinct* should not be surprising because it is a fairly obvious consequence of the theoretical perspective

adopted by him (intentionalism, essentialism and aesthetic perceptualism) for at least two reasons. First, as noted by Joseph Carroll, Dutton defines the proper subject of his considerations—which fundamentally distinguishes him from Dissanayake (1988)—primarily as high art of developed civilizations (Carroll 2010) described as the “white, cold peaks of art” by Clive Bell (Bell 1958), and the “undisputed, paradigm cases” by Dutton himself:

Instead of asking how is it that Duchamp's readymades are works of art, I say, let's ask what is it that makes the Pastoral Symphony a work of art. Why is A Midsummer Night's Dream a work of art? Why is Pride and Prejudice a work of art? Let's look first at the undisputed paradigm cases and find out what they all have in common. (...) Better to understand them, and then analyze modernist experimentation and provocations, such as Duchamp's brilliant work (Dutton 2011: 52).

Second, being an art anthropologist and a Darwinian naturalist, Dutton faultlessly recognizes the falseness of pseudo-scientific jargon, regardless of whether it originates from the postmodern *anything goes*, from unauthorized excursions of some comparative ethologists in search of linkages between the behavior of people and other animals (especially primates) or from a simple misunderstanding of the place art occupies in human reality:

“The gulf between human and chimpanzee “art” should be no surprise: our ancestors branched off from theirs six millions years ago. The

ensemble of adaptations that became the human art instinct go back in our prehistory only a hundred thousand years or so, a tinyone-sixtieth fraction of the time span back to our ancestral split with chimps. A lot has happened in the meantime, both to their family and to ours” (Dutton 2009: 8).

### **5. “Another Uniqueness Claim Bites the Dust!”**

Dutton’s argument, however, has a double-edged character which it paradoxically owes to the modern discoveries of evolutionists. The fact that we find more and more points of contact between the behavior of *homo sapiens* and other animals supports the position that some of the animals could be regarded creators of art (Davies 2012: 30). Examples are provided particularly by primatology and comparative ethology. Numerous observations of animals engaging in activities—such as the production and use of tools—that until recently were regarded as uniquely (and characteristically) human point to an interspecific affinity rather than a complete break between the species. The same applies to certain mental predispositions such as emotionality or self-awareness which occur both in humans and other animals (although with varying intensity), so that in the light of discoveries of modern evolutionary sciences it is assumed that the difference between the human and other primates is, in principle, not qualitative but quantitative, and the interspecific universality of many characteristics and behaviors is indisputable in the opinion of primatologists, comparative psychologists and animal ethologists.

It is no different with the flagship concept in evolutionary psychology,

but also revolutionary narrative and literary studies, namely the “theory of mind”, i.e. the cognitive ability of an individual to accept the second-person perspective, enabling him to recognize mental states of other persons, track the trajectory of their actions and predicting behavior, socially important cheating skills. As it turns out, this ability is almost certainly not unique to *homo sapiens* as chimpanzees and bonobos are also equipped with it. “Another uniqueness claim bites the dust!” announced triumphantly the primatologist Frans de Waal on his Facebook profile, referring to the experiment (the results were published in *Science* in the October 6, 2016 issue) in which chimpanzees passed the classic test of attributing false beliefs to others (a modified version of the so-called Sally-Ann test) (Caruso 2016).

Until now, the basic problem in the study of advanced cognitive abilities of chimpanzees, including the possibility of subjecting them to the false belief test, was the lack of an appropriate method that would allow to determine the focus of a chimpanzee’s attention at a given moment. Lacking the faculty of speech, the chimpanzee cannot communicate to the researcher in a conventional way—i.e. using words (as would be the case of 2, 3, 4-year olds taking the test—where it believes Sally will look for candies previously hidden by Ann. Therefore, the experiment conducted by researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig and Kyoto University’s Kumamoto Sanctuary was primarily about finding a way to make the results independent of verbal communication as a source of information about the intentions of the research subject. This was achieved through the use of the innovative *eye-tracking* method which

tracks the trajectory of a chimpanzee's sight while it is subjected to the experiment. The key to the success of the experiment (confirming the hypothesis that the chimpanzee possesses the "theory of mind") was to capture the moment when the animal focuses its eyes on the spot where the individual it observed had hid an object before it was moved to a different place without the chimpanzee's knowledge. If the chimpanzee did not have the "theory of mind", its attention, like the attention of a typical human three-year-old, would be focused on the point to which the object was moved (unknown to the individual observed by the chimpanzee, but known to the chimpanzee). The fact that the chimpanzee clearly expects that the observed individual will follow in the direction suggested by his or her (the individual's) outdated and erroneous belief about the hiding place proves that it understands that the observed individual may have different beliefs from its own and that they may be false beliefs.

The experiment of the researchers from Leipzig not only shows in a unique way the need to "avoid excessive dependence on language skills necessary to understand narratives and questions in testing the theory of mind in children", but also "emphasizes the mental continuity between apes and humans." (de Wall 2016: 40) We can thus, following Tecumseh Fitch, consider it "the last nail in the coffin of the long-standing idea that humans are the only species with the "theory of mind"" (Caruso 2016).

Does the fact that chimpanzees possess the "theory of mind" (mind reading, empathic accuracy or, as G. Currie describes it – ability to mentalize? – *mentalising*), a skill necessary to create simple tools and engage in advanced social or "political" practices (Szymborski 2011), also

mean that they have artistic skills? Are chimpanzees therefore capable of creating art? Modern ethology provides a lot of evidence which, at least at first glance, give grounds to answer this question affirmatively.

If we refer to the definition proposed by Tatarkiewicz in *A History of Six Ideas*— according to which art produces beauty, represents or reproduces reality, creates forms, expresses, produces aesthetic experiences and causes shock (Tatarkiewicz 1980: 27-33)—it will turn out that Congo’s paintings do not fall into this category. First of all, its drawings do not reproduce reality and do not give shape to things, which still, however, allows them to be categorized as non-figurative painting. Moreover, nothing stands in the way, especially taking into account a certain artistry of images created during the 22<sup>nd</sup> session and the emotional involvement of the chimpanzee, to include them in the category of artification activities which might support the hypothesis of *making special*, claiming that the most original function of art was to leave marks and mark-making, not copying, imitating or symbolizing (Dissanayake 1995, 2013). Of course, with this qualification of proto-artistic activities of the chimpanzee, it is important to underline that the animal undertakes the activity of “marking”, unlike primary people, as a result of a clear incentive from the caretaker; the activity is not motivated by the inner need for invention or preceded by investment of time, energy and hard to reach materials (e.g. multi-day expeditions to acquire rare dyes by hunters-gatherers).

The issues of aesthetic survival and shock induction also seem difficult to verify empirically (both are related to the intentionality of chimpanzee painting trials that is key to our deliberations). They can be

caused by each of the components of the emotional response to the situation in which, as a result of encouragement, the chimpanzee was put (mechanical hand movements, reactions to colors, fulfilling the caretaker's request, etc.). The cluster definition introduced by Dutton also does not explicitly decide in favor of recognizing the effects of chimpanzee creative work as art.<sup>2</sup> Considering the absolutely exceptional case of Congo,<sup>3</sup> in which signs of intentional action could be observed, it cannot certainly be said whether chimpanzees and other animals "enjoy art for itself, not demanding that it should protect them from the cold, or provide them with food and matrimonial attractiveness" (criterion of direct, impractical pleasure). In many cases the opposite is true: bowerbirds decorate their nests only in order to attract the attention of females (and this is a strictly functional motivation); although Morris compares Congo's achievements from the 22<sup>nd</sup> session to the impressionist style in painting ('style' criterion), which also did not escape the attention of Miro and Picasso who bought the paintings, this qualification seems to be exaggerated. Certainly, these works do not

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<sup>2</sup> Dutton creates a list of twelve "recognition criteria" of art (present inter-culturally and supra-historically), which, in his opinion, will facilitate an understanding of what art is as a universal human phenomenon in its diversity and indeterminacy. These criteria are (Dutton, 2009: 51-59): (1) *direct (impractical) pleasure*, (2) *skill and virtuosity*, (3) *style*, (4) *novelty and creativity*, (5) *criticism*, (6) *representation, imitation*, (7) *special focus*, (8) *expressive individuality*, (9) *emotional saturation*, (10) *intellectual challenge*, (11) *art traditions and institutions*, and (12) *imaginative experience*.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the claim that chimpanzees create art because Congo did it is equivalent to the claim that they know sign language because one of them, the chimpanzee named Washoe, learned and used around 250 signs of American Sign Language.

represent (imitate) the experience related to the real world ('representation' criterion). They are also not clearly separated from everyday life, treated as a source of specific experiences ('special focus' criterion) or created with the aim to use complex and diverse perceptual and intellectual abilities in their full extent ('intellectual challenge' criterion). Surely, the criterion of art tradition and institutions is doubtful and not applicable here either, even with the assumption of some form of an animalistic theory of mind or the ability to mentalize that animal "artists" and "art recipients" meet in fanciful worlds of imagination ('imaginative experience' criterion).

On the other hand, it cannot be unambiguously denied that among female spiders or bowerbirds there exists some kind of criticism and assessment of the "artistic achievement" of the male, be it a steady rhythm of tapping or visual improvement of the nest ('criticism' criterion). It may even be possible that the criteria of this criticism and assessment have been genetically fixed, being transmitted from generation to generation. There is a high probability that, for example, in the world of bowerbirds, similarly to the human world, the artistic or decorative craft ('skill and virtuosity' criterion) is cared for, appreciated and admired; what is perhaps also evaluated, praised and admired in the "work" is its originality, creativity and ability to surprise the audience even if it is an audience consisting only of female-connoisseurs of the same species ('novelty and creativity' criterion), although the functional nature of the achievement (courtship) accompanying it seems to contradict it. It also does not explicitly negate the "artistic aspirations" of animals, i.e. the ability to express the individual artistic personality accompanying their work and inherent in artistic practices,

regardless of whether it is fully achieved (criterion of expressive individuality); nor does it negate that every artwork experience is intertwined with emotions of varying degrees of saturation ('emotional saturation' criterion).

Why then, according to popular opinion (and rather obvious intuition), a typical chimpanzee does not create art? There are at least several important arguments for such a position. First of all, the chimpanzee seems to disturb and destroy the white space on paper rather than fill it for aesthetic reasons (which is pointed out by, for example, Lenain 1999). Second, the chimpanzee usually shows a lack of interest in the finished image after painting. Third, if the caretaker does not take the paper away at the right moment the image becomes a dark stain. The exception here is Congo who, during several sessions of the "mature period" showed optimal image heterogeneity, knowing exactly when to stop painting. Fourth, in any other case the pleasure resulting from the activity of painting seems to be derived from rhythmic movements, not from aesthetic causes (as pointed out by Davies 2012).

What arguments are then in favor of attributing meaning to chimpanzee art? The answer cannot be given without a certain amount of cynicism. If the world of art recognizes that it is worth dealing with, then according to the institutional definition of art, nothing stands in the way of including chimpanzees, elephants, bowerbird nests and spider stepping in the concept. Chimpanzee painting is also similar to art as a natural category, a universal property of human mental capacity, one of the recognition criteria of its perfection, namely rarity of occurrence (Dutton 2004). While

human artists can be counted in millions (and using the broadened definition of art perhaps even billions), there are at most a few thousand chimpanzee artists. Just as we value rare materials, rare artifacts seem valuable to us. The least important is the charitable function of chimpanzee art (or animal-made art in general, just to mention images painted by elephants in the famous experiment by Komar and Melamid, conducted as part of the campaign to save elephants called the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project), usually emerging in institutions that operate on the basis of voluntary donations and take care of animals.

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# *The (Aesthetic) Extended Mind: Aesthetics from Experience-of to Experience-with*

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ABSTRACT. Through this contribution I would like to outline a particular paradigm of aesthetic experience and carry out a first discussion on it. I will explain the basic reason for this proposal in par. 1, in which a paradox that, in my opinion, thrives in our present conception of the aesthetic is pointed out. In par. 2 I will provide the general coordinates of the paradigm at issue trying to highlight at least in principle the connection with the extended mind model<sup>2</sup>, while in the following two paragraphs I will draw some consequences with regard to the categorial apparatus relating both to aesthetic theory (par. 3) and to the aesthetic field, that is, to the practice of the aesthetic (par. 4).

## **1. Subject / Object: A Problematic Dualistic Premise**

If you ask people observing a painting, listening to a song, reading a novel, or even drinking coffee from a design mug or wearing a branded dress, what

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<sup>2</sup> The content of this paragraph was discussed at the ESA Conference 2018 in Maribor. I present it here in an abridged version; the broader and final one constitutes the second part of Matteucci (forthcoming). I am deeply indebted to the organizers of Maribor's Conference for inviting me to present my research and to all the participants who gave me critical suggestions during a very fruitful debate.

it is that makes their experience aesthetic, their answer will presumably appeal to emotions felt as their own, to specific knowledge or notions, or, alternatively, they will refer to some determined content detected in the object, to certain properties which would characterize the latter, if not even to a sort of, so to speak, “superior order objectivity” that would constitute an alleged aesthetic value.

Those who have tried to put order, conceptually and philosophically, among all these possible responses have usually suggested dual schemes. At least in the analytical field, the philosophers who have dealt with the question of how to investigate aesthetic experience, or the experience of the aesthetic, have generally emphasized dichotomies between opposing approaches: for example, “transformational” and “demarcative” (Shusterman 1997), or “phenomenological” and “epistemic” (Iseminger 2003 and 2008), or even “internalist” and “externalist” (Shelley 2017, par. 2.4). In this way it is as if the above-sampled responses were arranged within a two-column table. In the first column we would find answers that seem to trace back to the subjective dimension, advocating a conception of aesthetic experience based on peculiar characteristics of the acts of the subject and therefore constitutive of his/her attitude, or even of a subjectively understood value. In the second column, on the other hand, the answers that ascribe the specificity of the experience in question to elements proper to or attributable to the objective content. In the same basic approach we can also include Carroll’s analysis, that has experimented with different classifications during the course of its own development (see Carroll’s various essays: 2001, pp. 41-62; 2002; 2006), but which at the end has

settled on a vision that contrasts approaches focused on the subjective dimension, connected to attitude and value, and those approaches that instead leverage the experiential component related to the content, and therefore to the objective dimension.

Now, more than discussing the variously interesting and suggestive options that have animated the debate (well summarized, according to an original interpretation, also by Leddy 2012, pp. 135-149), it is here interesting to stress the underlying motif that unites these dual schemes. In fact, they all seem to be faithful to the principle according to which experience – in this case the aesthetic one – must be described and discussed assuming the dichotomy between subject and object as a starting point (against this conception see also Crowther 2008). In this they agree with the options that are implied by the various responses we introduced at the beginning as samples taken from common sense.

I believe that the reason behind this kind of justifications is a peculiar cultural stratification. Thus, although with a certain degree of approximation and beyond several complications, sophistications and refinements introduced by this or that philosopher, I would rather say that according to our tradition, aesthetic experience is described as a relationship that connects two heterogeneous and *per se* isolated entities, along the lines of a general conception of the cognitive act which implies a primary opposition between mind and world. In other terms, our analysis of the aesthetic has been traditionally developed according to a paradigm derived from the typically modern theory of knowledge.

If this holds true, in the aforementioned justifications one is exposed

to the risk of incurring a functionalist fallacy, by conjecturing a specific (either subjective or objective) *ad hoc* function that is considered able to explain the phenomenon at issue. Sometimes all this is aggravated by the presumption of an underlying substantialist and essentialist order, as when one ascribes this function to a (subjective or objective) substance that would constitute the essence of the aesthetic – a sort of *vis aesthetica* analogous to Molière's *vis dormitiva*.

The suspect of a poorly-developed functionalism also derives from a historical understanding of art, the domain to which one more tenaciously refers when speaking of the aesthetic. In fact, the kernels of this canonical model are increasingly challenged in our current artistic context: the aesthetic object has been replaced by experiential processes which are incompatible with the ontological status of modern objectivity; individual aesthetic subjects have been replaced by multiple subjectivities, or even inter-subjectivity figures and hybrid relationships between creativity and receptivity. Aesthetic experience nowadays takes place more and more as an interactive articulation that involves devices rather than objects and agencies greatly endowed with impersonal components rather than subjects. Suffice to consider how frayed and porous are here the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity.

Therefore we can speak of a paradox. It seems in fact that the way we think of the aesthetic is dualistic, while the way we practice it is – so to speak – holistically relational. Accordingly, the canonical model is still valid for the way we usually describe or conceive of our aesthetic experience, despite contradicting the way we usually practice our aesthetic experience.

In more sophisticated terms, we could say that the modern gnoseological pair subject-object yielded a sort of “ideological” structure that has sedimented in our common sense. According to this “ideological” structure aesthetic experience is that linear (it does not matter whether mono- or bi-directional) relationship that occurs between a constituted subjective pole and a constituted objective pole. Contrariwise, if you were to describe what happens commonly and effectively when you have an experience that is recognised as being aesthetic it turns out that the system of roles still valid for that “ideological” structure collapses, also with reference to what is considered art today. Preliminary ontological or substantial partitions (or separate levels of quality and quantity) between the organism and the environment do not subsist in the immersive and widespread practices of the aesthetic. What seems to be still valid for the ideological and explicit (thematical) structure of our conception of the aesthetic (i.e., our “common sense *about* the aesthetic”) conflicts with the actual and implicit (pragmatical) structure of our conception of the aesthetic (i.e., our “aesthetic common sense”).

The issue that I would like to address is hence how we can describe aesthetic experience by locating ourselves somehow outside the ideological scheme of the common sense about the aesthetic and by staying as close as possible to a conception of the aesthetic as a set of practices, namely to our aesthetic common sense.

## 2. The Paradigm of Experience-with

An experience that does not take place through linear yet biunivocal channels between constituted and stable entities, implies an irreducible solidarity between *relata* and a distributed *agency*. It pertains to a whole field system. This, or at least something similar, seems to apply already to the works of great art. In the aesthetic practice of reading a novel, we are not interested in the features that the novel preserves in itself as the object of both our perceptual and cognitive experience. By reading what is written, by experiencing words and propositions, we are not primarily interested in enjoying the qualities of linguistic forms and their meaning *per se*. Neither are we willing to taste the quality of our condition *per se*. Through this we want to taste the quality of the novel in the ways it “gets us”, in the ways it *becomes* our own way of feeling something. We want to taste the relational modality in its pregnant and involving contingency.

It is probably for this reason that some philosophers and critics have observed that aesthetic experience transforms both the perceiver as individual and as community, and the artwork, that hence, in its own historical efficacy proves to be irreducible to an absolute and atemporal datum. What kind of experience is exactly aesthetic experience, then? What is at stake in it, if not the subject in him/herself and the object in itself or their features? In other terms, what is the mark of the aesthetic as such? “What” and “what kind of thing” is the aesthetic?

An important element is that the aesthetic can concern any experiential content, any sort of perception, belief, memory, knowledge,

emotion, imagination... On this basis some have suggested to consider it as a potential doubling of experience in general or as a true and proper ontological transfiguration of it. At a closer look, yet, what emerges is the fact that the aesthetic is not really a “what”, but rather a “how”, a modal index. It is the modality in which the interaction between organism and environment takes place that qualifies, if anything, the experience as aesthetic, and not single elements, contents, or acts belonging either to the organism or to the environment.

In order to pinpoint this peculiar relational modality, I think that we could at least heuristically agree that the aesthetic designates a form of an organism-environment interaction so integrated that it generates a sort of full “collusion”. In other words, it is a kind of practices in which the organism and the environment are coupled and mutually supportive in a holistic experiential configuration. In this regard, some cues provided by a number of quite heterogeneous and otherwise incompatible contemporary philosophers seem reassuring: Wittgenstein, when he describes art experience as the act of paying a visit to someone and feeling welcomed, and hence “taken” into its field; Dilthey and “atmospherology”, with the analysis of *moods* and *Stimmungen*; Dewey, when he assigns a foundational role to the emotional quality of aesthetic experience; Cassirer, when he analyzes expressive perception; Adorno, when he seems to compare the aesthetic behaviour to the immersion into a tank full of energy.

Due to the lack of any ontological-substantial partition between Subject and Object, the aesthetic *agency* distributes itself in vectors devoid of predefined and specific ownership, to the extent that it generates a sort of

bi-stability that makes the roles of the various correlated elements exchangeable. The same elements can take on each role at any time, both actively and passively. They are experienced with in their shifting from one role to the other, and never in the simultaneous staticity of a specific and absolute function they would be endowed with. Hence, the aesthetic field has a performative and in itself indeterminable configuration in the most pregnant sense this term has in physics. Consequently, in the aesthetic field the object is not (or rather, no longer, in respect to Modernity) a mere object, but an appeal to us, and the subject is not (or rather, no longer, in respect to Modernity) a mere subject, but an embedded organism that corresponds to the environment by putting to the test its own skills. Both of them are players of a game, of a *ludus*, whose sense appears only when executed. Just as the object alludes, invites to the game, and in its extra-subjective passivity, in its materiality, reveals itself as effective, hence active, so the subject feels him/herself colluded, taken into the game of the sensibly mediated sense, thus also by virtue of elements of passivity – of constraints – to which he/she is supposed to correspond.

For this same reason, the aesthetic content cannot be reduced to the perceptual one. The experiential content that inheres in *aisthesis* goes beyond mere *aistheton*. The latter refers to a content of the senses inscribed in an order which is internal to the linear relationship between subject and object, and it hence gets structured as the articulation of a “noema”, as phenomenology would call it. While the percept we can focus on is a center, a *fulcrum*, that absorbs the “rays”, so to speak, of our attention that in turn shed light on it, the aesthetic in a wider and pregnant sense is a horizon that

expands itself while involving us, it is the light both shaping and shed by what we are facing: it dictates the configuration of an experiential field while avoiding every factual ascertainment. If *aistheton* falls back into a noematic order, the aesthetic *per se* outlines an order. It is – we may say – an “aisthema”, that is articulated not by virtue of acts of perception, but by soliciting practices of “perceptualization” (using a term introduced by Cassirer 1944, p. 193): more than perceiving, it is a matter of making perceivable.

Not being an *aistheton* but an *aisthema*, which generates sense in the simple form of relational efficacy, it is not surprising that the aesthetic may even be factually inexistent. In the aesthetic field the topological constraintness that usually marks a perceptual content can be embodied by an imaginative *analogon* that is performative only by appearing, and that makes us feel it effective and present, as it eminently happens with literature. It is exactly by virtue of this “aisthematic” nature, or in other terms as being a performative structure that makes something perceivable, that both makes someone feel and makes itself felt, that the aesthetic is fatally interwoven with the virtual, due to a common suspension of ontologically determined or noetically determinable entities.

As a relational modality, the aesthetic is hence pervasive (at least potentially) not because it doubles experience. It modifies the latter immanently, materially, by emphasizing those elements that, although inhabit it actively, would otherwise remain tacit. Specifically, the aesthetic alters the structure of the cognitive thematization: that which, from a functional point of view, is merely operative is here brought to the fore to

the extent of becoming apparent. When this switch takes place, the field's energy lines emerge and acquire relevance, while the linear tension towards thematic contents loses its supremacy. These contents now cease being the terminal targets of our attention and become the catalysts of a different manifestation of the field. They switch from being ends to being means, from being goals to being vectors. These cases emphasize the "operative" which implies a different paradigm from that of the "experience-of" something, that is, the paradigm of the "experience-with" something. It is a wide range-paradigm that covers various experiential phenomena, at least from the gestaltic to the imaginative.

In this framework, the distinction between experience-of and experience-with, which has been traditionally neglected, is crucial. Let's just think how different it is to ask on the one hand "what is seen *of* a painting" and, on the other hand, "what is seen *with* a painting". Moreover, such distinction, which is of a phenomenological if not even of a pragmatic (and certainly not ontological) kind, goes way beyond the most canonical aesthetic domain.

We may sum this point up by saying that in the experience-of, "of" marks a distance that may generate distinction and abstraction, while in the experience-with, "with" marks a relationship that is always mutually supportive and material. The first one is inclined to generalization and hence risks being inefficacious in practice, while the second one is ineludibly topologically bound and hence it possesses a whole efficacy which yet is valid only for that specific moment.

By deflating the term, the aesthetic hence appears as something with

which we experience – that is: only when we experience with something, we can be faced with aestheticity as a relational modality. In this case, the object, instead of being the target of a subject, performatively generates an experiential field which can be aesthetically qualified as a whole. Hence, the table that I have experience *of* is a thematically experienced content, while the aesthetic I can experience *with* the table is a field relationship that makes mediation inescapable, that is, it always and *simultaneously* says something about me and about the world in the current circumstance. Insofar as we are engaged in this experience-with we are colluding with the manifestation of an *aisthema*, and therefore our experience is aesthetic.

Since this manifestation pertains to operative, and not substantial elements, the kind of experience at issue here is radically contingent. It hence forces to an exercise of competences: the organism does not merely attend to, but participates in the apparition of the *aisthema*, even when it plays the role of the “author” of an aesthetic structure, by also making use of itself, and not only of those same contents that are mere functional terms for its experience-of, that is, of the matter it interacts with. In the practice of the aesthetic, activity and passivity pertain to both *relata*, according to a performative intertwining between feeling and feeling-oneself that produces reflexivity. By virtue of this involvement the organism, in fact, from its interaction with the environment acquires plastic competences about the “self-in-the-world” (a non-quantifiable formula within itself) that are outside of merely functional relationships and whose ownership is to be ascribed to the field as a whole.

The aesthetic inter-play develops in relation to concrete and

contingent usages of factual matter that becomes the experiential heritage of the organism as its own ways of operating with the material that then emerges. So, if the experiential arc describes the activity of a mind, the latter necessarily includes, in their own mutually supportive reciprocity, both the organism and the environment. The aesthetic requires collusion, participation in a correspondence (that unfolds in an analogical series), between players who are looking for reciprocal agreement, and hence, a common expressivity. That is why the primary feature of the aesthetic is its expressive property.

If aesthetic expressivity is the non-substantial connotation of the operative factors which appear when the experience-of-something is de-functionalized, that is, when one experiences “with” that something, what is aesthetically expressive is precisely the experiential field as a whole, not its components as isolated and thematizable entities. Hence, the peculiar nature of aesthetic properties. The properties that we objectively attribute to perceived objects are non-aesthetic exactly because they pertain to the content of *aisthesis* as *aistheton*, as that which we have experience of: the fragility of a glass refers to the object of which I have an experience, its objective and knowable attributes. Contrariwise, aesthetic properties operatively subsist in the praxis of sensibility, they pertain to the content of *aisthesis* as *aisthema*, as that with which we experience. Properties manifest their own expressive operativity when we experience with them. They then appear as that aesthetic property which overall orients the collusive interaction with the environment, namely working in an analogical way, not in a logical one. We will therefore say that aesthetic properties, instead of

supervening in respect to non-aesthetic properties, *inter-vene* in the contingent and topologically embedded experiential field. The aesthetic property is the non-aesthetic property itself that takes on a different role: we no longer have experience of it, but we experience with it. Without implying continuity solutions (“superior levels” or new entities), it coincides with the inflection point that makes an *aistheton aisthema*.

Summarizing: Aesthetic experience as such is based on a model which is not ascribable to the linear (univocal or reciprocal) relationship between two separate entities, a subject and an object (“experience-of”). It rather consists of an “experience-with” something, that develops within the sphere of sensibility, or, in other words, of *aisthesis*, meant as a field in which one can orientate him or herself only by analogically managing the expressive features of an ambiance-like situation. The lines of force that operate within such field should be understood as structures that are simultaneously endowed with activity and passivity, to the extent that they, in their expressivity, exceed every merely empirical, objective as well as subjective, content. I proposed thus to describe such a field force as “aisthema”, in order to emphasize the difference that exists from every structural relationship (“noema”) that connotes someone’s “experience-of” something.

The aesthetic field implies a distribution of factors through which aesthetic experience runs, just like the energy of a field. Such a distribution breaks the boundary between inside and outside which the classic modern Cartesian paradigm contrariwise relies on, that at a closer look is actually at the origin of the “experience-of” model. In these terms, the analysis of aesthetic experience meets recent philosophical programs who aim at

revising the traditional conception of mind, and specifically it meets the extended mind model, that precisely underlines how mental vectors are distributed in the environment (as scaffoldings) rather than confined inside the organism.

The adoption of the extended mind model seems to entail the necessity to talk of the aesthetic in those functional terms which have been stigmatized at the beginning of this paper, given that the model in question, at least in Andy Clark's version, remains bound to some kind of functionalism (see Clark 2008, p. 88). Nevertheless, two elements dismiss the possibility of ending up with a functionalist determination of aesthetic experience. First of all, the topological contingency of the aesthetic, its materiality, which makes its every single element that occurs each time non-replaceable. Replacing a material component, as functionalism would imply, means distorting an aesthetic structure. Secondly, the aesthetic resists to functionalism also macroscopically, as a whole. This has clearly emerged with the analysis of its "adverbial" and "analogical" nature, that is, its being a relational modality. For this reason, it turns out to be elusive every time one attempts to determine its specific function from a logical-cognitive point of view. Perceptions, beliefs, memories, knowledge, emotions, imagination... can take on an aesthetic qualification, but asking someone to identify an aesthetic content that is not perception, belief, memory, knowledge, emotion, imagination, means – I believe – assigning an impossible task just as much as it is impossible to detect the "mark" of the aesthetic, if we limit our analysis to the contents of an experience-of any object, event or process because, as we can say at this point, the mind is

aesthetic only if it is extended.

### **3. Consequences of the Paradigm of Experience-with: (1) The Categories of Aesthetics as a Theory are not Thematic but Operative**

If the aesthetic turns out to be the connotation of an “extended” modality of interaction as such, there is no reason to constrain it to the sphere of art in the sense of that system of Fine Arts which was consolidated between the mid-18th century and the early 20th century. The latter, if anything, seems rather a very particular case, strongly conditioned at the cultural level. If it has been possible to reduce aesthetics to the philosophy of art, it is precisely because the aesthetic and the artistic in fact have a bond, so strong that it has been culturally privileged in a certain cultural sphere. However, making the combination of the aesthetic and artistic the starting point for the analysis of the former risks forcing aesthetics into a very narrow episode of Western culture, bound to an ideal concept of art that had real value for two centuries or so, during which it was considered obvious that only it should act as a unique principle of definition and determination of a cultural sphere of its own.

Yet this combination, albeit reductive, drove aesthetics to develop a theoretical apparatus that, although it seems to be inadequate or partial today, nevertheless generated elements that are far from negligible. Indeed, even the negative outcome of aesthetics as a philosophy of art has a positive

side. First of all, not arriving at a unique and absolute definition of art meant gaining awareness of increasingly subtle and insidious questions. Above all, however, it meant realizing that the area in question is densely populated with categories (beyond that prototypical one of *art*, even those of *beauty*, *style*, *taste*, etc.) that have a peculiar character: that of acting effectively in the course of experience and analysis of certain phenomena, but, at the same time, to avoid any attempt at precise determination.

This happens when concepts do not have the function of cataloguing or qualifying very well-defined portions of reality, but mainly serve to provide certain experiences in a particular way, through a perceptually grounded “analogy-making” (with partial reference to Mitchell 1993; but see Melandri 2004, parr. 50-52 and 113-117). Therefore concepts are here more regulative than normative, they orient instead of defining, and thus imply the emergence of a “value” in terms of a possible sense of the phenomena that – so to speak – appear only then, *tendentially*, configured under a particular light which never excludes other concurrent illuminations. In other words, here the categories are more *operative* than *thematic*, and therefore strongly bound to practices and intrinsically metamorphic. And this is characteristic of the field of experience-with, which is a matter of carrying out a relationship rather than determining individual atomic contents, as we have seen.

Let us consider a specific case. It is not uncommon to hear people speak today of the “art of cooking”. Now, as long as to the concept of “art” is attributed solely or even predominantly a normative meaning, i.e., a thematic use, it seems very complicated to justify this phrase, which to the

contrary is immediately grasped. In this case, rather, it pivots on the operational use, on the regulative meaning of the concept of art, which orients experience in such a way as to render it permissible to proceed not so much by a mere figurative speech, and much less by conceptual negotiation by agreeing on what traits the work of a painter and that of a chef have in common, but rather through an approximate and suggestive shift, namely through an analogy meant (according to John Stuart Mill) as an “uncomplete induction” from a particular state of affairs to another particular state of affairs. The “purist” would probably oppose these shifts in meaning, although pragmatically (i.e., in the practice of communication) many are willing to accept this manner of speaking. Likewise, the opportunity to celebrate an athlete as an “artist” of his sport is due to the operative nature of the concept of art.

It would be wrong, however, to think that these shifts are related to an unconscious nostalgic reference to the pre-modern situation in which *ars* and *techne* indiscriminately indicated every constructive and productive capacity of the human being. Today when we talk about an artist in the kitchen or with a ball, we are generally, although vaguely, aware of two centuries of philosophy of art, because we are trying precisely to emphasise that there is also a certain refined skill in food preparation or dribbling that have salient features that, from a certain point of view, are no less important than the totally different talents that have been recognized exclusively in the creation of works of painting, poetry, music and so on over the centuries that separate us from the founding fathers of philosophical aesthetics in the 18th century. But it would be impossible to overcome embarrassment if you

were asked to provide an actual definition of a concept of art able to accurately and thematically include both the preparation of food and painting, and both dribbling and the writing of poetic verse. Only in its distillation into precise practices, orienting experience from within as its particular way of organizing itself (resulting in the multiple historical stratifications of its meaning), does the concept of art fully reveal the expansive potential it is endowed with.

That is why we need to be careful when we speak, as some scholars do today, about “artification” to indicate that process of ennobling that leads to the recognition of the rank of artistry to a certain expressive technique. The notion of artification struggles to get rid of a thematic concept of art, at least insofar as attributing to fashion the status of art, for example, would mean finding in fashion the same characteristics that should serve to define art. More productive, in these cases, is to stick to an operative use of the concept, that is, not go searching for well-defined shared traits, but rather contaminations and contiguities that incarnate in practice the overlapping between fields that are from time to time dynamically and mutually qualifiable as convergent or divergent, inclusive or exclusive, depending on historical and cultural circumstances. They are overlaps that emerge on the basis of a principle of mutual indeterminacy: the more elements become distinctive of the various fields, the more their interaction will be blurred, forcing a stiffening of their boundaries. Reversing the terms: the more effective is the content of experience-with, the more indeterminate is the content of experience-of.

If design is defined as art because, for example, its works are thought

to be worthy of “disinterested contemplation” (as it is assumed when exhibiting various “design pieces” in contemporary art museums) there is a risk of creating a serious aesthetic misunderstanding both of art and of design. On the one hand, because the aesthetic work of design does not aim to produce objects to contemplate, as anyone who relies on everyday spaces for which design develops its own works well knows. On the other hand, because today it is quite doubtful that disinterested use is indeed a universal and distinctive aesthetic trait of art: countless objects unquestionably considered to be works of art (religious statues, public buildings, mythological narratives, etc.) were created and are experienced on the basis of heteronomous instances from antiquity, if not from prehistory. In fact, there are many contemporary experiences that are widely held to be artistic, yet they parade their homology with everyday life and their mingling of interests. Such a definition would neither capture the aesthetic sense of design nor the aesthetic sense of art, but rather would sterilely replicate a definitional structure that is antiquated with respect to art and forced for design.

Things are no different for the other categories of aesthetics. Beauty, style, autonomy and so on escape thematic closure as much as they operatively unfold new horizons for experience-with. This is precisely what the history of the arts itself attests to, which has not infrequently proceeded with progressive fractures, always shifting the boundary within which it was thematically supposed to remain, often explicitly subverting established norms. In this regard Duchamp’s ready-made is striking. It shares very little with the previous artistic “facts”: the skilled act of the artist is reduced to a

minimum; the object itself is far from being distant from everyday life; there is no formal experimentation and so on. Yet its relevance to art is undeniable and obvious, even for those who would not want to recognize it as such although they are provoked by it. But what about the contrasting schools that have always marked the history of the arts, where a thesis and its exact antithesis are repeatedly contrasted, thus showing the operative wealth of the notions invoked? In all these cases the thematic reversal of the concept translates into the expansion of its scope of operation.

That is why the categories of aesthetics appear destined to evolve (or better: to reposition and readjust themselves from time to time) practically by leaps. The various meanings they assume in different cultural contexts, in their different practices, are linked by discontinuous traits. There is no common denominator for all definitions of “beauty”, for example, but some concepts have similarities, while others share elements of a different kind, as stressed by the nowadays popular concept of family resemblances. Continuity is only operative and contingent, that is, it is explicated by contextual and pragmatic contiguity in the connection between different concepts practicing experience-with. Philosophically speaking, acquiring this awareness even through the failure of its own program could be no small achievement for aesthetics as a philosophy of art.

However, this does not mean that any definition of these categories is acceptable. A pure relativism that led to believing something like that would be at least unusable. In reality, it is precisely the nature of the operative categories to follow specific polarizations that historically define their margins of effectiveness. “Historically” means, in this case, in relation to

certain practices of experience-with that are interrelated in various manners. In short, the area of significance of an operative category can be compared more to a force field than to a static domain. Within it possible discrete positions appear, discontinuous though correlated (even opposing), which continuously redesign the temporary physiognomy of the category itself, still based on a sort of indeterminacy principle that makes some traits salient in certain circumstances to the detriment of others, which in any case may subsequently acquire renewed importance.

A preliminary mapping of those operating fields expressed in categories of aesthetics should then show of the latter not so much static content as, contrariwise, operating margins that have become dramatically perceptible when the project of aesthetics conceived as a philosophy of art ran into difficulties. It would thus become obvious how unstable the categories examined turned out to be, especially when they crossed the horizons of acute criticality, as often was the case in the course of the 20th century. It is no coincidence that in the last century they have been almost inevitably pushed to flip to their opposite, as certified by some pairs that have become inseparable: beauty-ugliness, autonomy-heteronomy, taste-disgust. Consequently, it would be wrong to expect doctrinal conclusions from such a mapping. On the contrary, we would notice how the outcomes will always be prospective, *in fieri*, suggesting a reconsideration – in fact – of the operative character of aesthetic conceptuality in general, once we renounce to resort unilaterally to subjective or objective entities, and instead we emphasize the holistically relational nature of experience-with, which underlies the aesthetic as a dimension of the extended mind.

#### **4. Consequences of the Paradigm of Experience-with: (2) The Categories of the Aesthetic in Practice are not Static but Dynamic**

The fulcrum of the canonical model of the aesthetic, attributable to the paradigm of experience-of, is constituted by a work of art as something to be determined, if not even precisely defined, in its specificity. In connection with this need very specific institutions have emerged: academies, conservatories, etc. as places where one learns to produce works and thus authorized to convey artistic knowledge; museums, book series, etc. as places designated to preserve obviously not art, but its relative works; theatres, concert halls and so on as places established for the public proclamation of the achieved artistic nature of the works; and so on. It is these institutions, as well as critical and philosophical reflection (with their respective institutions: journals, universities, cultural circles, etc.) that have traditionally been entrusted with the task of certifying the artistic status of the works, issuing, let's say, their IDs. In this institutionalized world there is no art that is not a work of art, and continuous conflicts of legitimacy arise in relation to specific objects and practices. Again, according to the concept of the artwork the canonical model also predefines the actors on the stage: the author as the one who ably produced the work; the beholder as the one who properly enjoys the work; the critic as the one who skillfully extracts the meaning of the work.

But already at least in some institutional places of the art world that have recently been accredited – biennials, workshops, portals on the web – works are no longer encountered by subjects in this canonical sense, at least from an *aesthetic* point of view. What fails here is the fundamental principle according to which *the aesthetic* should be necessarily embodied in a work of art (or in a product similar to it for its alleged purely aesthetic function) that first “sits” in front of its creator and then from time to time of its audience, its critic, its theorist etc. And this lack connotes exactly the situation of our currently usual interaction with something we practice as aesthetic, not only in relation to art. In all these cases what is aesthetic is not the *experience of* something, but the *experience with* something. Using the terms introduced at the beginning of this paper we could say then that our “aesthetic common sense” conforms with the strictly aesthetic model of experience-with, which is very different from the “common sense about the aesthetic” which is instead associated with the essentially cognitive model of experience-of.

If you visit the Louvre and you enter the *Mona Lisa* room, you come across a wall of tourists each of which is intent on taking a selfie that somehow frames the masterpiece by Leonardo, but first of all certifies that they have been exposed to this masterpiece, that there was an interaction (more or less trivial, more or less corny, more or less significant) with it. The images thus created attest to the value of the experience *with*, its aesthetic prominence compared to the experience *of*. Within this dimension also falls every hypothesis of the clear demarcation between the artistic and the quotidian from an aesthetic point of view. Here, in fact, even the

eventual direct contact with an artistic content takes place in continuity with the methods and styles of the virtual relationship: more and more often the work is experienced in flesh and blood through the same devices that structure everyday life. A painted picture enters peoples' aesthetic baggage more in the sense that it has been digitized than viewed without artificial intermediaries. The new experiments with installations in which the works of art "come to life" thanks to 3D technology and the implementation of augmented reality, though they may disgust cultured connoisseurs of Great Art, are ways of procuring even intense aesthetic experiences of common sense (valid, after all, even for refined enthusiasts) on a par with commercial venues designed to immerse consumers in the kaleidoscope of synesthesia.

The categories that are used to describe this complex relationship must then renounce the static nature of the canonical model (see also Matteucci 2016). When the fulcrum of the analyzed phenomena shifts from the artwork or aesthetic object to the interaction that takes on a peculiar value for how it involves the various individuals that come into its field, one must speak of articulated, complex and indefinite processes rather than of a well-defined entity. And a number of different individuals work together in these processes, not a single person assuming in turn the fully defined role of artist, beholder or critic. In other words, the actors of aesthetic processes no longer appear as individual and isolated subjects, as self-sufficient and autarkic as the work of art or the "ideal" aesthetic object should be autonomous according to the canonical conception. It then becomes necessary to radically change even the cluster of concepts that govern the institutions of the art world in so far as the latter should remain an aesthetic

field.

If the category of “author” must lose rigidity, because it is no longer packaged along the lines of the particular case of the individual artist who expresses him/herself in his/her work and must cover more generally a widespread authorship that includes a combination of skills, the idea of experiencing art as a concentrated and absolute descent into one’s own interiority is replaced by that of a collective reception and recreation that can aggregate as much as it renders gregarious. The exercise of criticism supported by refined scholarship, which with its judgements aims to shape and educate other people’s perception, is replaced by the evaluation carried out through a symbol (i.e., a “like”, or “star ratings”), a gesture that distils the aesthetic message into a primary interjection based on an average appreciation that practically exempts from individual discrimination.

Under these conditions the factors of the aesthetic field (with regard to art too) turn out to be dynamic elements, both for their continuous modifications and for the fact that they assume this or that physiognomy depending on the overall experience that is developing. Also for this reason what we once considered as belonging to the category of artwork has gradually dematerialized. The artwork has been sublimated in a device that is designed to generate experiential flows that have the effect of shaping a taste unbound from individual objects, allowing the consequent exercise of preferences on an unpredictable array of content. The determination of well-defined objects is replaced by the scanning of a flowing continuum that must not be interrupted and that therefore requires surface nodes that tend to contract instantaneously. This is almost the sunset of aesthetics as a modern

philosophy of art. Here we face the passage (forwards or backwards?) from the *experience of* the work of art to the *experience with* aesthetic devices working as mere and serial analogy-makers.

This point is very delicate. The theories of aesthetic experience mentioned at the beginning of this paper tend, sometimes explicitly sometimes critically, to focus exclusively or as a priority on art experience precisely because they are patterned after the paradigm of experience-of. This reveals how intrinsically “modern” they are, and therefore how limited is their theoretical validity, which seeks to justify the aesthetic starting from a philosophy of culture or even starting from a cultural ideology. If we switch the paradigm by adopting that of experience-with, the basic question changes. It is no longer about how to export the results of the analysis of art into non-artistic areas (such as everyday life) in which aesthetic experiences are however encountered. The question becomes how art has been able to represent a very particular case in continuity with non-artistic aesthetic practices, being moreover endowed with exclusive distinctive traits as a cultural and symbolic sphere. It is as a material analytic of practices (similar to the analysis of a form of life), and not as a logic or an epistemology of a specific symbolic world (a mere description of a language game), that aesthetics can aim at justifying an art theory.

Furthermore it is exactly because it embodies an exemplary experience-with something that the aesthetic has its remarkable pervasive force. Not being anchored to a particular object, not being primarily an experience of something specific, it is a reserve of experiential intensification even in a reality characterized by the saturation of functional

needs. As marketing experts well know, today's widespread and prevalent aesthetic *practices* relate to events that are planned through an actual "experiential design" that penetrates daily life and must ensure the participation of individuals in a field of energies we have to correspond with, and therefore we have to receive and at the same time to implement, in a continuous alternation between passivity and activity.

## 5. Conclusions

At the end of these analyses there are no real conclusions to be drawn, but only programmatic indications for a further study. In the complex system of transformations implied by the adoption of the paradigm of experience-with, the aesthetic seems to accentuate its evanescent, ephemeral nature and thus its original bond with sensitivity, with *aisthesis*. All in all it insists on the dimension of appearance, no matter how deeply substantial one might consider the content that is expressed through it. But it would be naive to say that by being inscribed in the domain of appearance the aesthetic is therefore a negligible element. On the contrary: taken in its dynamic nature and reassessed in its matrix of experience-with and therefore in its intrinsic openness to otherness and sharing, the aesthetic proves to be an indispensable factor for carrying out holistic relations, both between the Self and the world, the Self and itself and between one's Self and the other Selves. Hence the aesthetic turns out to be a primitive (underivable) manifestation of an extended mind as the analogical competence (the knowing-how) that an individual must possess in order to emerge from

within the interaction with the surrounding environment. For in all these cases, it is a tangled weave that first of all rests on the surface of experiential dynamics, which are consequently usable in turn as interfaces. Even before learning it, what the world means for us we experience primarily through the face that it shows us and that tunes the tenor of our experience. What we realize we are, what we therefore consider our identity, is not only embodied but also determined by the way in which we represent ourselves, which conditions our gestures and words to the point of often raising the suspicion that behind this staging there is very little to look for if not the need to produce a new appearance. Finally, the set of social relations is not reflected, but rather in the normal sense and fluidly established – at least in part – by the manifestation of preferences and tastes and their roles in interactions with others.

Knowing how to manage the complex system of appearance even in the absence of references to deep structures of existence (in the most varied spheres: metaphysical, religious, moral, ideological, and so on) is the skill increasingly required of the contemporary human being, and perhaps decisive in general for human beings from the beginning insofar as they are prompted by their own nature to extend their mind, to live in dialogue with something that cannot remain merely “outside”. An aesthetic knowledge that, in order to be expressed effectively, must remain operative and thus be entrenched in a field of experience that involves dynamic categories, ready to change on impact with circumstances without stiffening into structures that are too elementary because abstractly atomic.

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***The Politics of Poetic Language:  
An Analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's Alphaville***

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ABSTRACT. My paper explores the relation between poetic and ordinary language through an analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*. I argue that, in *Alphaville*, poetic language becomes political as poetry is a way of revolting against the dominant ideology which is laid down in language. Poetry changes the ways of seeing the world and thus serve as critique of ideology. This relation between seeing and critique of ideology is also central to Slavoj Žižek's analysis of John Carpenter's *They Live*. Although Godard and Carpenter stage different means to overcome the ideology of the ordinary, both poetic language and the glasses are metaphors for what films can do. My argumentation follows three steps: first I analyse the role of poetic language in Godard's *Alphaville*; second, I explore the political task of poetic language and relate it to Žižek's analysis of Carpenter's *They Live*; finally, I suggest that these films offer a reflection on film as bringing the viewer to another way of seeing.

Theories of language—philosophical or linguistic—often postulate from the outset a separation between ordinary and poetic uses of language. Far from being neutral, this separation also suggests a hierarchy: poetic uses would be secondary to ordinary ones, and therefore philosophically less relevant. This hierarchical dimension can be observed in the words theorists and

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philosophers use to characterise poetic language: as a ‘deviation’ or a ‘deviance’ (with the moral prejudices the latter word contains) from ordinary language. This separation further nourishes a common picture, namely that poets are somehow isolated from the world, contemplating it from their ivory tower. According to this picture, poets and their poetic language would have no impact on the world, especially not a political one. Poetic language would be a language deprived from its political force.

A perfect example of such considerations can be found in J. L. Austin’s ordinary language philosophy. In *How to Do Things with Words*, he famously considers poetic uses of language as non-serious ones, and this is precisely the point of criticism Jacques Derrida raises against him.<sup>2</sup> In his article ‘Signature, Event, Context’—which gave rise to the Derrida-Searle debate<sup>3</sup>—he attacks Austin on the normativity of his ‘ordinary language’. In a very schematic way, Derrida considers that the total context necessary to understand an ordinary use of language can never be fully given, and that there cannot be any ordinary context as opposed to non-ordinary (i.e. poetic) ones. If ordinary language is to be defined as an ordinary use in an ordinary context, and if this ordinary context can never be fully determined (and therefore never be considered ordinary for certain), there can be no ordinary language. For Derrida, the ordinary-poetic dualism is a remnant of

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<sup>2</sup> See Austin (1962: 9-10, 20-22, 104, 121) and Derrida (1988: 1-23).

<sup>3</sup> This debate has been important in the recent philosophical landscape, especially in attempts to connect so-called analytic and continental philosophies. Among the many papers discussing the debate, two book-length discussions have even been published in the past few years: see Moati (2014) and Navarro (2017).

metaphysical dualisms which must be deconstructed.

One of the consequences of Austin's rejection of poetic uses as non-serious is that such uses cannot have a political force. By depriving them from any performative or linguistic force, Austin deprives them from any potential political force. Such a consideration is not limited to Austin's philosophy and Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosopher very distant from Austin, follows a similar view. Although he defines literature as the most politically committed artform, he denies any commitment to poetry, precisely because poetic uses of language would be too distant from the world: 'How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out?' (Sartre 1988: 34)

There is a normativity to ordinary language which gives it its political force and this idea is at best exemplified by dystopian stories which represent a reduction of language, such 'Newspeak' in Orwell's *1984*. Rare, however, are stories that show poetry as resistance to such a reduced ordinary language. Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* brings up such an idea, and I will argue in this paper that artworks have a political role even when they do not exhibit it explicitly, and that this role is to disturb—and ultimately destroy—the dominant perspective or ideology, i.e. the normativity of language.

*Alphaville* is a science-fiction film which opposes the hero, Lemmy Caution, to the villain, Professor von Braun and his machine Alpha60 which control the city according to the laws of logic and science. Briefly

summarised, Lemmy Caution is sent to Alphaville in order to stop the Professor and manages to do so with the help of the Professor's daughter—Natacha von Braun—and a volume of poetry—Paul Eluard's *Capital of Pain*. Although the film raises many questions which would be of contemporary concern such as the loss of control over the machine or issues in gender studies, I will focus in this paper only on the notion of poetry. In one sequence especially, the film offers a defence of poetic language as a means to escape the oppression of the machine's technical language. In other words, in *Alphaville*, poetry becomes the language of revolution. If the role of the machine is to control language in order to control the minds of the citizens, poetry appears as an act of resistance and therefore acquires a political role from which it is often thought to be very distant.

In the first part of my paper, I will analyse a central sequence in in which poetic language is the key to resist the ideological ordinary language represented by a bible. According to Alpha60, in a world dominated by technology, poetry has no place because it offers a way of thinking things differently and escapes the normativity—or ideology—of ordinary language. However, Godard suggests that it is precisely in such a world that poetry is the most needed. To further explore the notion of ideology and the political force of poetry and art, I then compare the role of poetry in *Alphaville* to that of the glasses John Carpenter's *They Live* through Slavoj Žižek's analysis thereof. According to Žižek, the glasses in *They Live* play the role of a critique of ideology by changing the ways of seeing. Art and politics are brought together here and Jacques Rancière's analysis of the relation between literature and politics further expands this view. In a

concluding section, I consider these two films as presenting a metareflection on the capacity of film to modify our ways of seeing the world.

### **1. *Alphaville* and the Force of Poetry**

As Lemmy Caution enters *Alphaville*, a signpost indicates the rules which govern the city: 'Science, Logic, Security, Prudence'. These laws are at the basis of the technocratic society of *Alphaville* in which artists and poets have no place at all. As Lemmy Caution later says to Henri Dickinson, a former secret agent who failed to eliminate the Professor von Braun: 'I see. People have become slaves of probabilities.' As Miguel Bouhaben argues: 'For Godard the greatest enemy is the dominant language and the mechanisms of propaganda that impose their power structures on minority languages. The dominant language is the one that *must* be spoken in *Alphaville* to avoid death.' (Bouhaben 2015: 120) To control the people, Alpha60 controls their language and, ultimately, their way of relating to the world. Language reflects the ideology of Alpha60, and the failure to resist against it amounts to the failure to oppose the governing force. As only weapon against this enemy, Lemmy Caution has the book that Dickinson gave him on his deathbed, that we later learn to be Paul Eluard's *Capital of Pain* in a central sequence of the film.

This sequence is at the heart of my analysis. After his encounter with Alpha60, Lemmy Caution returns to his room where Natacha von Braun awaits him. He shows her Paul Eluard's *Capital of Pain* and she reads

sentences from it. Failing to understand some words, especially the word 'conscience', she looks for the bible which turns out to be a dictionary. We learn that words are removed from it every day, including the word 'conscience' which does not exist anymore for Alpha60 and the inhabitants of Alphaville. This revelation is the first step towards the destruction of Alpha60 which then causes the inhabitants to become mad as their ways of relating to the world are profoundly disturbed.

This sequence shows a conflict between two books which represent the opposition between a creative poetic language and a normative ordinary one: *Capital of Pain* and the Bible which is in fact a dictionary. The use of the bible as dictionary reveals the normative dimension of ordinary language and reminds of Nietzsche's words in *Twilight of the Idols*: 'I am afraid that we have not got rid of God because we still have faith in grammar...' (Nietzsche 2005:170) Nietzsche suggests a connection between language and the dominant mode of thinking, and the latter cannot change so long the former remains the same. In *Alphaville*, this normativity of ordinary language is further suggested by the normativity of social interactions such as recurrent greetings: 'I'm fine. Thanks. You're welcome.' In the abovementioned sequence, there is a mood shift after Natacha von Braun realises she does not know the word 'conscience' anymore. Music takes over and she goes back to her ordinary ways of being, thus asking Lemmy Caution when she serves his coffee: 'One sugar or two?'

The film shows the resistance to this dominant mode of thinking, or ideology, as emerging from the poetic: poetry operates changes in language and reveals the incapacities for the ordinary language Alpha60 ascribes to

give an account of what people experience, and especially in relation to feelings. This failure of language to account for feelings can be connected to Nietzsche once again, as he argues in *Daybreak* that language fails to account for inner processes and drives.<sup>4</sup> The revelation of the shortcomings of ordinary language leads Natacha von Braun to reconsider her way of seeing the world and therefore to question Alpha60. As Bouhaben further argues: 'Poetry offers us another way of knowing, another truth in alliance with the future. Poetry transmutes all materials, transfigures all forms, moves in ambiguity, unleashes all meanings, transgresses all border.' (Bouhaben 2015: 122) In doing so, poetry offers another perspective, enables people to see things differently. To use a Wittgensteinian image, it is as if Alpha60 ordered to see the duck-rabbit as a duck and poetry opened the possibility of seeing it as a rabbit. This change in perspective, as we will later see, is not always peaceful and easy, and the chaos which ensues the destruction of Alpha60 suggests that many people are unable to survive such a change in perspective.

Poetry therefore represents the antithesis to the normative language

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<sup>4</sup> 'Language and the prejudices upon which language is based are a manifold hindrance to us when we want to explain inner processes and drives: because of the fact, for example, that words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of these processes and drives; and where words are lacking, we are accustomed to abandon exact observation because exact thinking there becomes painful; indeed, in earlier times one involuntarily concluded that where the realm of words ceased the realm of existence ceased also.' (Nietzsche 1997: 71)

Alpha60 aims to impose, and the choice of Eluard is not innocent. According to Chris Drake: ‘Eluard’s is a name that carries various associations for Godard; with surrealism and popular love poetry, with the French Resistance and political radicalism. All that surrealism stood for—the creative power of love, the irrational as a liberating force, the “marvellous” discovered in the everyday—is irreducibly hostile to a technocratic society dedicated to the values of “logic”, “order” and “prudence”.’ (Drake 2005: 54) The relation to the surrealist’s conception of ‘the “marvellous” discovered in the everyday’ suggests that poetic language is not only a use of words which do not exist in ordinary language, but also, and thus following the example of the duck-rabbit, a different use of ‘ordinary’ words. In these new uses, the meanings of the words change, and the poetic arises from within the ordinary. This is what Wittgenstein suggests in a remark from *Zettel*: ‘Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information.’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 27) In the words of Alpha60 itself: ‘Everything has been said, provided words do not change their meanings, and meanings their words.’

This central sequence exemplifies the role poetry can play in modifying our ways of thinking. To a broader extent, art, in opposition to science and logic, opens new ways of seeing the world, in the sense that an ordinary word in a poetic work might require a different reading, or an ordinary object in a museum a different seeing. But if art brings us to see the world as something else than what the dominant ideology suggests, it acquires a political dimension. It is not only descriptive—saying how things

are—but also critic—contesting the dominant perspective’s definition of how things are. In this framework, even poetry, an artform usually considered so remote from the ordinary politicised world, has a political impact, and Godard’s *Alphaville* represents this perfectly.

## 2. Art and the Critique of Ideology

If Godard’s *Alphaville* stages poetry as political resistance, other metaphors can be found suggesting such a change in perspective. An example which will further develop our analysis of *Alphaville* is John Carpenter’s *They Live*. Instead of poetry, Carpenter uses the common metaphor of glasses to represent the change of perspective. What is especially interesting with this film is Slavoj Žižek’s analysis which compares the glasses to a critique of ideology, and I will argue that these glasses are themselves metaphors for what film does, namely changing our ways of seeing.

*They Live* is a science-fiction film in which aliens have infiltrated human society and manipulate the population with hidden messages. The main character, John Nada, finds glasses which reveal the aliens and the true message hidden behind advertising boards. The glasses operate a change of perspective and Žižek analyses these glasses as functioning as a critique of ideology: putting the glasses on allows the character to extract himself from the dominant ideology and take a new perspective on things. Žižek analyses as follows:

According to our common sense, we think that ideology is something blurring, confusing our straight view. Ideology should be glasses which distort our view and the critique of ideology should be the opposite like you take off the glasses so that you can finally see the way things really are. This precisely, and here the pessimism of the film, of *They Live*, is well justified, this precisely is the ultimate illusion. Ideology is not simply imposed on ourselves, ideology is our spontaneous relationship to our social world, how we perceive each meaning and so on and so on. We, in a way, enjoy our ideology. To step out of ideology, it hurts, it's a painful experience, you must force yourself to do it.

Art conflicts with what Žižek calls ideology and, following Nietzsche's words in *The Gay Science*, 'Without this art we would be nothing but the foreground and live entirely in the spell of that perspective which makes what is closest at hand and most vulgar appear as if it were vast, and reality itself.' (Nietzsche 2001: 79) Whereas the ordinary perspective makes everything flat, art gives depth to our perception of the world and of our existence. Only through art can one escape the vulgar perspective in which we usually live. Godard's *Alphaville* suggests such an escape through poetry as poetry gives depth to ordinary language whereas Carpenter's *They Live* focuses on the level of perception.

In Žižek's interpretation of *They Live*, the vulgar would be the dominant ideology and art the glasses which reveal the world as it really is. In Nietzsche's words: '*Work and artist.*—This artist is ambitious, nothing more. Ultimately, his work is merely a magnifying glass that he offers

everybody who looks his way.’ (Nietzsche 2001: 147) It would however be misleading to consider that there is such a ‘reality’ to be found behind appearances. If we follow Nietzsche’s vocabulary of perspectives—or even Wittgenstein’s notion of seeing-as—there is no ultimate truth to be found but only a multiplicity of perspectives to experience, there is not correct way of seeing the duck-rabbit but different ways of seeing it. Art presents such perspectives and the films themselves, *Alphaville* and *They Live*, operate as such perspectives.

What is interesting with Žižek’s analysis is that he establishes a direct connection between art and politics. Art is not isolated from the politicised world but operates a critique of ideology. This theme is quite common in contemporary continental aesthetics and Jacques Rancière is exemplary to that regard. Indeed, he suggests a connection between political statements and literary locutions (which could probably be extended to artistic expressions): ‘Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making.’ (Rancière 2004: 35) Works of art and political statements have a similar task of drafting maps of the visible and the sayable, although they do so in quite different ways. Rancière’s conception of literary locutions is especially interesting as it suggests that art, rather than being a stance remote from the ordinary politicised world is at the very heart of it. Making things visible, such is the task of both politics and art. But if politics gives us the dominant perspective, art offers an alternative

which can lead, in turn, to a political change.

### **3. Conclusion: *Alphaville* and *They Live* as Reflections on Film**

What both Godard's and Carpenter's films suggest, is that to change perspective or way of seeing is not an easy task. Godard considers poetry as the vehicle for such change, Carpenter glasses. But in both cases, we can think that the film itself serves as a means to change perspective, and that *Alphaville* and *They Live* play the role of poetry or the glasses. As Margo Kasadan argues, Godard's choice of Eluard's poetry is related to his conception of film: 'Godard, it is clear, contemplates in Eluard a poet whose work can be related to cinema, a poetry that explores essential elements of film—lighting, the glance into and within the image, reflexivity, the multiplication of the image—and relates them in turn to love, one of cinema's traditional narrative concerns.' (Kasdan 1976: 7)

Eluard is in this sense a cinematographic poet for Godard, as Godard himself is perhaps a poetic cinematographer. Poetry is a metaphor for what the film itself is supposed to do, namely reveal the limitations of our worldview imposed on us by the dominant language. This dominant language is not only to be thought of in terms of a technical language, but much more in terms of the ordinary language we use every day. Thus, Derrida's quarrel with Austin is not just a linguistic matter, but also a political one. If we accept, in Derridean terms, the language of metaphysics

and its related dualisms and hierarchies, we accept an established order. To deconstruct the dualism between ordinary and poetic language is thus not a matter of imposing the poetic as the original language (as Heidegger would for instance suggest), but of maintaining freedom within our uses of language.

Poetic uses of language show us ways of distorting and disturbing the established order which permeates through what we call ordinary language. In Žižek's terms, such an ordinary language is also and above all an ideological language, and one needs to put the glasses on in order to escape it. Poetry and the glasses are both metaphors for what the films themselves aim at, namely changing the spectator's way of seeing and thinking.

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***Naturalization and Reification of the Human Global  
Subjective Experience in Some Forms of Scientific and  
Technological Art***

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ABSTRACT. In recent times, a heterogeneous set of institutions, such as, journals, websites, cooperative spaces of creation, peculiar galleries and museums, have been founded in order to call into question the creative boundaries between art and science. Moreover, famous artists like Eduardo Kac and Natalie Jeremijenko have also called into question these boundaries even before those institutions were founded. In addition, philosophy has also grasped the problematic by publishing academic papers in famous journals like *Leonardo*. A question arises, have the boundaries between art and science been dissolved by the artifacts of these artists? Moreover, are there actual or clear differences among traditional arts, mainstream contemporary art, and scientific and technological arts? Against standard perspectives in philosophy and history of art, I hold that some forms of scientific art are consequences of a historical process which I would like to call “defictionalization” and “demimetization” of arts. This defictionalization is, I argue, associated to the process that Lucy Lippard has called “dematerialization” of contemporary art. The defictionalization traces the boundaries among these recent forms of art by virtue of the cognitive consequences in the receptors. Naturalization and reification of our aesthetic comprehension of everyday social and physical world is a key consequence of that process. This process that contemporary art is going through, allows

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us to question about the nature of the latest art history and, of course, about the nature of the art criticism.

## 1.

In last years, a particular phenomenon has taken place in Uruguay, in which some spaces of artistic production and diffusion pretend to distinguish themselves from traditional institutions of art like galleries, museums, schools of art, etc.<sup>2</sup> Although they are local institutions, these spaces do nothing but respond to a heterogeneous worldwide tendency which has almost fifty years now.<sup>3</sup> Here, I am specifically referring to institutions that seek to revisit the boundaries between art and science in such a way that these boundaries could be dissolved. In line with this global tendency, academic journals like, for instance, *Leonardo*, have published essays from the dissolutive point of view.<sup>4</sup>

However, can we accept intuitively their programmatic specificity? In

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<sup>2</sup> These spaces are *Gen* (<https://gen.org.uy/>), *Medialab* (<https://www.fing.edu.uy/grupos/medialab/>), and *Equinoccio* (<https://www.eventos.ei.udelar.edu.uy/event/3/session/10/contribution/249>).

<sup>3</sup> Some of these institutions are *Laboratorio Arte Alameda*, Mexico, (<http://www.artelameda.bellasartes.gob.mx/>), *Arts Catalyst*, UK, (<https://www.artscatalyst.org/>), *ArtScience Museum*, Singapore, (<https://www.marinabaysands.com/museum.html>), *Art and Science Collaborations*, EEUU, (<http://www.asci.org/>), etc.

<sup>4</sup> See Tomasula 2002, p. 137.

order to answer this question, we should further ask what is the new nature of the artifacts and experiences produced and exhibited in these institutions. Let us consider briefly two examples from the history of art that justify this skepticism. Historically, painters have been challenged by two big technical difficulties. On one hand, the mimetic representation of light perception has ever been a quite complex issue, from antiquity to nowadays. On the other hand, to solve the representation of the three-dimensional space onto the two-dimensional plane has also been a very complex task. Regarding the latter issue, it seems obvious for us (in our current context) that the solution could be obtained resorting to the technification of design by means of some artifacts, for instance, perspective machines. At the same time, this technification also depended, in such historical context, on specific theoretic conditions, such as, the process of mathematization of natural sciences, and the revision of the Euclidean geometry, among others. In brief, the geometric perspective was the solution for such a problem.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the first problem, the “painting of light” (impressionism) proposed for its development a long and slow, but fruitful, scientific comprehension of chromatic relationships. In fact, we now know that impressionist painters considered Michel Chevreul’s laws of contrast of color and applied them in their projects.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, A) can we assume that the programs and slogans of these institutions are historically trivial? B) Are they actually dissolving two

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<sup>5</sup> See Andersen 2007, p. 19, for instance.

<sup>6</sup> See Roque 1996 and Foa 2015, p. 90.

practices (art and science) which are historically intertwined with each other? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to take into account the discourses and practices of these peculiar institutions, and, of course, the role of the scientific knowledge in their productions. The hypothesis of this paper is, on one hand, that there actually exist substantive differences between these spaces and traditionally ones; however, by virtue of these differences, it is hold, on the other hand, that such identification between art and science is part of a process of dematerialization of art. This process of dematerialization supposes an associated process of *defictionalization* or *demimetization* of arts. The aesthetic consequences of both interlinked tendencies will be valued through the problematization of such identity of art and science. In particular, the absorption of art by theoretic knowledge and political slogans inhibits the possibilities of reorganization and contention of the actual psychological and phenomenological constitution of our minds. This inhibition can be referred to as “reification and naturalization of our human subjective experience”.

For the purposes of this paper, we will consider two examples of genetic art. Due to space constraints, it is not possible here to describe all the varieties of scientific and technological art; nevertheless, we believe that the proposed examples will be enough to allow us to highlight some points of interest. In addition, it is our intention to draw some conclusions based on these two examples aimed to point out important current problems.

## 2.

To address the questions formulated above, we propose to analyze two art genetic's projects developed by Natalie Jeremijenko and Eduardo Kac, respectively. In Eduardo Kac's *Signs of Life*, Natalie Jeremijenko briefly describes what her *OneTree* project consisted in.<sup>7</sup> In line with Walter Benjamin's agenda, Jeremijenko argues that the very ideas of authenticity and individual identity are already obsolete, because nowadays genetic engineering can produce living photocopies of living organisms.<sup>8</sup> To put it in a borgean way, in the genetic engineering world one tree is all trees, and all trees are finally one tree. Or, in more blunt terms, in such a world time has been refuted. But, what would have happened if we had exposed two organic photocopies to different environmental conditions? The problem set out by Jeremijenko to biological determinism could be formulated as follows. If genetics refutes time, then genetics should account for the deep transformations that environment produces in these photocopies. Therefore, is it reasonable to hold genetic determinism? This question concerning individual identity and authenticity is actually subordinated to the dichotomy between freedom and determinism. Jeremijenko's project was divided into two parts. The first one consisted in the production of a thousand of cloned trees which were exhibited as plantlets in the Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts in San Francisco, California, United States, during 1999. The second one was developed in 2001, when each little tree

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<sup>7</sup> See Jeremijenko 2007, pp. 301-302.

<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin 2002, p. 103.

was seeded in different public sites of the San Francisco Bay Area. According to Jeremijenko, each of these little trees was nothing but the mimetic living memory of the experiences and contingencies of the public places where they had been seeded.

Let us now introduce a second example of genetic art, the *Genesis* project by Eduardo Kac.<sup>9</sup> In order to fully comprehend it, let us postulate, in the first place, that anything that can be said in any language is translatable into Morse code. Here, the avid readers probably will associate biology to the general concept of *code*. Their intuition is good! As it has been proposed by Claus Emmeche years ago in “*Defining Life. Explaining Emergence*”, biology can be thought as a particular form of semiotics or interpretable symbolic information.<sup>10</sup> In his project, Kac sets out a translation from a sentence of Morse codes into DNA base pairs. He calls the obtained DNA base pairs the “artist’s gen”. At this point, I bet the readers are asking themselves: ‘why “*Genesis*”?’ Kac called his project *Genesis* since the project consisted in the progressive translation into a genetic code of a verse of the Bible (*Genesis*, 1:26) that says: “Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Yes, this verse was translated into Morse code, and then into a genetic code integrated by Kac himself into a bacterium exhibited online in the OK Centre of Contemporary Art in Linz, Austria. According to Kac, the interest in this biblical verse is to problematize the

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<sup>9</sup> See Kac 2007, pp. 164-165.

<sup>10</sup> See Emmeche 1997.

human domain over nature, while, the interest in the Morse code is – attending its power to open the globalization process of Western civilization – its character of epochal symbol. By means of the Internet, the receptors of *Genesis* were able to produce mutations in the bacterium shooting ultraviolet light at it. In this way, according to Kac, the transformation of the genetic code, then the Morse code and, finally, the biblical verse, constitutes a *symbolic gesture*. And Kac concludes: “... It means that we do not accept its meaning in the form we inherited it, and that new meanings emerge as we seek to change it.” (Kac, 2007, p. 164).

Despite both projects are displayed as symbolic gestures, they guide our attention to philosophical and political discussions. From a visual and material perspective, Jeremijenko’s *OneTree* is composed, at a first stage, of plantlets exhibited altogether, and then, of a series of visually diverse trees isolated in different sites of San Francisco. In Kac’s case, we see a little glass cube containing the bacterium, together with projected codes on one of the Centre’s walls, and the projection of the bacterium activity on the other wall. In addition, this last projection is already displayed in a monitor screen. Nevertheless, despite being strongly visual, the interpretative key of these projects does not lie strictly in these visual and material aspects, since both artists emphasize, as their point of departure, a theoretic problem: 1) Let us imagine we modify a bacterium, then, can we accept Bible maxims of a living organism on Earth? 2) Let us imagine a numerous set of genetically identical trees that change their properties by virtue of their relationship with different environments, then, can we reasonably say that the behavior of every seeded tree is only ruled by the genetic information?

In this paper, my intention is not to simply point out that both works of art are stimulated by theoretical and political problems (since many artistic productions suppose this kind of incitement), but also to hold that both problems reduce the materiality of these art works to theoretical and political discourses. In fact, it is not possible to assume all those trees as an artistic gesture without para-textual information establishing that, precisely, all those trees are a kind of evidence to Jeremijenko's answer to the second question. Moreover, *Genesis* supposes a discursive play in which every internet user focuses her or his attention on a particular answer to the first question, *i.e.*, the live world, in opposition to the biblical cosmos, is a volatile or contingent conglomeration.

Finally, the Lucy Lippard's thesis on the dematerialization of art is, in general lines, valid; and valid to think the genetic art too.<sup>11</sup> The materiality of art works of genetic art's programs is dissolved as it was also dissolved in conceptual art. However, it is necessary to revisit some aspects of this Lippard's thesis. According to her, conceptual art challenges us since:

The concept can determine the means of production without affecting the product itself; conceptual art does not need to communicate its concepts. For instance, the audience at Cage concert or at Rainer dance performance will never know what the conceptual framework of the work is. (Lippard, 1971, p. 270).

That is, according to Lippard, the concept does not affect the means of

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<sup>11</sup> See Lippard 1971.

production. Nevertheless, if one receptor seeks to fully comprehend the genetic artifacts as art works, then this receptor needs to know the theoretical fundamentals and information, as well as, the intentions of their authors. If this is not the case, that is, if the receptor does not have access to the needed information, the absence of concept – which according to Lippard obtrudes the art criticism – triggers a hermeneutical openness, *i.e.*, the experience of the receptor is random. The dematerialization of art in *Genesis* and *OneTree* is not verified by means of the absolute absence of a physical materiality, but by means of the impossibility to interpret the works without their subordination and absorption by an intellectual disposition. I mean, this intellectual disposition is crucial to avoid the entire randomness of the receptor's experiences. Nevertheless, this condition is almost inexpensive, it is just needed to stretch these artifacts to intellectual cognitive arms to make it possible to codify them as works of arts. This supposes our reception to turn into some seriousness associated to theoretical discussions, or merely to a fun – or ludic – play associated to symbolic gestures. In one way or another, genetic art works are “wrapped” in those two questions, 1 and 2. This last point turns still justified by Lippard's thesis:

During the 1960's, the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making typical of the last decades, begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues

to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete.  
(Lippard, 1971, p. 255).

However, Lippard does not recognize a big aesthetic consequence of this dematerialization. The dematerialization implies the impoverishment of the fictional and mimetic character of art. The specific artistic materialization warrants some sort of judge inhibition, in the sense in which Gottlob Frege used "judge".<sup>12</sup> This inhibition triggers a specific cognitive activity which is very different from the activities involved in scientific, philosophical, technological and political practices. Despite the fact that Frege did not speak about images, it is possible to think – from his reflections about truth and reference – that every form of art supposes an indifference to the existence of referred or pictorially represented objects. The works absorb textually or ichnographically diverse aspects of the social world, but we do not put the focus on the existence of the objects. However, this referential or representational information has a relevant and specific role in art. That is, this information is subordinate to our cognitive activity *in totum* (sensibility, intellect, desire or volition); it links us to the social and physical world and, at the same time, it perturbs the links.

Genetic art works stimulate judges, *i.e.*, our intellectual activity. When the judges happen, other kinds of cognitive activities remain the same. In order to hold this thesis, it is needed to explicit some premises about our cognition. Our mind is a plexus of beliefs associated to interests and desires.

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<sup>12</sup> See Frege 1960, pp. 62-63.

Then all of these elements are intertwined to reactions, gestures, and feelings. According to different psychological perspectives, the beliefs do not constitute coherent networks of propositional attitudes and, the propositional thinking is, for its part, only one element of the mental plexus.<sup>13</sup> This is due to the fact that, pre-linguistic and pre-reflexive faculties remains from the first years of human socialization despite the emergence and stabilization of the symbolic function. Incoherent beliefs overlap each other; some of them are repressed by others, and all of these dissonances are related to reactions, gestures, volitions and feelings.

### 3.

Based on the presented discussion, it is possible now to answer the questions A and B. There is a substantive difference between the traditional institutions of art and all of the spaces mentioned above. The theoretical and political slogans of genetic art play a key role in genetic art works. In addition, the role played by the science and programs, or the intentions of the genetic artists are the main factors influencing the dematerialization. This specific form of dematerialization is the key of the programmatic pretensions of the artistic-scientific spaces.

Such dematerialization, which is associated to defictionalization and demimetization, has a profound effect on production and reception. The dematerialization of art naturalizes and reifies what we call, according to

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<sup>13</sup> See Festinger 1964, pp. 1-7 and Stern 1998, p. 6-7.

Juan Fló, “human everyday subjective global experience”.<sup>14</sup> This expression refers not only to the theoretical comprehension of the everyday world – by means of intuitions, hypothesis and theories–, but also, and especially, to the dissonant beliefs, gestures, reactions, and feelings. Therefore, the dematerialization does not allow the reorganization of the whole plexus of mind. Then, since the global reorganization of the mind is the key aspect of that experience, the aesthetic comprehension of everyday world, associated to the global activity of the mind, does not happen. In this way, the absence of the global movement of the mind entails some kind of naturalization in genetic art, since the artifacts do not allow the openness of the “irrational” dimensions associated to the intellectual ones. Ways of feeling and reacting are assumed, and they do not emerge from the deeper areas of the mind to consciousness. Moreover, the naturalization implies some form of reification, since the receptor merely identifies him or her to slogans or ways of feeling. Therefore, the receptor recognizes his or her proper static subjective experience as objective or external. In brief, the relationship among the whole components of the mind remains ever the same.

To sum up the presented discussion, it can be said that the central role of slogans and theoretic knowledge involved in genetic art works implies its dematerialization. In addition, a key aspect of the dematerialization is the intellectualization of production and reception. In particular, the nucleus of such intellectualization is the stimulus to judge. The judgments stretch our cognitive activity to concepts, beliefs and propositional attitudes, making

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<sup>14</sup> See Fló 1967, p. 47, 51.

dissonant relations of beliefs and non-linguistic or propositional mental dimensions to be excluded from the experiences stimulated by the works. Then, the naturalization and reification of our global mental comprehension of everyday world are consequences, of the dematerialization of art. In this way, the static construction of our whole mental experience would seem to be external and ever the same.

It is important to highlight that, in this paper, it was not my intention to deny the aesthetical value of technology and theoretical or political programs in art. In fact, it is worthy to mention here that there actually exist many aesthetical objects that have theoretic stimulus and are strongly influenced by scientific knowledge without resigning their productions to politics, philosophy, technology, or science. The sound sculptures by Lukas Kühne are fruitful examples of the integration of theoretical and technological information in art, but producing, at the same time, interesting integrations of music and sculptures. In this acoustic works, the science claims and intentions are subordinate to play with materiality and mimesis.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in this paper, instead of denying the aesthetical value of technology and theoretical or political programs in art, I aimed to point out a current problem, reflected in the questions that follow. Can we draw some kind of identity of the art history, if we determine the transformation of arts focusing in the dematerialization processes? Moreover, can we comprehend the possibilities of the art criticism through this broken identity of art history? These are two urgent problems for further interdisciplinary studies.

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<sup>15</sup> See Lukas Kühne's website, <http://www.lukaskuehne.com/>

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# *Aesthetic Cognition and Art History*

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the function of aesthetic categories within some empirically informed frameworks of art history. More specifically, I argue that cognition can be regarded as a basic unit of analysis in art historical research along with other units of analysis such as time, form, or style. In support of this hypothesis, I limit my claims to memory processes and to the role they play in aesthetic appreciation. I consider the writings of three psychologically minded art historians, namely Aby Warburg, Michael Baxandall and Svetlana Alpers, who explore ways in which we can attain knowledge of mental reality through the arts. Drawing on these art historical accounts, I examine three types of memory processes understood at different levels of explanation, namely: collective memory presented as a socially constituted force, operating at the unconscious, subpersonal level of individuals and orienting artistic development in particular directions; individual, autobiographic memory, operating at the personal level, and episodes of aesthetic response triggered by distant recollection and contemplation of past events.

## **1. Art History versus Aesthetics**

A commonly held belief among a number of art historians who take positivism as their guiding principle in their effort to place the discipline on a scientific basis is that the problems addressed in art historical research are to be distinguished from aesthetic problems.<sup>2</sup> Moritz Thausing, for instance, advocates preserving the methodological borders of the history of art against aesthetic speculation. Here's a relevant passage:

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to the audience at the annual conference of the European Society for Aesthetics 2018 for helpful comments, especially to Robert Hopkins, Jakub Stejskal and Ken Wilder.

The history of art has nothing in common with aesthetics [...], no more than natural science with metaphysics. [...] It has nothing whatsoever to do with deduction or speculation: what it publishes are not aesthetic judgments, but historical facts which might then serve as a subject for inductive research. [...] Art historical judgments are limited to the conditions under which a work of art was created, as these are discovered through research and autopsy (Thausing, 1873/2009, pp. 6-7).

According to positivist approaches, art history is concerned with ascertained facts – that is, historical facts such as dating, attribution or provenance, serving subsequently for inductive research that may or may not lead to broader generalizations. It is not concerned with aesthetic judgments or any other evaluative and subjective statements. Inductivism as a privileged research method, or the view that “truth emerges in the form of generalizations based on the accumulation of [allegedly neutral] data” (Gombrich, 1973, pp. 4-5), was sharply criticized by Ernst Gombrich. He associated it with “the cult of *idola quantitatis*”, that is, feeding the illusion that true research amounts to searching for facts for their own sake and to collecting *all* available data, without any subjective interference; whereas “there are no neutral data [and] we can only collect evidence if we want to bring it to bear on a particular hypothesis” (*ibid.*, p. 5; Mount, 2014, p. 27). Although he dismisses inductivism as illusory, Gombrich incidentally seems to share the positivists’ skepticism about aesthetics. His skepticism is

anecdotally confirmed in an essay in which he evokes his attendance to one of the annual meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics, where he confesses his suspicion that aesthetics is concerned only with “vapid generalities” and abstract “verbiage” (Gombrich, 1981, p. 336). The tacit assumption behind these views is that the history of art is necessarily tied to empirical inquiries that leave the philosophical aesthetic concerns out.

## **2. Process-Oriented Approaches to Art History**

In contrast to positivist approaches, the hypothesis I would like to put forward is that art history reaches beyond the nature of individual artifacts and their historical conditions such as location in time and space (Summers, 2003, p. 15), and can be equally informative with respect to the very general categories of aesthetics that it is supposed to meet with skepticism. I am referring here mostly to psychological categories related to processes involved in our response to art rather than to philosophical categories, in which traditional academic aesthetics has originally installed itself – aesthetic value, beauty, and the like –, and which were dismissed as metaphysical speculation (Kleinbauer, 1989, pp. 2-3). In other words, what I am proposing is to develop an alternative line of argument focused no longer on positivist methods in art history concerned with factual information about artworks (provenance, authenticity etc.), but on process-oriented approaches to art history, which bring to the fore the psychological foundations of art appreciation and analyze the relation between the spectator and the work of art. Further distinctions are to be made between

various theories of response to works of art.

First of all, the process-oriented approaches that I will be considering are to be distinguished from reception histories (Kemp, 1998, pp. 181-182) that focus on the beholder's social, cultural and political situatedness and the way it might determine his or her appreciative response.

Process-oriented approaches are also to be distinguished from reception aesthetics that originally appeared in literary criticism in the late 1960s (Jauss, 1982, Holub, 2014), although it does manifest the same concern with respect to understanding how a work triggers appreciative response. The difference lies in that process-oriented theories rely on a notion of response which is mainly informed by cognitive psychology rather than hermeneutics and phenomenology; while reception aesthetics works with phenomenological distinctions such as the distinction between primary experience and interpretation (Jauss, 1982, p. xxix) and considers only the hypothetical involvement of an idealized beholder, process-oriented theories rely on psychological foundational categories such as perception, memory or attention and consider the beholder as an empirical, psychological entity.

Finally, I also set aside here approaches that focus on the iconography of various states of mind; there is a very rich tradition of studies analyzing processes such as pictorial melancholy, absorption, theatricality (Klibansky et al., 1979; Fried, 1980). Such approaches, for instance that of Michael Fried's, are determined by subject matter in art and mainly provide a conception of pictorial composition rather than a conception of beholding per se.

The question that I will address in this paper is the following: what are

the core aspects of aesthetic cognition that are disclosed through art historical investigation? By “aesthetic cognition” I mean a set of mental processes like perception, attention, memory or imagination that are regarded as integral to aesthetic responses. What makes attractive addressing problems of cognition in the interpretive paradigm of art history is the complexity of the objects of inquiry, namely the works of art. The various treatments of these complex sensory configurations may reveal characteristics of mental reality that have not been addressed so far, thus providing a more compelling psychology of the human mind. Unpacking the art historians’ psychological assumptions in dealing with various aspects of art appreciation might bring into focus problems or categories that have been neglected in present day psychological scholarship.

### **3. Memory Processes and Art History**

In support of the hypothesis that cognition can be included among the fundamental units of analysis in art historical research along with other units of analysis such as time, form, or style (Wood, 2000, pp. 10-11), I will narrow down my investigation to memory processes. I will be focusing on three psychologically minded art historians, namely Aby Warburg, Michael Baxandall and Svetlana Alpers, who are sensitive to issues that come from outside the proper field of art history, operating with frames of reference developed in the natural sciences (e.g., psychology or biology). What they have in common is a self-reflective propensity and a deep interest in the

ways in which we can attain knowledge of our cognitive life through the arts. The writings that I will be discussing are mostly autobiographical; each of them illuminates some characteristic of memory. More specifically, they provide valuable insight into various types of memory processes understood at different levels of explanation, such as: *collective memory*, presented as a socially constituted force, operating at the unconscious, subpersonal level of individuals and orienting artistic development in particular directions; individual, *autobiographic memory*, operating at the personal level, and episodes of aesthetic response triggered by *distant recollection* and contemplation of past events, removed from the present perceptual judgment.

### **3.1. Collective Memory and Pictorial Representation: Warburg and the “Historical Psychology of Human Expression”**

To start with Warburg, I will focus mostly on a number of notes from his notebooks that were published recently under the title *Fragmente zur Ausdruckskunde* [Basic Fragments on Expression]/*Fragments sur l'expression* (Warburg, 1888-1905/2015; Rampley, 2016). I will also refer to Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1929/2012), which refines themes already present in his notes. What we find in these writings is the outline of a project in the psychology of art, which, in turn, is considered to be integral to a

general science of culture. Within the framework of this project, artworks, and images more generally, count as materials or documents of cultural history (Binswanger & Warburg, 2007, pp. 209-210). Here's a much-debated passage where the project of "a historical psychology of human expression" is introduced:

Until now, a lack of adequate general evolutionary categories has impeded art history in placing its materials at the disposal of the – still unwritten – 'historical psychology of human expression.' [O]ur young discipline [...] gropes toward an evolutionary theory of its own, somewhere between the schematisms of political history and the dogmatic faith in genius. (Warburg, as cited in Gombrich, 1999, p. 270)

The passage expresses Warburg's concern with the evolution of the discipline of art history, which can no longer be based on the established chronologies – be they "political" or "dogmatic" –, and which is in need of new periodization schemes (Gombrich, 1999, p. 275; Didi-Huberman, 2002, p. 39). The originality of the proposed approach is to connect art history with a psychology that is not ahistorical in character, a psychology that is related to a conception of time. As for the "human expression" mentioned here, it may refer to human affections, passions, inner movements of human experience and other "processes of human life" (Warburg, 1888-1905/2015,

p. 40)<sup>3</sup>. The main reference is Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, a book that Warburg found and read at the National Library of Florence, in 1896 (*ibid.*, pp. 50, 292-293). What Warburg retains from Darwin's book is a biological definition of expression, where expression is defined as the exteriorization of a reflex triggered by the memory of a strong, potentially threatening stimulation (for example, the startle response when one hears a sudden noise). The psychology behind this is associationism (Gombrich, 1966/2001, pp. 39-40; 1970/2015, p. 82), according to which strong sensorial impressions are stored in memory and retained as mental images (also called "engrams"), while faint impressions fall below the threshold of consciousness.

After having identified expression with the memory of a strong stimulation, the next step is to apply this conception to the *pictorial* representation of expression. We have seen that expression is a response to memory images; responses can be "prior and primitive", when they take the form of reflex movements (the startle response), but they can also be "consciously stored in pictures and signs" (Gombrich, 1970/2015, pp. 393-

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<sup>3</sup> On the expression of human affections, see also Aby Warburg, as cited in Matthew Rampley (2016, pp. 2-3): "I. An artwork that attempts to depict an object or process taken from human life is always the product of a compromise between the inability of the artist to lend real life to an artistic form on the one hand and, on the other, his ability to imitate nature faithfully. II. This duality is uppermost in the demands made of such a work by the spectator: on the one hand, the wish to gain a sense of the unstated presupposition that the work of art is not alive, on the other, the desire to experience the full semblance of life".

394). Thus pictorial representations become in turn repositories of memory, more specifically of collective memory of inner affections. Describing himself as a “psycho-historian” (Warburg, 1928-29/2011, pp. 108-109), Warburg uses images as a discovery heuristic to account for what he calls the “schizophrenia of Western civilization”; in other words, he uses images as a way of delving into the unconscious, irrational forces of human culture and putting on display its frenzied affects or more contemplative ones. The expression that Warburg is interested in is not face expression, but bodily movements expressing reactions to stimuli (for example, he evokes the Greek mythological figure of the Maenad (Saxl, 2003, p. 156) as a symbol of violent inner emotion).

The artistic representations of expression are brought together in a picture atlas entitled *Mnemosyne*, which is described in the following terms: “Its series of images will unfold the function of the prefigured classicizing nuances of expression which were used to represent the inner and outward movements of life. It will at the same time also be the foundation of a new theory of the function of the human memory of images” (Warburg, as cited in Schoell-Glass, 2001, pp. 186-187). The project of the atlas is to make visible “pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion” (Warburg, 1926-1929/2009, pp. 276-278). The primordial values in question are to be found in the survival or ‘afterlife’ of images of the antiquity in the culture of the Renaissance (Warburg, 1912/2015, p. 216), although Warburg’s approach goes beyond analyzing the migration of symbols or pictorial motifs across space and time. Warburg’s interest lies rather in looking for the roots of human affections (Ghelardi, 2011, pp. 11-

12), in bringing into focus patterns of affective reactions. This idea is illustrated for instance by the Panel 75 of the Mnemosyne atlas (Warburg, 1929/2012, p. 180), which brings together various inquiries into the anatomy of the human soul. Among other things, the panel presents scenes of anatomy painted by Rembrandt – *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* and *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman* – and representations of Hippocrates visiting Democritus – a physician therefore, visiting a philosopher deemed to have lost his wits. The corpus of representations on which Warburg relies in his various writings is vast and heterogeneous (Recht, 2012, p. 42), expanding from the Florentine archives and Edouard Manet’s paintings, to ritual performances of Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. The atlas is part of a larger enterprise of assembling “documents relating to the psychology of human expression” (Warburg, as cited in Gombrich, 1970/2015, p. 393), which will culminate with the creation of the Warburg Institute Library (*Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*), now based in London. The library’s aim is to answer questions such as: “how did human and pictorial expression originate; what are the feelings or points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the archives of memory? Are there laws to govern their formation or re-emergence?” (*ibid.*, p. 393)

Hence Warburg’s first thesis on the psychology of art, which holds, if my understanding is correct, that memory traces are enclosed unconsciously in the artwork: “The memory image of general dynamic states with which the new impression becomes associated later on becomes the idealizing contour which is unconsciously projected in creating the work of art”

(Warburg, 1888-1905/2015, p. 178; Gombrich, 1970/2015, p. 353). According to this view, memory imagery becomes literally picture-like. In creating the work of art, new sensory impressions and memory images of past sensory impressions become interwoven, giving rise to ‘an idealizing contour’, ‘idealizing’ because there is more to the artwork than mere perceptual stimulation (Gombrich, 1970/2015, p. 95). Several questions arise when reading this thesis: assuming that there are similarities between memory images and their unconscious projection in pictorial representation, how could we discern one from the other, how could we avoid mistaking one for the other, can we perceive through remembering, while remembering, that is, while retrieving memory traces in the pictorial representations? An objection might be that instead of triggering memory, pictorial representations just yield another perceptual experience.

It appears that what is at stake in Warburg’s understanding of expression is the epistemological role of images, and, more generally, an epistemology of art history; the role of artworks in human cognition would be to serve a memory function, namely, to give access to portions of reality<sup>4</sup> of the past. The history of art would thus provide the basis for a psychology of *collective memory*, illuminating the causal factors of the expressive culture of a given period (Müller, 2015, p. 15). Memory appears here as a socially constituted force (Recht, 2012, p. 11), operating at the unconscious,

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<sup>4</sup> See Warburg’s second thesis on the psychology of art: “In autonomous and monumental art the artistic manipulation of additional dynamizing forms evolves from dynamic images of individual situations which were originally seen in reality”. (Warburg, 1888-1905/2015, p. 178-179 ; Gombrich, 1970/2015, p. 353)

subpersonal level of individuals and orienting artistic development in particular directions.

An important question raised by Gombrich in relation to Warburg's overall theory of expression is the following: "Who is doing the expressing?" (Gombrich, 1999, p. 272) If it is a collective entity like culture, society or age is it plausible to say that such a collective entity has a mental experience?

A further question that I would like to raise is "Who is doing the remembering?" Is it the Renaissance, if we think of the Mnemosyne atlas, is it the biological organism, is it the social organism or some other entity? The primitive bodily experiences to which Warburg alludes are not experienced at first hand, they are not first-person experiences; here's another elliptical passage from his notebooks in support of this idea:

Art = the act of reproducing a particular memory image of the social organism (Warburg, 1888-1905/2015, p. 144).

Visual art: memory of a picture presenting a condition that we did not experience

Artist: unfamiliar images fixed as if they were experienced at first hand

Public: reflex movement with no differentiation (*ibid.*, p. 134).

Is then Warburg's account of artistic appreciation experiential? Is it about experience at all, about experiencing the world through pictorial representation? Are the primitive memories he refers to recruited in

experiencing the artworks? And what exactly happens when we do experience these pictures that seem engrossed with human affections? Warburg remains silent on these questions. What he does say about aesthetic appreciation and about the spectator's experience of the work of art is that capturing the individual or collective inner affections enclosed in the pictorial representation requires education; a poorly educated spectator will only pay attention to "general qualities" such as subject-matter (*ibid.*, p. 98). In his later writings, he will sharply criticize the "hedonistic aesthetes [who] win the cheap approval of the art-loving public when they explain such formal changes in terms of pleasure in the extended decorative line" (Warburg, 1926-1929/2009, p. 278). To such doctrines relying on the pleasures formal contemplation, Warburg opposes an aesthetics based in the psychology and physiology of human beings: "Let anyone who wishes content themselves with the flora of the most beautiful and aromatic plants; this will never, however, develop into a physiology of the circulating, rising sap of plants, for this only reveals itself to whoever examines the subterranean roots of life" (*ibid.*, p. 278). A further passage presents aesthetic concerns as sterile verbiage: "I had acquired an honest disgust of aestheticizing art history. The formal approach to the image – devoid of understanding of its biological necessity as a product between religion and art - ... appeared to me to lead merely to barren word-mongering" (Warburg, as cited in Gombrich, 1970/2015, p. 354). These passages reflect the same tension between aesthetics and art history that I have mentioned at the beginning of my paper. By expressing his feeling of "disgust of aestheticizing art history", Warburg targets more specifically a traditional

conception of aesthetics understood as a doctrine of beauty.

### **3.2. Autobiographic Memory: Baxandall and Alpers**

Further examples of art historical developments that are psychologically informed could serve to illuminate the experiential component of memory; the autobiographical writings of Michael Baxandall (2010) and Svetlana Alpers (2013) are valuable sources in this respect. Here the analysis of memory is located at a personal level; memory is described as a property of consciousness and no longer, more generally, as a property of biological organisms or collective entities.

Asked whether we can still learn anything from Warburg in relation to memory, Baxandall answers that “it would be a matter of the limitations of memory; [that] what one can retrieve is very little and very crude. That is one thing that comes out of Warburg’s work on the use of classical motif in later art” (Obrist, 2008, p. 47). In this respect, the difficulty to recognize as genuine the survival of patterns and motifs in the pictorial representations of different cultures and epochs would reflect a limitation of memory, which is prone to deprive the original impressions of their strength. Instead of drawing on iconographic material as Warburg did, Baxandall appeals to the evoked image of a sand dune in an attempt to capture that shape of memory that would make manifest its elusive character. He characterizes memory as “a sanded down thing” (Obrist, 2008, p. 42), while working on a book that will eventually be published posthumously under the title *Episodes*. The thought developed in Baxandall’s book is that memories summoned up

through deliberate recall would arrange themselves in a way that parallels the arranging of the grains of a sand dune as wind flows. The sand dune is meant to illustrate “some properties of the consciousness itself” such as its “continuous but changing” nature (1), a “unitary structure” (2), its capacity to preserve traces of its own history (3), “firmness and stability” (4), responsiveness to external factors (5) as well as self-reflexivity (6) (Baxandall, 2010, p. 20).

Several characteristics of memory resurface through this analogy of the sand dune:

- memories from past experience undergo a number of transformations in the retrieval process which prevent them from being preserved as fixed traces like in some photo archive of the past;

- they are not scattered fragments but are embedded in a unitary structure, such as the unity of consciousness;

- they act upon present states (for instance categorization), possibly improving them (*ibid.*, p. 20-21);

- as for the character of reflexiveness, which may serve to secure a sense of the self, it is further described as a feedback loop : while the self constructs memories by choosing to retain only a small portion of the profusion of data, the act of remembering affects in turn the sense of the self, reinforcing it:

For the sense of the self what seems crucial here is the reflexiveness of the process. [...] A sand dune is repeatedly reshaped by wind but that wind is partly re-directed on itself by the shape of the dune: in turn,

that shape has partly been produced by previous experience of wind. The agent in remembering must be partly an incremental product of the object of the act of remembering. The consciousness would have a character deriving partly from its past experience, and *a* particular memory would be an act of construction by an experienced consciousness, now. The construction depends first on the selection of cues that have been retained, which it then develops within dispositions that are partly acquired. Many of the liveliest memories from our earlier lives are likely to be those we have used to explain ourselves to ourselves – even though we may no longer use them immediately in this way. (*ibid.*, p. 30)

With this analogy between the act of remembering and a sand dune, Baxandall offers a creative account of the individual, *autobiographic memory*, namely an account that acknowledges the active presence of memories in current mental states.

Svetlana Alpers continues Baxandall's line of questioning regarding subjective states of mind. In addition to variations on the topic of looking, which lie at the core of her recent book entitled *Roof Life*, Alpers considers episodes of aesthetic response triggered by *distant recollection* and contemplation of past events. Her introspective pursuit is based on the records she kept of various events, for instance selling a Rothko painting or buying a Bonnard drawing. According to Alpers, in "taking a distant view" (Alpers, 2013, pp. 5, 71), new aspects of experience emerge. "Distance" may be understood in different ways, as a notion of:

- historical or temporal distance, when confronted to objects or events not belonging to one's time (Melville & Alpers, 2013, p. 41);
- physical distance – for instance, seeing a city skyline from a rooftop (Alpers, 2013, p. 3);
- phenomenal distance, elicited by objects or actions which instill in the observer a sense of strangeness or unfamiliarity.

Seeing things at a distance seems to be a pre-condition for aesthetic appreciation, as suggested in the following passage: “What does it take for something to strike one as a work of art? [...] In my experience, it is not a matter of familiarity, but rather a matter of distance, an appearance of being strange” (*ibid.*, p. 130). Experience of loss might count as a further condition for appreciation: for instance, in evoking the selling of a Rothko painting, Alpers claims that only when she ceases to own the painting, does she become aware of it as a work of art: “After the day I saw it on its own in the storage area before it was taken away, I never set eyes on it again. But it was under those conditions that I was able to see it for the first time. It was itself. Its distance from family and then from me, and the sense of letting go, was when it struck me as a work of art.” (*ibid.*, p. 140). It is not so much the lack of possessing which enables the experience, as the distant view of oneself and of art which is made possible through letting the painting go. The importance of seeing oneself at a distance in art appreciation is confirmed when contrasting this episode with the moment Alpers sees again a Bonnard drawing and decides to purchase it:

It had looked familiar when I caught sight of it among other Bonnard drawings in the booth. Aside from its being a Bonnard, what attracted me to this particular drawing was that I had seen and liked it before. But why that? Something reciprocal can occur – between viewer and work of art – in seeing again. Something that was lost is found and in the finding the person looking and the object, each in its own way, is confirmed: to be conscious of seeing a work of art again it is to recover the self who had looked at it. And the object is still there, proving it still exists. Being revisitable sets something apart. One has the clarity gained from a distant view of oneself and of art. It is another instance of “the shock of sight”, and, in my experience, loss or separation is part of it, always lurking in the wings. (*ibid.*, p. 153)

The passage suggests that in the acts of remembering or seeing again, both self and art appear to undergo a process of re-vision. It would be interesting to compare these insights with psychological empirical findings and see to what extent personal memories and art appreciation are intertwined.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper I have pointed to particular art historical approaches that might advance the contemporary debates on the cognitive processes engaged in the appreciation of art. Process-oriented approaches to art history provide fundamental distinctions in the realm of cognition, giving us access to different levels of psychological explanation (subpersonal, personal, transindividual etc.), while focusing the discussion on the complexities of

art practices.

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**Ancuta Mortu**

*Aesthetic Cognition and Art History*

G+B Arts International.

# *Cubism and Kant*

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ABSTRACT. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1920), Picasso's dealer and early authority on cubism, interpreted Picasso, Braque and Gris as Kantian in their approach. In §1 I provide an introduction to cubism and to Kahnweiler's use of Kantian terminology to distinguish analytic and synthetic cubism. §2 concerns the 'idealist' interpretation of cubism in which the works are seen as attempting to depict Kantian things-in-themselves. I argue that this interpretation betrays a misunderstanding of Kant and it is at odds with Picasso's pluralism. In §3 I suggest an alternative Kantian interpretation of cubism, one that draws on Kant's empirical realism and the cognitive input that is necessary for experience. In §4 this is contrasted with the two-aspect reading of transcendental idealism. Lastly, in §5, I acknowledge that the major cubists had limited or no knowledge of Kant, but nevertheless argue that it is illuminating to see their works in terms of Kantian realism.

## **1. Cubism**

Since the Renaissance artists have attempted to represent how things look from a particular, one-point, perspective. The picture frame can be seen as holding a transparent sheet through which viewers look, and from which, behind the painting, the scene recedes. Cubists reject such an 'illusionist' approach since, according to George Braque, '[i]t is simply a trick—a bad

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trick—which makes it impossible for an artist to convey a full experience of space, since it forces the objects in a picture to disappear away from the beholder instead of bringing them within his reach, as painting should' (Verstegen, 2014, p. 294). Further, it is a misrepresentation of what we actually see. Such perspective assumes that the viewer is motionless, that their vision consists of input to a single eye, and that everything in the visual field is in focus. In contrast, cubist works represent simultaneously the shapes and surfaces of objects from different perspectives. Objects are 'analysed' in terms of facets at shallow angles to the picture surface, and they do not recede from the eye. In a series of drawings by Juan Gris, starting with *The Eggs* (1911), one can sense traditional perspective beginning to fracture, with the journey to full-blown cubism culminating in *Bottles and Knife* (1912).<sup>2</sup> (That same precariousness can be sensed in cubism itself: holding sway for a few short years, shimmering, briefly, before it fragmented into futurism, constructivism, abstraction and the rest.) Gris is usually considered to be the third serious cubist, along with Picasso and Braque. The latter are often distinguished from 'salon' cubists such as Fauconnier, Gleizes and Metzinger; 'salon' was intended pejoratively since they exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants, an annual exhibition avoided by Picasso and Braque, in favour of Kahnweiler's commercial gallery. Salon

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<sup>2</sup> Reproductions of the artworks I discuss are now just a click away, and so I recommend viewing the images to which I refer as you read through the paper. Title and date should suffice to locate an open access version. I will provide further bibliographic details for those images it is difficult to find. For this series of works see Green (1992, pp. 165–9).

cubists were widely disparaged: 'their appreciation of true cubism was barely skin-deep and they employed a timid sort of faceting and cubification as a pictorial system' (Cooper, 1971, p. 127).

Cubists employed various techniques to realise, in Braque's phrase above, a 'full experience of space'. The emphasis on volumes led cubists away from the eye and visual appearances to tactile experience of reality. The subject matter of their paintings were things that you wanted to touch. Braque explained that his still lives evoked 'tactile space' (Verstegen, 2014, p. 293): there are tables with newspapers to leaf through, musical instruments to grasp and pluck. Braque, always more willing to articulate the approach than Picasso, says: 'It isn't enough to make visible what one paints; it must also become tangible. A still-life ceases to be a still-life the moment it can no longer be reached with the hand' (Gantefuhrer-Trier, 1996, p. 42). Volume is also given by '*passage*': 'The merging of planes with space by leaving one edge unpainted or light in tone' (Richardson, 1996, p. 97). Objects are tipped so volumes can be seen from within. There is no vanishing point in cubist works, no destination behind the transparent screen towards which one's eye is led; one's eye, rather, is loosely directed by the artist to rove over roof and table tops.

There is a sense, then, in which cubist paintings are sculptural. Picasso did turn to sculpture, but, at least at first, the results were a less radical departure from the canon. His *Head of a Woman* (1909–10) is more or less a traditional bust, albeit with distortions. Radical departures, though, were to come. Carving was replaced by the construction of cubist guitars and glasses of absinthe; voids were used to depict volumes, light itself depicted by

pointillist dots, and paint applied to works to inhibit the natural effects of shadow. Julio Gonzalez, friend, welding teacher, and collaborator with Picasso on sculpture projects, emphasizes the sculptural nature of Picasso's cubist paintings: 'With these paintings it is only necessary to cut them out—the colours are the only indications of different perspectives, of planes inclined from one side or the other—then assemble them according to the indications given by the colour, in order to find oneself in the presence of a "sculpture"' (Aparicio, et al., 2017, p. 49).<sup>3</sup>

Cézanne was a key influence, or as put by Gleizes and Metzinger: 'He who understands Cézanne, is close to cubism' (1912; cited in Herbert, 1965, p. 4). He, too, created volumes from flat coloured planes, and used subtle distortions of perspective: in *Basket with Apple, Bottle, Biscuits and Fruit* (1893), for example, the plate of biscuits is tilted towards the viewer and the two sides of the table do not seem to meet under the tablecloth. In a letter to his son, Cézanne writes: 'Here, on the river bank, the motifs multiply, the same subject seen from a different angle offers a subject of the most compelling interest, and so varied that I believe I could keep busy for months without changing position but by leaning a little to the right and then to the left' (Rewald, 1976, p. 324). The variations in view obtained were painted, together, on the canvas. Cubists took this method to extremes: instead of merely leaning to the right or left, they looked at objects from the other side or from above and, as with Cézanne, simultaneously combined such viewpoints in their works. Picasso and Braque acknowledged their debt

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<sup>3</sup> For the relation between Picasso's paintings and sculpture, see Cowling and Golding (1994).

to 'The Master of Provence', quoting from him in various works: the drapes in the proto-cubist *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) are derived from Cézanne's *Female Bathers in Front of a Tent* (1883–5), as are the poses of some of the figures (Gantefuhrer-Trier, 1996, p. 9). A wonderful episode recalled by Pierre Daix (1993, p. 339) expresses Picasso's respect for Cézanne: 'he informed Kahnweiler that he had "bought the Sainte-Victoire."' "Which one?" Kahnweiler asked, unaware of any Cezanne on the market'. One of Cézanne's favourite subjects was the mountain Sainte-Victoire, close to his home in Provence. "'The real one!'" Picasso was crowing with pleasure. He had, in fact, just bought the Chateau de Vauvenargues, whose grounds include the famous mountain'.

Some of the more impenetrable works such as *The Accordionist* (1911) and *Still Life with Glass and Lemon* (1910) skirt close to abstraction or what Douglas Cooper disparagingly calls, 'cubism's misbegotten child' (Richardson, 1959, p. 40). The objects in *Still Life with Liquor Bottle* (1909) were so inscrutable that they were not identified until 1971, from a sketch in which Picasso drew the real objects.<sup>4</sup> *Still Life with Glasses and Bottle* (1912) was also for ten years mistakenly called *The Battleship* after an exhibition catalogue compiler presumably took the table top with glasses to be the deck of a ship with cannons (actually quite a plausible reading in the absence of a title) (Kahng et al., 2011, p. 49). Cubism is a key stage on the path to what some see as the ultimate end-point of modernism, that of abstraction, and cubism had influenced early abstract artists such as

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<sup>4</sup> See Karmel (2017, p. 130). Picasso also, apparently, did not remember years later the representational content of *Pointe de la Cité* (1911) (Daix, 1993, p. 104).

Mondrian and Malevich to break free from representation and the vestiges of it in their own cubist works. Picasso and Braque, though, were vehemently 'realist'. Their distortions may presage surrealism and abstraction to come, but, as Cooper puts it, they were wholeheartedly engaged in 'solving the strictly pictorial problem arising out of their intention to find a wholly new and precise way of recreating tangible reality on canvas' (Cooper, 1971, p. 62). Viewers are aided by triggers or signposts—or what Picasso called 'attributes' (Gilot & Lake, 1964, pp. 65–6)—that enable us to orientate ourselves with respect to the shimmering facets and thus appreciate the subject matter of these works.<sup>5</sup> Carefully placed amidst the 'cognitive fog' (Baxandall, 1994) of otherwise inscrutable configurations of facets and scaffolding we find a coat button, guitar strings, the f-holes of violins, cigarette smoke, an ear lobe or eyelid, a quiff of hair, or a segment of lemon. An anecdote recalled by John Richardson nicely captures Picasso's attitude to abstraction: 'People who urged Picasso to look

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<sup>5</sup> Kahnweiler claims "The object once "recognized" in the painting is now "seen" with a perspicuity of which no illusionistic art is capable' (1920, p. 12). Gombrich (1959, p. 263), however, is somewhat unimpressed by cubist claims to realism: 'Cubists...kicked aside the whole tradition of faithful vision and tried to start again with the "real object" which they squashed against the picture plane. One can enjoy the resulting confusion of telescoped images as commentary on the unresolved complexities of vision without accepting the claim that they represent reality more really than a picture based on projective geometry'—Gombrich, here, echoing an early uncomprehending review of an exhibition of Picasso's drawings at the Stafford Gallery, London (1912), in which a reviewer quipped that a depicted 'skull...has obviously been under a steam roller' (Galassi & McCully, 2011, p. 40).

more favourably on abstract art because it was the pictorial equivalent of music would be told "That's why I don't like music" (Richardson, 1996, p. 165).<sup>6,7</sup>

Cubists have been interpreted as Kantians by, amongst others, Kahnweiler, Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg (1960). There are several features of their works that are seen as Kantian, including the attempt to capture things-in-themselves, and their alleged formal autonomy, to which I will return below. Kahnweiler also uses Kantian terminology to delineate two phases of cubism. The *analytic* phase, that upon which I focus here, involved the analysis of objects into facets, whereas, from 1912 on, the goal of *synthetic* cubism was not the depiction of objects in the world, but the creation of new aspects of reality. *Tableau-objets* were created using collage and papier collé; the latter are canvases to which pasted paper is added, whereas collage includes a wider range of materials such as, in Picasso's

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<sup>6</sup> Semiotic interpretations of cubism take cubist pictures not to represent via resemblance, but via arbitrary signs. This is not a convincing interpretation of analytic cubism given the clear, albeit fragmented, appearances that are presented. It is, though, a more plausible interpretation of synthetic cubism, as suggested by Gertrude Stein: 'From 1914 to 1917 cubism changed to rather flat surfaces, it was no longer sculptural, it was writing' (1938, p. 39). For a sophisticated account of the semiotic interpretation, see Florman (2017), who argues that cubism does not involve a 'full-blown (non-iconic) language', just the 'promise' of one (p. 54).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gris: 'A picture with no representational purpose is to my mind always an incomplete technical exercise, for the only purpose of any picture is to achieve representation' (cited in Rosenthal, 1983, p. 66).

works, cane seating, sand, and rubber gloves: paintings of cluttered tables could now include real newspapers.

The Kantian terminology, though, is misleading: it does not mark the semantic distinction that it does in Kant, with analytic judgements true in virtue of the meaning of the terms in which such judgements are couched, as opposed to synthetic judgements which are true in virtue of the nature of the world. Kahnweiler and others have therefore been accused of simply name-dropping, basking, as Cheetham snipes, in the 'cachet that high-powered German metaphysics lends to cubism' (Cheetham, 2001, p. 83).

## **2. Kant's Transcendental Idealism**

Some see cubist works as moving away from fleeting appearances and engaging with a more profound or deep reality, that corresponding to Kant's noumenal world and transcendental things-in-themselves. This is the 'idealist' or 'conceptual' interpretation of cubism, one adopted by various contemporaries of Picasso and Braque, including the art dealer Léonce Rosenberg, poets Pierre Reverdy and Olivier Hourcade, and the critic Maurice Raynal. I suggest, though, that it is not illuminating to think of cubism in this way.<sup>8</sup> In this paper I am focusing, apart from some thoughts

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<sup>8</sup>This is, though, the explicit intention of artists such as Kandinsky and Klee: 'Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the

on formalism in §5 below, on Kantian interpretations that draw on *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) rather than on those concerning the specifically aesthetic themes in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), such as disinterestedness and free play.

First, it would appear that some of these interpreters have a confused understanding of Kant. Kahnweiler, for example, also related cubism to John Locke's (1689) distinction between primary and secondary qualities: Picasso's aim, he says, is 'to present the primary...qualities as exactly as possible' (1920, p. 12). Lockean primary qualities are those whose existence is independent of the existence of a perceiver, such as shape and size. Secondary qualities such as colour, smell and felt texture depend on the existence of a perceiver and are not possessed by objects themselves: the haystacks that Monet painted at sunset (1890–91) were not themselves golden, but the physical composition of their surface, and the particular way this surface reflects light rays into our eyes, causes in us the experience of seeing this colour. Impressionists painted the fleeting images and plays of light that strike the viewer; cubists, in contrast, can be seen as focusing on primary qualities, those that constitute the volume of objects and the relations between these volumes. Colours were muted—only there to depict form and volume; visual effects, as Lockean secondary qualities, were of little interest. In order to depict this primary reality, Picasso and Braque were not restricted to reproducing the natural effects of light. It was used where it was needed, as one might explore a large sculpture or a building in

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universe and that there are many more other, latent realities' (Klee; cited in Hughes, 1991, p. 304).

the dark with a flashlight; some figures also had an inner light, diffusing out between overlapped planes and facets.<sup>9</sup>

Such a Lockean account, though, is incompatible with the Kantian picture. For Locke, primary qualities such as the shape, size and sculptural form of an object are mind-independent, whereas, for Kant, as we shall see in the next section, these are mind-dependent properties. It is tempting also to see other 'idealist' interpretations in terms of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and not as Kantian. Rivière claims '[t]he true purpose of painting is to represent objects as they really are; that is to say, differently from the way we see them. It tends always to give us their sensitive *essence*, their presence, this is why the image it forms does not resemble their *appearance*' (Fry, 1978, p. 76). In tilting a glass to the viewer the painter represents the objective, circular shape of the object in space, rather than how it appears from a particular perspective. In doing so, it can be said that the focus is on 'reality', the object's 'essence' or the 'thing-in-

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<sup>9</sup> Rivière (1912, pp. 253–6) explains the cubist attitude to lighting: 'Lighting is not merely an accidental mark; it has the effect of profoundly altering forms.... It is therefore possible to say that lighting prevents things *from appearing as they are*.... In short, the painter, instead of showing the object *as he sees it*, that is, disarticulated between light and dark, will construct it, *as it is*, that is, in the form of a geometrical volume, free of lighting effects. In the place of its relief, he will put its volume'. Rivière is similarly insightful with respect to perspective: 'No doubt, reality shows us these objects mutilated in that way. But we can move around in reality: one step to the right and one step to the left complete our vision. The knowledge we have of an object is, as we said, a complex sum of perceptions. The plastic image, for its part, does not move: it must be complete from the first glance. Hence, it renounces perspective'.

itself'. Such terms, though, need not be taken in a Kantian sense; they could merely refer to the objective, primary properties of objects in Locke's sense.<sup>10</sup>

A second reason to reject this idealist interpretation is that, for Kant, things-in-themselves cannot be the objects of experience, nor can we have any knowledge of them or cognitive contact with them. We can only have knowledge of the phenomenal world, the world of our experience, and not the transcendental world from which, presumably, these experiences are derived. Any attempt to depict the noumenal world is impossible.

Third, in later works Picasso adopts a pluralist approach where, within the same work, there are cubist representations alongside naturalistic, traditional ones. This is so, for example, in *Fruit-Dish with Grapes, Glass and Playing-card* (1914) and *Still Life with Fruit-Dish on a Table* (1914).<sup>11</sup> This suggests that cubism does not aspire to *the one true* representation of reality—to a representation of things-in-themselves. The message of these works seems to be that these styles are complementary (Cooper, 1971, pp. 215–17).<sup>12</sup> Braque's trompe l'oeil nail in his *Violin and Palette* (1909)

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<sup>10</sup> Bois (1990, p. 67) notes a parallel tension in Raynal, who interprets cubism in terms of both Kant and Berkeley (1710); Kant, though, attempts to refute Berkeley's idealism in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

<sup>11</sup> See Cooper and Tinterow (1983, pp. 300–2).

<sup>12</sup> See also Amédée Ozenfant, the cubist, and later purist: 'Because Picasso nowadays paints cubist and representational works, it has been falsely claimed that he is giving up Cubism.... Can such people not understand that Cubism and figurative painting are two different languages, and that a painter is free to choose either of them as he may judge it better suited to what he has to say?' (cited in McCully, 1981, pp. 146–8).

draws attention to the contrast between naturalism and cubism, and Rosenberg interprets this as saying that ‘the Cubist means of recording...reality—unlike the means devised by the Renaissance—are not absolute but relative. One pictorial language is no more “real” than another, for the nail, conceived as external reality, is just as false as any of the less illusionistic passages in the canvas—or, conversely, conceived as art, is just as true’ (Rosenblum, 2001, p. 45).<sup>13</sup> This pluralist claim is illustrated in Picasso’s drawing, *The Studio* (1933).<sup>14</sup> In the depicted artist’s studio there are two artistic representations of the same female model, one a broadly naturalistic sketch resting on an easel, the other a balloon-like sculpture sat on a table, the latter in the style of his beach paintings of the 1920s and 1930s.

### 3. Kant’s Empirical Realism

Kahnweiler may be confused about the distinction between the views of Locke and Kant, and his use of the analytic/synthetic distinction may be mere name-dropping; nevertheless, there are other appeals to Kant that are more convincing. He says, for example, that cubism’s

new language has given painting an unprecedented freedom...

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<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of this famous nail, see Rubin (1989, pp. 40–1, 60n86): ‘his nail is a subtle artistic pun, which draws attention to the premises of his Cubist style by alluding to what it is not’ (p. 41).

<sup>14</sup> See Cowling and Golding (1994, fig. 66, p. 90).

coloured planes, through their direction and relative position, can bring together the formal scheme without uniting in closed forms.... Instead of an analytic description, the painter can...also create in this way a synthesis of the object, or in the words of Kant, 'put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in our perception'. (Kahnweiler, 1920, p. 12)

Here he is concerned with the creative role of the mind in perception. This is also stressed by other commentators and by *le bande à Picasso* (Picasso's circle of poet and artist friends). Apollinaire claimed that '[c]ubism differs from earlier painting in that it is not an art of imitation, but an art of *imagination*' (Gantefuhrer-Trier, 1996, p. 20) and that it involves 'the art of painting new structures with elements borrowed not from visual reality but from the reality of *knowledge*' (Cooper, 1971, p. 109). There is a shallow sense in which this is so. Our knowledge of the human body and of traditional ways of depicting this allow us to see, for example, the figure in Picasso's *Standing Nude* of 1910. Such a figure is not in itself 'closed' (see Kahnweiler quotation above)—its form and the space around it interpenetrate; it is, however, 'completed' in the viewer's mind. We have to apply such knowledge to the drawing since the descriptive content of such a work is so minimal.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It is in this move away from visual appearances and towards the involvement of cognitive capacities that we see one influence of tribal art on cubism. Golding, echoing the now archaic terminology of the cubist epoch, puts it thus: 'As opposed to Western art, Negro art is more conceptual, much less conditioned by visual appearances. The Negro sculptor tends to depict what he knows about his subject rather than what he sees' (1989, p.

There is, though, according to Kant, a deeper sense in which the mind constructs what we see and this, I argue, can provide the basis for a distinct Kantian interpretation of cubism, one not focused on things-in-themselves, but on Kant's empirical realism and his account of the cognitive input that is necessary for our lived experience.

Early modern empiricists such as Locke and Hume saw experience as passive, something that impinges on us. Hume calls such experiences, impressions; the world forming impressions on the mind as a stamp forms an impression in wax. Kant, however, in the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' (1781, A22–49/B37–73), argues that the mind imposes spatio-temporal order on experience.<sup>16</sup> Space and time are not things independent of us; they are preconditions of experience—necessary, a priori, aspects of experience through which we must engage with the world; what Kant calls 'forms of intuition'. Kant has two arguments for this claim. First, the idea of space cannot be derived from impressions (in Hume's sense) since spatiality is already built into our impressions: I see that the glass is to the left of the

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59). Karmel (2003, p. 68) cites Kahnweiler's (1949) thoughts on the creative role of the viewer's mind in relation to a Grebo tribal mask: 'The volume of the "seen" face is inscribed nowhere in the "true" mask, which provides only the outline of this face. The volume is seen somewhere before the real mask. The epidermis of the seen face only exists in the consciousness of the viewer who "imagines" or creates the volume of the face in front of the plane surface of the mask'. Picasso owned two Grebo masks (see Rubin, 1984, p. 307).

<sup>16</sup> 'Aesthetic' is used here to refer to the sensible or experiential representation of objects in general (cf. anaesthetic) and not in the contemporary sense that refers only to art and art objects.

newspaper. Second, I can think of space with objects removed, but I cannot think of the absence of space; representation of space is thus prior to representation of objects (ibid., A23–24/B38–9). Further, in the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ (ibid., A95–130/B129–69) Kant argues that experience must also correspond to the ‘categories’—certain fundamental ways of conceiving of the world. We have no choice, for example, but to see the world in terms of enduring substances in causal relations to each other. In what follows I will focus on the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’ and the spatial structure of experience.

Commentators on cubism gesture towards such an account: ‘The arrangement of bottles and fishes [in Braque’s *Still Life with Fish on a Table*, 1911] is not embedded in a spatially recognizable background.... Spatial integration of the objects in the picture develops only in the viewers’ minds’ (Gantefuhrer-Trier, 1996, p. 42). The viewer fuses multiple views into a single image, reconstructing objects from dislocated facets, bringing to bear their conceptual understanding of those objects. Braque, in his 1917 *Thoughts and Reflections on Art*, says ‘[t]he senses deform, the mind forms’ (cited in Versteegen, 2014, p. 295), and a more developed description of the constructive role of the mind is given by the cubist sculptor, Archipenko: ‘One can say that Cubism had created a new cognitive order in respect of pictures.... [T]he viewer is himself creatively active, and speculates and creates a picture by building upon the plastic character of those objects that are sketched out as forms’ (Gantefuhrer-Trier, 1996, p. 30). Such constructive effort can be felt as one searches for life in the more difficult canvases, those not readily decipherable to the untrained eye. The claim is

not that cubist works have distinctive features that trigger such Kantian synthesis; for Kant, all experience has this structure: apprehending a teapot actively involves forms of intuition and the categories. The teapot does not sit there in space that is independent of observers, waiting to be seen. Space, rather—and thus volume—is a precondition of experience—a feature imposed on experience by the mind of the viewer. The claim is that cubist works can make us aware of such acts of synthesis, and therefore that such an account of visual experience can be seen as one of the subjects of these works.<sup>17</sup> Cubists are not alone in this, of course, and Cezanne, divisionists such as Seurat and Signac, and impressionists all have this goal, but the claim here is that the self-reflexivity of cubism's form of modernism is Kantian in flavour.

I will discuss two potential objections to my interpretation. First, one concerning a distinct account of what Kant means by things-in-themselves; second, a reason to think that such a Kantian approach could not have been intended by the major cubists.

#### **4. The Two-Aspect Interpretation of Transcendental Idealism**

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<sup>17</sup> For Kant, such synthesis is also the foundation of self-awareness. Kant argues that self-consciousness—or the 'unity of apperception' (1781, A106–8)—is grounded in acts of synthesis: I become aware of myself as I synthesize spatio-temporal intuitions into, for example, the experience of seeing someone descending the stairs. Perhaps, then, cubism not only makes manifest the active cognitive input that we bring to experience, but also the very existence of our selves. One does not lose oneself in a cubist picture; one finds oneself.

The idealist interpretation of cubism that I discussed in the previous section assumes what is called the 'two-object' view: there's the spatio-temporal objects of experience and also transcendental or noumenal objects that are not located in space and time. Cubist works are seen as attempting to depict the latter or as enabling us to comprehend the noumenal. There is, however, another interpretation of what Kant has in mind by things-in-themselves. This is Allison's (1987) 'two-aspect' view. According to this, we have two ways of conceiving of objects: in spatio-temporal terms, as they are experienced, and also as objects-in-themselves, shorn of the spatio-temporal properties that our mind imposes on them. According to this view, there is just one set of objects conceived in two distinct ways, and not an accompanying mysterious world of noumenal objects.

A 'two-aspect' interpretation of cubism is suggested by considering the density of the clustering of facets across a cubist work. There are areas, often 'seeded', as it were, by an attribute, where facets form recognizable objects, and there are impenetrable areas of the canvas where it is difficult to discern such features. We can talk of the former as resolved parts of the canvas and the latter as unresolved. These distinctive regions illustrate the two distinct aspects of objects central to the two-aspect interpretation. Cubist works can be seen as concerning the familiar objects of experience: both, as they are experienced—in the resolved parts of the canvas, and, as they are in-themselves, in the penumbras and regions of unresolved shimmering facets. This would be an idealist interpretation of cubism, one in which the viewer is presented not with depictions of transcendental

*objects*, but with those of the transcendental *aspects* of familiar everyday objects. Such an interpretation is not prey to some of the problems discussed above. On this view, for example, there is a sense in which things-in-themselves can be experienced (one aspect of them, at least).

My interpretation differs from this two-aspect reading. I am claiming that cubist works bring to our attention the acts of synthesis involved in perception—*this is their subject*, and not the transcendently-ideal aspects of the objects of experience. I suggest that my interpretation is more plausible. First, consider the regions of the paintings where facets form familiar objects of experience. According to the two-aspect interpretation, the depicted facets should be seen as, as it were, *falling or shearing away*, revealing the transcendental aspects of such objects; according to my interpretation, the facets should be seen as participating in the *construction* of the spatio-temporal objects we come to see. The latter description chimes more with my experience of looking at these works. Second, the explicit pronouncements of some cubists lend some support to my interpretation. We saw above that Braque and Archipenko focus on the constructive role of the mind and not on transcendental objects, either as construed according to the two-object or two-aspect interpretations.

## 5. 'Picasso Never Spoke of Kant'

Such consideration of the explicit statements of the major cubists can suggest a second objection to my empirical realist interpretation of Kant. Braque's rather opaque comment concerning the creative role of the mind

may be suggestive ('the senses deform, the mind forms'), but further consideration of the intentions of Picasso and Braque may be thought to undermine all Kantian interpretations of their work. According to Paul Crowther: 'the internal structure of Cubist works should not even be linked analogically to Kant's "synthesis of apprehension"—unless we have external documentary evidence to show that the artist intended his...representation to be thus construed' (1987, p. 198). We do not have any such evidence. In fact, it is highly unlikely that Picasso and Braque read Kant or that they had anything but a very rudimentary understanding of his works. Kahnweiler, questioning the veracity of Francoise Gilot's (1964) account of life with Picasso, asserts that 'Picasso never, never spoke of Kant or Plato' (Ashton, 1972, p. xxvii). Both his partner during the cubist years, Fernande Olivier, and Gertrude Stein attest that Picasso did not read much at all, apart from, perhaps, some of the poetry of his friends (Rubin, 1989, pp. 54–5). Further, both Picasso and Braque explicitly stated that they were not driven by philosophical or theoretical concerns and Picasso, in particular, seemed to delight in obfuscating his intentions when directly asked about his work—or, as Cocteau (1956, p. 93) put it: 'He never dissected the doves that came out of his sleeves'.

Crowther's claim, though, is too strong and not very plausible, as I will go on to argue. A plausible position with respect to the relation between an artist's intentions and knowledge and the meaning or subject of their art would seem to occupy the middle ground between Crowther's claim and that of Beardsley and Wimsatt (1946) who argue that the intentions of the artist are not relevant to judgements concerning what the work means or

what it is about. I myself have searched biographies and interviews with Picasso to find mention of Kant. What if I had been successful—what if I had fallen upon a well-thumbed copy of *The Critique of Pure Reason* in one of David Douglas Duncan's wonderful photographs of Picasso's home and studio, *La Californie*?<sup>18</sup> This would surely add credence to one or other Kantian interpretations of his work. However, according to Beardsley and Wimsatt, if Picasso had been successful in his intention to depict Kantian themes, then they would be there to be seen in the work, regardless of the existence of such a photograph. If, on the other hand, he were unsuccessful, and his reading of the critique never came through in his work, then he would have failed in his intentions and such a photograph would merely be a record of a failed project. There is, however, middle ground between these two views concerning the relevance of artists' intentions to the meanings of their works. Instead of limiting consideration to the explicit intentions of the artist, we can consider wider aspects of the creative process. Knowledge of these may illuminate the works. An artist—Picasso, perhaps—could have a sharper awareness than most of us of his own perceptual mechanisms and the synthetic activity of his own mind. That is at least an open possibility. The artist's representations of what and how he sees could therefore manifest features of perception that we rarely notice, but are those that are explained by scientific, psychological or philosophical theory. It may also be the artist's intention to express their perceptual insight in their works even though they do not have knowledge of the relevant theories. Picasso

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Duncan (1980).

could thus portray Kantian synthesis without having read a word of Kant.

I have considered various ways that interpreters have taken cubism to be Kantian in its approach. It has been seen in terms of the analytic/synthetic distinction and transcendental idealism. I have rejected both interpretations, but suggested an alternative interpretation in line with Kant's empirical realism. Lastly, I shall relate this interpretation to formalist interpretations of cubism—formalism derived from Kant's (1790) account of beauty in his *Critique of Judgment*. Formalist interpretations of cubist works limit their aesthetically-significant properties to the planes, lines and muted colours on the surface of the canvas. Roger Fry offered an early influential account of this kind: cubists 'do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life.... The logical extreme of such a method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form—a visual music; and the latter works of Picasso show this clearly enough' (Rubin, 1989, p. 406). However, the richness of these works belies such interpretations. Abstract art may be limited to such formal properties, but, as we have seen, cubism is not abstract: it can therefore be judged on how well it captures the atmosphere of the café or the character of a person, as, by all accounts, he evidently did in his portraits of the art dealers Ambroise Vollard (1910) and Wilhelm Uhde (1910). To understand cubism one also has to be aware of its subversive role with respect to Renaissance perspective, and its relation to a roll-call of artists through the ages to which Picasso, in particular, makes reference: Cézanne, El Greco, Courbet and Ingres, to name but a few. Further, I have suggested here that these works

concern the process of seeing and Kantian conceptions of this. Cubist works do have a distinctive form, one that at times offers a kind of shimmering beauty—a ‘prismatic magic’: ‘As cubism evolves, Picasso presses his analysis beyond the study of volumes to the point at which it becomes “a melodius fabric of lines and tints, a music of delicate tones—lighter or darker, warmer or cooler—whose mystery increases the pleasure of the viewer”’ (Rubin, 1989, p. 44). In addition to this form, though, there is multi-faceted content: a certain work can depict the bohemian world of zinc bars in Paris at the start of the last century, art-historical themes concerning perspective and the norms of realism, and philosophical theories concerning vision and the role of our cognitive faculties in experience.

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***The Birthplace of Aesthetics:  
Baumgarten on Aesthetical Concepts and Art  
Experience***

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ABSTRACT. The founding of aesthetics in XVIII century implied changed understanding of both beauty and art, as well as the development of the new form of theory. To develop aesthetics, Baumgarten had to connect aesthetic experience, beauty, and art; as their common ground he chose art experience. In addition to such basis of aesthetics, he also had to define the theoretical character of the new discipline, and especially the character of its concepts. Such concepts of aesthetics have special character - they should immediately refer to the aesthetic experience, which, in turn, they make explicit and communicable. The paper will focus on art experience, as the very basis for the development of aesthetics, as well as on the character of this theory, orientated on *extensive clarity* - the concept that should differentiate between logic and aesthetics, i.e. between characters of these disciplines of philosophy. These problems will be analyzed with regard to the logic of Port Royal and philosophy of Leibniz.

## **1. Introduction**

Although problems of beauty and art defined philosophy from its very

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beginnings in Ancient Greece, it was Alexander G. Baumgarten, who proclaimed aesthetics as a distinctive and legitimate field of philosophy in XVIII century. Baumgarten founded a new and special philosophical discipline such was never seen before – he notoriously defined it as lower gnoseology, *gnoseologia inferior*. The main issue I will address here is exactly Baumgarten's gesture of defining aesthetics as a new discipline, as a new field of philosophy.

The oddity of the Baumgartens's project is, however, often neglected (Buchenau, 2013, p. 14). Namely, the fact that aesthetical issues and problems were addressed in philosophy from its very beginning often distorts the interpretation of Baumgarten's project, presenting it as a simple, natural, and perhaps even necessary phase of the development of philosophy in its traditional form. Such interpretation is also often endorsed by another one, the interpretation that puts Baumgarten in line with the rationalistic philosophy of Descartes, Leibniz, and, of course, Christian Wolf. With regard to this particular interpretation, Baumgarten's project merely represents a kind of supplement of Wolf's endeavors, intended to systematize Leibniz's thought (Poppe, 1907, pp. 15-16, 49).

Although Baumgarten was indeed inspired by Wolf and Leibniz, and although he did in fact develop many of his views under the influence of the Rationalism, he also offered something completely new and innovative – namely, the very discipline of aesthetics (Wessel, 1972, p. 334). In my opinion, such novelty should be investigated once again – not from the perspective of the continuity of Baumgarten's project with his predecessors, but from the perspective of their differences. As a discipline of philosophy,

aesthetics is, in my opinion, a point of discontinuity, of provocation and of rapture in the fibre of traditional philosophy; and it is just Baumgarten's project that presents it as such.

Why Baumgarten? In my opinion, Baumgarten's project of aesthetics should be focused exactly because it abandons the traditional philosophical practice with regard to the problems of art and beauty, which addressed them in terms of metaphysics, or other non-aesthetical domains of philosophy. In opposition to such practice, Baumgarten presents us with *aesthetical* analysis of aesthetical problems. Namely, he tried to investigate and to define the very conditions of their proper theoretical and philosophical inquiry, at the same time rejecting their reduction to other and more usual philosophical problems and questions (metaphysical ones). His aesthetics is, therefore, a new philosophical discipline not only in terms of its new threefold subject – the unified domain of beauty, art and aesthetic experience, but also in terms of its theoretical character. It is this specific theoretical character of aesthetic that I would like to address here more precisely.

In the light of previously given distinctions, my main question could be defined as follows: why is it that the threefold domain of aesthetics should be considered as a domain that is in need of special theoretical inquiry, different from any previously known? In another words, which characteristics of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, as a special form of theory, should be considered as intrinsic to the very nature of Baumgarten's project?

In order to answer these questions, I will put stress upon early

Baumgarten's manuscript – *Philosophical meditations on some aspects of poetical works (Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis Ad Poema Petrinentibus)* from 1735. Namely, it is in this manuscript that Baumgarten mentions his new discipline for the first time (Baumgarten, 1900, p. 41). Although he literally just mentions aesthetics on last few pages of the work, and although this work does not present the idea of aesthetics in its developed form, but it only announces such idea, I am convinced that it can reveal the true nature of Baumgarten's aesthetics, perhaps even more than his *Metaphysics* or *Aesthetics*. Although it was not fully developed in this early work, the very idea of aesthetics is in fact here conceived: therefore, it could also be interpreted out of this perspective in a specific manner, such that would bring forth its very meaning – the idea behind the founding of the new discipline. I will address Baumgarten's project out of two perspectives: 1) the domain of aesthetics, and 2) the character of the aesthetical theory.

## **2. The Domain of Aesthetics**

I have already mentioned that the novelty of Baumgarten's project could be interpreted in terms of the novelty of its domain, the subject it investigates. It is well known that Baumgarten's aesthetics encompassed threefold subject – art, beauty and aesthetic experience. Such systematization of previously separated problems could be considered as a new perspective of aesthetics, as a proposal of one and unique new subject of philosophical investigation. Namely, before Baumgarten, the theory of beauty and the theory of art were not united – art and beauty were understood as separate

subjects of separate theoretical inquiries. The theory of beauty was mostly seen as a part of broader metaphysical considerations, be it Plato's theory of ideas or mediaeval problem of transcendentals. The theory of art was, on the other hand, mostly developed in terms of science and knowledge, with the special case of Aristotle. Baumgarten's gesture of unification, consequently, changed both studies in beauty and art, as well as philosophy and its further development.

Therefore, for such a gesture to be delivered, it had to be prepared with a changed understanding of both beauty and art from Baumgarten's part (Buchenau, 2013, p. 114). That implies that mentioned systematization and unification of art, beauty and aesthetic experience in one aesthetical domain is itself a novelty: it was not understood in such a way before Baumgarten, and – for it to be seen in this new way – it demanded some common ground for all of these three aspects. Hence, to develop aesthetics as a separate and legitimate field of philosophy, Baumgarten needed to reach out for some deeper ground of both beauty and art. With regard to the tradition, he should have reached out for some more abstract concept that would allow for the single theory that would encompass both problems. However, Baumgarten reached not for more abstract, but for more lifelike and more concrete basis – namely, he chose aesthetic experience as the basis of aesthetics, out of which he further developed both his understanding of art and his understanding of beauty. This is, of course, marked by the definition of aesthetics as lower gnoseology.

However, such Baumgarten's choice presents us not only with the new way of understanding of beauty and art, but also with the new way of

understanding of theory and philosophy. As we have seen, in search for the common ground of beauty and art, Baumgarten did not focus on any concept more abstract from those, he did not reach out for some kind of their common genus, to put it in Aristotelian terms. On the contrary, he reached out for the more subjectivistic solution – for the aesthetic experience. As a theory, aesthetics is not defined with regard to the 'object' it investigates (Aristotelian model of science/theory), but in terms of the subjective faculty that allows for such a theory (Descartes's model of theory/science).

It is well known that Baumgarten proclaims aesthetics to be lower gnoseology, *gnoseologia inferior*, and that he had conceived this new field of philosophy as similar to logic. The character of aesthetics is, therefore, understood with regard to knowledge and especially in respect of powers of knowledge given to human beings (reason and sensibility). Such thesis could be – and it often was – interpreted as if Baumgarten only followed previously given divisions of philosophy, mainly the one given by Christian Wolf. The implication is that he understood aesthetics as a kind of logic, as a kind of abstract and partially formal discipline, which is orientated on sensibility. However, in my opinion, that was not entirely the case: Baumgarten did in fact claim the mentioned similarity of logic and aesthetics, but he also emphasized aesthetic experience as a starting point and as a basis of aesthetical inquiry (Wessel, 1972, p. 337). The aesthetic experience is, therefore, Baumgarten's ground for the development of theory that should encompass both beauty and art as its problems and objects of inquiry.

Namely, although Baumgarten in his later and more developed works on aesthetics defined the discipline as the lower gnosology, i.e. as an investigation of sensation and sense perception as such, he sharply differentiated between the traditional sense of the term gnosology and the new, aesthetical one, the one he himself proposes (Franke, 2008, pp. 77-78). This new sense of gnosology is not primarily associated with the non-aesthetic sensory experience, but with the problem of beauty, given that beauty is defined as *perfect sensitive knowledge* in Baumgarten's *Aesthetics* (Baumgarten, 2007, p. 21). That is to say that *gnosologia inferior* investigates the very essence of sensory experience, but with regard to aesthetic experience – that it is the aesthetic experience as such that can give us proper insight in inner forms and structure of the sensibility, even in possible claims for its aesthetic truth (analogy with logic) (Buchenau, 2013, p. 123).

Here we have an inversion of the traditional understanding of sensibility: aesthetic experience is here presented as the fundamental sensory experience – it is not a 'special case' or aberration of more usual and more ordinary non-aesthetical sensory experience (in this Baumgarten follows Leibniz) (Brown, 1967, pp. 71-72). Therefore, Baumgarten's basis for the new discipline of aesthetics is not conceived with regard to the traditional philosophical disciplines – even though it was named gnosology (Franke, 2008, p. 82).

However, such inversion, claimed and developed in *Aesthetics*, is prepared early on, in *Meditations*, and with another twist – by focusing on the aesthetic experience of art. It is in this work that Baumgarten testifies

that his own endeavors started with the question of the essence of the works of art, namely the works of poetry. He presents his own project in *Meditations* starting with a brief critique of his predecessors – namely, he states that he wants to re-think those concepts and positions he already accepted concerning the question of poetry, and that he wants to do so by starting from the experience of poetry (the single concept of the poem in the soul/mind) (Baumgarten, 1900, pp. 4-5). In this case, it is obviously the experience gained through the contact with the poetry, i.e. aesthetic experience of art: the single concept of the poem in the mind could not be *a priori* concept, but *a posteriori* one – the concept which is developed from the experience of poetical works of art.

This critical stance of Baumgarten is crucial for *Meditations*, for its structure is implicitly governed by the questioning of the traditional model of the theory of art – poetics. Such questioning, finally, results with the idea of the new kind of theory of art – the one that cannot be restricted to the poetical model, but has to be legitimized on the level of more fundamental account on those features of human being that allow for any theory of art to be developed (Baumgarten, 1900, pp. 40-41). This, of course, is aesthetics.

Therefore, we can conclude that previously mentioned inversion of the relationship between ordinary, non-aesthetic sensory experience, and the aesthetical one now should be additionally clarified: it is an aesthetic experience of art - of poetry - that leads Baumgarten towards aesthetics as a discipline. This is not to say that the aesthetic experience of art has any prominent position in later Baumgarten's development of aesthetics, for it is beauty – not art – that is accentuated and made the most explicit example of

the domain of aesthetics; beauty is, as we have already seen, perfect sensitive knowledge (Aichele, 1999, pp. 88-89). Consequently, the aesthetic experience of art is here made prominent with regard to completely different problem – namely, the problem of the character of the theory that can be adequate to the domain of aesthetic experience as such. If such discipline is to be developed, one should start with the special case of aesthetic experience – with the aesthetic experience of art (poetry), out of which the fundamental simple concept of the poem in the soul is derived. Its prominent position is, thus, to be understood with regard to the problematic character of the discipline of aesthetics.

It should not surprise us that Baumgarten has chosen poetry, i.e. poetics for such questioning. His choice is governed by the very character of poetics, as a specific theoretical approach which is not suitable for any other problem but the analysis of art. In other words, he did not choose theory of beauty, because in its traditional form it has metaphysical character, because it is not restricted to the question of beauty. He chose poetics because it does present a suitable candidate for a theory specially designed and adequate to the aesthetical problems, at least to one of them. Surely, in the course of *Meditations* he questioned traditional model of poetics and abandoned it in favour of aesthetics as the more fundamental discipline.

Therefore, it seems that Baumgarten's project is, from the very beginning, orientated on the very idea of new and innovative way of philosophizing, i.e. of philosophical thinking. *Meditations* offer us a critical analysis of the traditional model of art theory and present us with the possibility of the new, more general model of aesthetics. Consequently, we

should investigate the very theoretical character of this new discipline.

### **3. The Character of the Aesthetical Theory**

As we have seen, it is an experience – and not a concept – that should lead us to the new discipline of aesthetics. Such claim should not be misunderstood: given that aesthetics is conceived as philosophy and as similar to logic, such discipline demands for a proper conceptual framework. However, concepts adequate to aesthetics are not to be understood logically – they are not concepts of logic, or the concepts of metaphysics. Moreover, they are not concepts of epistemology, regardless of the definition of aesthetics as lower gnoseology (Wessel, 1972, p. 338). These aesthetical concepts should have special character, one that corresponds to their origin: namely, they should refer to the aesthetic experience, which, in turn, they are to make explicit and communicable. Finally, as concepts, as products of reason, they should allow for the specific theory of aesthetical character – aesthetics.

Interpreting Baumgarten, we should, therefore, differentiate between two problems: between aesthetical domain (of beauty and art), given with aesthetic experience, on the one side, and the aesthetics as a theory on the other. In other words, aesthetics as the problem is here understood in terms of questioning if such separate field of philosophy is even possible. Its domain, aesthetic experience, poses the question with regard to questioning if such experience, which is fundamentally subjective, concrete and bound to the senses, closely related to life itself, could ever be adequately

expressed by any kind of concepts. As we can see, both problems have one common ground – namely, aesthetical concepts, concepts that would be suitable for the theory and that would not neglect aesthetic experience.

Baumgarten is well aware of this problem, and he has proposed the solution. His solution is given in terms of *extensive clarity*, the concept that should differentiate between logical and aesthetical concepts, i.e. between characters of these disciplines of philosophy. Extensive clarity is, therefore, juxtaposed with *intensive clarity*, which is characteristic for the concepts of logic – and for the traditional concepts of philosophy, I might add (Buchenau, 2013, pp. 124-125). Such intensive clarity is intensive because it intensifies the meaning of the concept, because it emphasizes the aspect of unity that connects various and multiple objects to which such concept could be predicated (Baumgarten, 1900, p. 9). On the other hand, extensive clarity emphasizes the very multiplicity – not the unity: such concept presents us with nuances and variations of meaning that are by definition abstracted in concepts of intensive clarity. In other words, concepts of extensive clarity do not emphasize the multiplicity in terms of broadening the referential domain of concept; on the contrary, if a concept is more extensive, its referential domain is more narrow and vice versa (Baumgarten, 1900, p. 10).

Extensive clarity, as a proposed special character of aesthetic concepts in opposition to the logical ones, represents the very difference between aesthetics and other disciplines of philosophy. Namely, it presents us with completely new idea of a concept – such that turns away from the discursive forms of reason (distinct ideas) and opts for the discursive possibilities of

sensation, of sense perception as such. It follows from here that extensively clear concepts allow for completely new form of their unification with regard to judgements or arguments, and finally concerning the complete theory. Although we use terms like 'judgement' and 'argument' which belong to logic, connections between extensively clear concepts would not operate in the same manner in which intensively clear concepts (concepts of logic) operate. That is to say that, although Baumgarten claims the analogy between logic and aesthetics, he does not claim that they are the same – nor does he claim that aesthetics is a kind of subdiscipline of logic.

However, logic is here of some importance: now we can trace one of neglected origins of Baumgarten's aesthetics – namely logic, as it was understood in rationalist philosophies of Modern Ages. Previously mentioned inverse relation between meaning and reference of an extensively clear concept is logical in its origin, and the possibility to make use of such traditional logical principles in terms of extensive clarity draws from Port-Royal Logic and from the understanding of the *determination* which was developed in this context. A. Arnauld and P. Nicole made an effort to explain how judgements and arguments can be developed from ideas, i.e. from the building-blocks of consciousness, making a single idea – and not a single term - the very basis of logic (Wahl, 2008, pp. 670-672). In turn, this opened a new possibility: if an idea could be *explained*, that means that it is clarified in terms of making its content explicit; on the other hand, if an idea should be *determined*, that means that it is clarified in terms of making its content more concrete and more individual (Arnauld and Nicole, 2003, pp. 37, 40, 44-45). In both cases, logic in its core is to be developed from the

private consciousness by means of clarification and explication of its contents, which is very similar to Baumgarten's understanding of aesthetics.

Bridge between Port-Royal Logic and Baumgarten, G. W. Leibniz, took this idea even further, connecting the *determinative* way of thinking not with reason and its operations (logic), but with sense perception, for the first time proclaiming sensibility to be clear and, therefore, true in special cases – in cases of aesthetic experience of beauty (Brown, 1967, pp. 70-71, 73). Relying on Leibniz, Baumgarten is now in a position to make a demand for special aesthetical concepts, concepts of extensive clarity adequate to (aesthetic) experience, such that would make the basis for the development of an *aesthetic* theory. Such theory should, therefore, be aesthetic not only with regard to the subject of its inquiry – art and beauty, but also in terms of its own theoretical character, exemplified in its concepts.

The main point which is here to be noted is that these extensively clear concepts are essentially bound to the aesthetic experience. It follows from here that such concepts cannot be purely rational, cannot be products of pure reason. And even more: it seems that their origin is not reason at all, although they are called concepts – in a way, they present us with forms of sensitivity such is derived by the sensitivity and out of the sensitivity as such.

In other words, these concepts are not purely descriptive, they do not just tag some sense perception. On the contrary, they bring inner operations of sensitivity to clarity – i.e. to the specific aesthetic form. Such form, of course, is not to be understood as a logical form of concept, firstly because logical form is a product of reason – it brings to clarity inner operations of

reason, and secondly because logical form of concepts is without any meaningful content. Extensively clear concepts, on the other hand, cannot be purely formal – their form is of another kind, while it represents the multiplicity of sensation in its given unity – the unity which is always given for a consciousness and which has its roots in consciousness. Nevertheless, they are rightly named concepts because they do function as such – they allow for non-descriptive inner unification of presentations given via sensation.

Finally, such concepts are very problematic. Namely, if they are a kind of clear forms of the inner operations of sensitivity, they are properly used only in aesthetical, i.e. poetical speeches – that is, in poetry. Hence Baumgarten in *Meditations* almost identifies extensive clarity with the poetic character of discourse (Baumgarten, 1900, p. 6). That implies that only art presents us with true extensive clarity. However, if this is so, what can we say with regard to the aesthetics and its concepts? Are they also poetical ones? They could not be, while such conclusion would mean that there could be no theory of art – that there could be only art as such.

Baumgarten never made a comment on this problem explicitly. However, we can at least conclude that aesthetics as a theory has to deal with such poetical, i.e. extensively clear concepts - that it has to investigate and analyse them. In other words, we can conclude that aesthetics, as a discipline of philosophy, may well be using reason and form some more traditional concepts and arguments, but that it has to do so never leaving the domain of aesthetic experience which presents its very basis. Therefore, Baumgarten's project would move from the aesthetic experience, via

extensively clear/poetical concepts, towards a new theory of aesthetics, which is to be built upon such grounds.

Finally, by presenting his *Meditations* as a kind of poetics, Baumgarten clearly puts his new ideas in the context of old Renaissance quarrel between logic and poetics; in turn, poetical speeches will become a basis for the aesthetical ones.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

In my opinion, Baumgarten's project of aesthetics was in fact a project of the new perspective of philosophy as such, whether he personally conceived it as such or not.

Namely, aesthetics opened the possibility of aesthetical truth – the possibility of knowledge that is not, in any way, determined or delivered with the help of our rational capacities. Such knowledge is, consequently, adequate to the domain of the contingent, the individual, affective and personal side of human being. However, Baumgarten's efforts did not rely on just any perception and experience; although his aesthetics was determined as *gnoseologia inferior*, it was not conceived as a mere theory of sense perception in traditional terms. It also was not conceived as a theory of aesthetic experience of beauty, which was emphasized by Leibniz; it has started as a theory of aesthetic experience of art.

Baumgarten did in fact understood his aesthetics as a theory of sense experience in general terms, but he also did emphasize the aesthetic experience of art as a key which would allow for understanding of any other

possible kind of experience. Therefore, specific aesthetical concepts, that we considered earlier, should also be referring to the aesthetic experience of art, making it extensively clear and communicable in a form of theory.

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# *Minimalism: Empirical and Contextual, Aesthetic and Artistic*

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents a critical discussion of the philosophical discussion of minimal artworks: Initially it's suggested that there are two basic ways in which art has been said to be minimal: It can be *minimally made* (absence of effort) or it can be a *minimal object* (undifferentiated in content). The *minimally made* and the *minimal object* are not logically connected categories, giving four possible permutations:

1. A non-minimally made non-minimal object;
2. A minimally made minimal object;
3. A minimally made non-minimal object; and
4. A non-minimally made minimal object.

The paper suggests that philosophy has treated some such minimal works as 'hard-cases' in classificatory questions about art. However, it's suggested that art itself regards such works as problematising *how* to engage with them, but *not* about their status.

The paper considers this mismatch. It's argued that the traditional characterisations of minimal artworks are not hard cases for *art* but are however, hard-cases for *aesthetics*. This analysis suggests a new consideration of these minimal artworks as *aesthetically problematic yet artistically central*.

It's suggested that a different characterisation of 'minimal art' might be needed given the widespread acceptance of contextualist theorise of art of

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some kind. They might be *aesthetically* unproblematic yet, may be, for contextualist accounts of art, *artistically* problematic – and, as far as they are artworks, are *contextually minimal* artworks.

The paper concludes with an outline of *contextual minimalism*: These are practises that produce objects which have the form of art within practices which ape the persona of art, but made at the edges, or outside, of any artistic context. They only minimally possess any of the relational properties that make them artworks, and/or these relational properties are of marginal value and relevance to them in respect of their artwork status.

The artists involved with 'Minimalism' as an artistic movement were described by the critic Hilton Kramer as self-consciously “involved with finding out how little one can do and still make art” (Cramer 1968). The art produced was characterised by stylistic commonalities such as avoiding ornament; paring down elements; repeating single motifs; or material commonalities of using or designating found or ephemeral objects, media or activities; or curatorial commonalities of placing artworks so that they appear somehow contiguous with non-art reality and production commonalities such as using mechanical or standardised production techniques. So, although we are generally able to classify an artwork as minimal or not, we are not always able to make explicit the basis for that classification.

For philosophy, minimal artworks have often been of interest as they have involved ways of working which tested previously accepted norms of art-making and stretched previously accepted notions of artefactuality. This is a treatment of these works that goes beyond labelling them as items

within an artistic movement of Minimalism.

Wollheim's 1968 article "Minimal Art" (Battock 1995,.387-400) actually chimes with Cramer's characterisation somewhat and provides a good example of this classical philosophical approach to the minimal artwork - and of why minimal artworks might cause problems for philosophy (and indeed some art audiences) Wollheim discusses actual and imagined artworks and contends that minimal artworks are either (a) undifferentiated in themselves from other artworks or non-artworks, or (b) differentiated by factors external to the work, or art in general, and not attributable to the artist's work. Wollheim ascribes minimalism to an artwork both on the basis of its manufacture (the minimal effort of the artist) and on the basis of its aesthetic content (its displayed variety and aesthetic distinctiveness).

Wollheim argues on the basis that art is traditionally produced by uniting two elements – (i) work to actually form something, and (ii) the decision when it is right to stop this working to form something. These together constitute art-making. For Wollheim, minimal artworks are ones in which these two elements of artistic work are, or appear to be, divorced from one another so that the decision making element is the sum total of the work employed. Hence the audience's discomfort - the unease comes from holding both that artworks are artefacts made by artists and that these things purport to be artworks but show so little sign of having been made. Seen thus, making minimal art is a direct challenge to the necessity of an artist physically artefacing an object in order to make art. Also, of course, for Wollheim some kinds of painting within Minimalism – monochromes –

caused a problem because they do not admit of 'seeing-in.'"<sup>2</sup>

Wollheim's analysis can act as a launch pad for a critical discussion of the use and characterisation of minimal artworks within philosophical discussions. Following Wollheim, there are two basic ways in which art be minimal: It can be *minimally made* (absence of effort) or it can be a *minimal object* (undifferentiated in content).

An artwork is minimally made if the object which is the artwork is materially unaltered, or has been barely altered, from the state in which it was in its pre-artwork state. These are usually cases in which an artwork is made from a pre-existing object: In extremis, the artwork *is* just a designated or indicated one of a mass produced object, where the designation of that one object as an artwork is the total work invested in the object by the artist. So, for the plastic arts at least, if an artwork is produced without the artist's work entailing physically altering an object then an instance of minimal making has occurred.

A minimal object, on the other hand, can be a new physical artefact and can be made through physical work. A minimal art object is one that displays little, if any, distinct aesthetic or perceptual content as an artwork either in terms of its own internal aesthetic differentiation (as in monochrome white canvas) or in terms of its differentiation from other artworks (two different white monochromes) or a non-artwork (as in a

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<sup>2</sup> For the idea of 'seeing-in' see Wollheim *Art & Its Objects* (1968) 2nd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

readymade).<sup>3</sup>

The minimally made and the minimal object are not logically connected categories. It is possible that each can be exemplified separately, or in different combinations, in different artworks. So, there can be particular artworks which exemplify the four possible permutations afforded us by these categories.

The four permutations are:

1. A non-minimally made non-minimal object - an example would be Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.
2. A minimally made minimal object - an example would be Carl Andre's *Lever*.
3. A minimally made non-minimal object - an example would be Tracey Emin's *My Bed*.
4. A non-minimally made minimal object - an example would be Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*.

The *Mona Lisa* is a non-minimally made non-minimal object. Such works are the standard against which minimal objects and minimal making are judged on this kind of analysis. It took a lot of obvious work to make and it

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<sup>3</sup> But see Herwitz (1993) "The Journal of Aesthetics and Danto's Philosophical Claim", JAAC v.51 261-270 for a list of perceptual differences between Warhol's work and commercial Brillo boxes.

displays a lot of internal and comparative aesthetic variation: It was obviously made and is visually complex and unique.

*Lever* is a minimally made minimal object. Andre's work has minimal content as far as the object experienced is concerned – as an audience in a gallery experiences the work as a line of regular house bricks all alike, arranged on the floor. Yet the work is also an example of the arrangement of material to occupy three dimensional space, just as every other marble bust, bronze heroic figure and or wooden crucifixion throughout the history of Western sculpture has done. It differs from most others in terms of the re-fabricated nature of the materials used and the repetition, rather than variation of their deployment within the work and as the sole component of the work. That is, they differ in terms of their respective semantic content they put to use within the medium and form conventions of sculpture. There *is* however, undoubtedly a presumption that Andre's piece and, for instance, Michelangelo's *Pieta* were *made* differently. For the Andre piece the presumption is that it was conceived of at once in a conceptual realisation, and then articulated at once through a gesture of placement, rather than realised through a sustained process of working on a particular material to discover and articulated forms in that material, There is a presumption (perhaps not wholly well-founded) that Michelangelo's work contained a series of accumulative decisions and work towards a finished piece, whereas Andre's was articulated in a single decision.

However, style can be a deceiver and the presumption of arguing from an audience's minimal experience to a minimally made object is not always correct. Consider, Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*. The

genesis of this work was that Rauschenberg arranged with Willem De Kooning that he would erase one of De Kooning's drawings to leave a blank piece of paper – as if virgin but obviously not – as his resulting artwork. De Kooning provided Rauschenberg with a very heavily worked drawing on paper. It apparently took Rauschenberg weeks of assiduous rubbing to erase De Kooning's marks. The resulting artwork, as it appears to be a white sheet of paper, displays minimal aesthetic content. It thereby hints at being the result of a minimal making process. However, this artwork required physical artefactualisation to achieve its look and was the result of considerable craft-like making skills – skills of the sort that pare down content, rather than work it up. As Wollheim, (1970) among others points out, erasing an unwanted line has been a core practice of art making throughout the history of drawing and the decision that a work was complete was not made until this paring down had been achieved. Arguably then, Rauschenberg's physical work in making the artwork was at least the equal of, if not more intensive, laborious and skilful, than De Kooning's, although as an object of experience, De Kooning's original drawing was much less minimal than Rauschenberg's. So, Rauschenberg's minimal artwork object was the result of his non-minimal making and Erased De Kooning Drawing is a non-minimally made minimal object.

The presumption of a link between a minimal object and a minimal way of making may also brake when a richly detailed non-minimal work is the result of minimal making by an artist. Examples include any aesthetically complex ready-made, such as (supposedly) Tracy Emin's *My*

*Bed*<sup>4</sup>, or indeed many installation pieces. The point is that if the prevailing conditions are right the most aesthetically complex of works can result from the most minimal of making effort. Because this characterisation of minimalism relates solely to how an artwork was *made* these works are not obviously identifiable as minimal by an audience that does not know *how* they were made.

In terms of philosophy's discussion of minimalism in art, each variety of minimal art has been used to test substantive theories of art and to provide classificatory worries for philosophical theories or definitions of art. Critics of theories that require artworks to be artefacts resulting from physical work by an artist,<sup>5</sup> will use *minimally made* artworks for this purpose, whilst those that require artworks to have some degree of aesthetic or material sophistication,<sup>6</sup> will use *minimal objects* as their counter-

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<sup>4</sup> *My Bed* was supposedly Emin's real bed and surrounding artefacts in her home which was recorded and then re-assembled, as was in a gallery space. The moving of this work from one place to another was not work of creating the piece, but rather of re-locating an already made piece in a particular location. It was made, through an act of pure designation of the scene in Emin's home as that artwork.

<sup>5</sup> An example of such a theory might be that put defended by Monroe Beardsley in "Redefining Art" in Wreen & Callen eds. *From An Aesthetic Point of View*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1982), pp.298-315. There he writes, (p.312): '... I think it is a mistake to confer artistic status on found objects untouched by human hands or arrangements, however aesthetically interesting, in the genesis of which no human intentions played a part.'

<sup>6</sup> An example of such a theory might be that offered by Nick Zangwill in "The Creative Theory of Art", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 32, (1995), pp.123-148.

examples. However, the most extreme challenges have been seen to come from artworks that are *both* minimally made *and* a minimal object. Their status for philosophy has been therefore to act as markers of the extreme fringe of legitimate artistic creation. As they can provide worried for a range of different philosophical positions.

However, this is not the case for how they are regarded art itself, which accepts such works within its canon as central instances of mid-to-late Twentieth Century art. Such works are also among the examples that those seeking to understand art or art history, have to encounter in order to understand what was going on in visual art at this time. Moreover, these works were made by artists deliberately and self-consciously exploring the possibilities that art afforded them at that time – and that exploration included the investigation into minimal ways of making and minimal objects – it was an avowedly *artistic* project. Within art itself moreover, minimal artworks did not (for long) raise concerns which called their *status as art* in question, but instead raised points about *how* they were to be engaged with and how they related to the art of past (as per Fried's "Art & Objecthood" in Fried(1998)). That is, the questions were what was one supposed *to do* with them, how one was supposed to *appreciate* them, what problematics (such as Fried's 'theatricality') did they throw into view – all of which was predicated on the view that they were indeed artworks, *and not* on the question of whether they qualified as art at all.

This suggests a mismatch between the philosophical discussion of minimal art and how minimal artworks (in this philosophical sense) are regarded from within art history and artistic practise.

My question now is what can be made of this mismatch? Well, I'm suggesting that it points to a deeper problem with the philosophical characterisation of minimal art. Timothy Binkley's classic analysis in "Piece: Contra Aesthetics", (Binkley, 1977) can help here. There, Binkley argues there that the philosophical discussion of artworks was still entangled within the historical legacy of aesthetics so that artworks were viewed through the prism that their aesthetic properties were basic to them and that they were fundamentally and primarily *aesthetic objects*. However, Binkley observed that some artworks were such that their aesthetic properties were irrelevant to their status and/or appreciation as artworks and indeed to their achievement as such. Consequently, viewing these works through the prism of aesthetics was misleading and restricting. The solution was to separate clearly discussions of aesthetics and discussions of artworks, in order to remove the presumed link and treat each case on its merits, as a 'piece'.

I think that a similar legacy is at work here in respect of minimal art. Using a similar approach, we might say that the traditional characterisations of minimal artworks are not hard cases for *art* but are however, hard-cases for *aesthetics* – hence the mismatch.

The cure for the mismatch is then a different consideration of these traditional kinds of minimal artworks, as *aesthetically problematic* yet *artistically central*. Considering them thus aligns their treatment by philosophy with that of art history and artistic practise. This different consideration actually recognises their status and purpose within the history of visual art without robbing them of their precise philosophical problem generating role. It allows monochromes to be problematic for 'seeing-in'

without preventing from nevertheless being very important art – and important art because the aesthetic is non-foundational for them.

This leaves questions hanging. If the discussion of minimal art thus far provides only a partial, aesthetically or materially based account, how might we construct new accounts of minimal art that reflect the consensus that, at least from Danto's "The Artworld" (Danto, 1964) onwards, artworks necessarily possess, as well as perceptual and aesthetic properties, non-perceptual relational properties as a result of the historical and cultural context within which they are made and which they acquire as a result of being *artworks* as opposed to some other thing.<sup>7</sup>

I think that this demands a different analysis of what it means to be a minimal artwork, applying contextual, historical and cultural concerns to how an artwork might be minimal. If we could construct such an account it would enable minimal artworks to continue to play their role of providing hard cases at the limits of artistic activity but now within the framework of what might be called “post-empirical theories or definitions of art”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of relational artistic properties see Stephen Davies 1991 *Definitions of Art*, Ithaca, (NY, Cornell University Press 1991, pp. 67-70. He cites there Danto's discussion of such properties in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

<sup>8</sup> Any roll call of the main post-empirical definitions would include: T.J. Diffey "On Defining Art", Jerrold Levinson "Defining Art Historically: *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 19 (1979), pp. 232-50; Arthur C. Danto *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981); George Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*, (New York, Haven Publications 1984); James Carney "Defining Art Externally" *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 34 (1984) pp. 114-123; Robert Stecker

Since these definitions or theories of art locate an object's status (generally) as an artwork in its relational properties – arguing between themselves which features are necessary and/or sufficient (or indeed, if you're a cluster theorist, that none are individually) – we can look to these relational properties for ways of potentially being minimal art. This would mean looking for instance, to parse some well known positions, to such things (i) as the precise circumstances of an artefacts manufacture, or (ii) its relation to the body of already existing artworks, or to the 'artworld' as validating institutional framework or (iii) to the narrative history a piece provides to justify its status as an artwork, or (iv) how something exemplifies one of the things that art does at the time of its manufacture, etc. to generate accounts of what might constitute minimal art in *these* terms.

The overarching claim for this kind of minimal art is that they are artefacts that only minimally possess any of the various relational properties needed or claimed to be make them artworks, and/or those relational properties that they do possess are of marginal value and relevance to them in respect of their status *as* an artwork. Additionally, certain artefacts might potentially fall foul of limits imposed from this kind of minimalism because they possess insufficient or inappropriate relational properties, and so might be too minimally related to existing or current art, (however intensionally or extensionally constituted) to be artworks. These are the kinds of artefacts that can provide the hard and borderline cases for post-empirical theories or

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*Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value*; David Davies *Art as Performance*, (Blackwell, Oxford 2004). This is by no-means an exhaustive list.

definitions of art. I suggest that this kind of minimal art can be called '*contextual minimalism*' and that such artefacts, in as much as they are artworks, can be called *contextually minimal* artworks.

It should be noted that there are various 'hard-cases' for these post-empirical positions already existing within the literature: For instance, there's the "romantic artist's" work for institutional theories or "alien" or "first artworks" for historical/recursive theories. However, these are postulated hypothetical categories of works generated from the commitments of the theories themselves, and not real world examples. What I'm arguing here is that there *are* real artefacts that could create hard cases for these accounts of art, because they are, in my terms contextually minimal artworks or artefacts. Contextually minimal artworks might be *aesthetically* unproblematic, (in that they have been obviously made through the labour of an agent and display comparative and internal aesthetic variation) and so not meet Wollheim's criteria of how to be a minimal artwork, yet be *artistically* problematic artefacts. They thus sooth the tension between philosophy and artistic practice by aligning a way of discussing these objects within philosophy that mirrors their regard within art.

What this different characterisation of minimal artworks reflects is a move within philosophy from definitions or theories of art that take art to be a collection of objects that have some kind of conditions attached to how or whether they are made (a so-called 'artefactuality condition')<sup>9</sup> to definitions

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of this term and its use see Davies *Definitions of Art* (1993)

or theories of art that take art to be those things (however construed) that fall within a cultural practise (however constituted). If, alongside this, minimal artworks per se, play a role of providing potential hard or limiting cases for classificatory questions, then the cause of the mis-match becomes clear. Object-based accounts cannot provide limiting or borderline cases of contextually constructed concepts, since for such concepts items fall within them not because of the kind of object they are, but because of the cultural context of that object. An account of minimal art based on the uncontextualised properties of physical objects cannot provide borderline cases for post-Danto theories of art. Similarly, borderline cases for contextually constructed concepts can be found, at least in theory, from any kind of object – its properties as a physical object will always be less relevant than its context of presentation. We are used to and easily accept there being no-art photographs and that some photographs qualify as artworks, but this position has the implication that there will (or could) be non-art instances of every current art form or medium: There can be a non-art instance or an 'art' instance of any thing in the world because art is not a materially grounded or restricted activity, it's a socially constructed practise.

To conclude I shall provide a brief overview of how this idea of contextual minimalism might work and provide some (non-exhaustive) examples of what may now be contextually minimal art and/or artefacts.

One strand of art making activity in relatively recent art history has been to investigate the possibilities of the minimal making and minimal content of the empirical art object – these are the works that were the subject of Wollheim's investigations. At *this* art historical moment, given the

ongoing centrality to understanding contemporary art of that investigation, it is almost inconceivable that a minimally made object with minimal content, but which, was rich in relational properties that located it centrally and specifically within an artistic practise could also be contextually minimal.<sup>10</sup> This is, however, an historically contingent fact and one, that is perhaps already a *fading* presumption since the presumptive artistic value of such experiments alone is already openly questioned within art. However, it demonstrates at least two things about contextual minimalism: Firstly, unsurprisingly, that it's not a property that can be grasped perceptually.<sup>11</sup> And Secondly, that the criteria for its application are historically sensitive and contingent, since they form in relation to the prevalent ways in which

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<sup>10</sup> As Glickman (1976) "Creativity in the Arts" in " Culture and Art eds. Aagaard-Mogensen, 131-146 p.146) states: "Just as some artworks of great technical skill embody the most banal conceptions and other brilliant conceptions, is there not a range of conceptual skill exhibited in readymades, object trouves, and works of conceptual art? Such art does exclude 'ability or cleverness of the hand' but it doesn't on that account preclude artistic creation"

<sup>11</sup> Goldman (1990)"Aesthetic Qualities and Aesthetic Values" Journal of Philosophy 87, 23-37: "Works may be aesthetically valuable solely because of the way in which they continue, modify, overthrow, or extend a particular tradition within a particular genre." Goldman holds that relations between artworks are of aesthetic relevance in regard to their evaluation, and although relations themselves are non-perceptual, the basis for the relations are the perceptual properties of the artworks and knowing these relations means we come to perceive these works differently. In (1993)"Art Historical Value" BJA, 33, 17-28 he also argues that individual artworks can possess positive value properties deriving from their art-historical importance. Stecker (1997, 263-264) agrees but cites these properties as functional.

art is made at any historical moment. Different kinds of artefacts and ways of making will therefore be contextually minimal at different times, but my contention is that there will always be artworks that are more contextually minimal than others and always be artefacts at the contextual borderline of art.

So, given this, what might be contextually minimal artworks now? Here are some suggestions: These might be (i) artefacts within folk craft or creative practices, (ii) illustrations, or representations where the *sole* criterion of value is faithfulness in depiction as a prescriptive constraint on value, or (iii) practices which no longer *presumptively* issue in artworks, or (iv) artefacts within practices that *presumptively* produce art forms but which are made in contexts of manufacture only minimally connected to the current concerns of artistic practice and/or (v) which consciously *refuse* the choices available to artists using those forms given that it's such choices which generate the ongoing artistic interest in those forms and its ongoing use by artistic practitioners.

These are each forms of productions that produce objects which have the form of art within practices which ape the persona of art, but which are made on the edges of, or outside, an artistic context – either social, historical, cultural or personal – they are artefacts made with the flimsiest atmosphere of theory or made in happy ignorance (or even knowing scorn) of the relevance to their value as potential artworks of their place within the ongoing history of art and how they contribute to the ongoing articulation of

the use of their materials and/or form.<sup>12</sup>

They force the question that lurked under the mismatch highlighted earlier – why are there these artefacts that are irrelevant to art, that are not problematic to a theory or definition of art? How can that be? And force the thought that given definition or theories of art that recognise an artefacts' context as essential to its status, that this kind of contextual minimalism is more fundamental to an artefacts status as an artwork than anything it lacks in how it was physically made or what kind of object it is, or its differentiation from other works or non-artworks or any aesthetic or material forms.

The real-world 'hard-cases' of contextually minimal art will come from those happily and self-righteously creating on their own terms, in ignorance, denial or defiance of why and how what they are doing might matter to art at this historical moment; or from those using art or practises that have been, or are, used to make artworks, for alternative ends or in different contexts. They may even run the danger of making things that are *not* art, since the context in which they make is *so* removed from the contexts and concerns in which art is made at that time. That being the case, we as philosophers are looking in the wrong place for our borderline cases of art. Instead of the experiments in artists co-ops, guerrilla practises and

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<sup>12</sup> Note that this characterisation is the opposite of 'outsider art'. The case made for any item of outsider art is that it is actually doing the sort of work that established insider art was doing at the time – materially, thematically, etc. – this is a claim that contextually minimal artefacts would explicitly not be able to have claimed of them (if they were outside art) or only be able to claim weakly (if they were contextually minimal artworks).

pop-up galleries (all of which are thoroughly and self-consciously contextually enmeshed within art) we should be focusing on the garden watercolourists, sunset snapshots, pet portraits and creative therapy courses or those for whom delight comes from whittling battleships from discarded driftwood for our borderline examples of art. These are all things that are omitted and ignored as irrelevant by those seeking to understand contemporary art and by contemporary critical discussion in art. In this world of so many choices about how to make art, and so many contexts in which you can paint or carve or draw, it is with the rejection of possibility and the absence of context, rather than its experimental contextual acceptance that the limits of art may be most fruitfully explored.

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# *Manipulating the Spectator's Moral Judgments: a Criticism of the Cognitivist Approach in Cinema*

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ABSTRACT. In cognitivist film studies, Carl Plantinga has put the focus on the particular relationship between moral judgments and nonmoral judgments regarding the reaction of the audience towards fictional characters in film. For Plantinga, "it is the capacity of filmic narratives to manipulate the spectator's judgments that provides films with much of their rhetorical power, because humans have a tendency to confuse moral and nonmoral judgments". One of the main examples in Plantinga's argument is the film *Legends of the Fall* where "The filmmakers employ varied strategies to effect this allegiance, providing us with many reasons to both like and sympathize with Tristan [the main character] despite his moral flaws". Nevertheless, Plantinga has to consider that, without detriment to many people Tristan becomes a figure to whom they lend their strong "allegiances" (using Murray Smith's term) and even a masculine ideal, "the film fails to win the allegiance for Tristan of some audience members".

My criticism starts at this point, on the problems that I find in Plantinga's use of "manipulation". What is the cognitive status of this kind of failure to win allegiance? Moreover, is that failure suspending or blocking the possibility of an aesthetic experience for the spectator of the film? Not necessarily, in my

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opinion. I am not completely sure that Plantinga would be able to take account of this failure and consciousness of manipulation in his cognitivist frame. In a positive vein, I will suggest a complementary (if not alternative) approach based on the concept of aspect seeing, blindness towards aspects, dimensional understanding in aesthetic disagreements, etc., which is also able to assume the 'thinking/feeling' pattern, in order to offer a more fine-tuning of the different cases that Plantinga considers under the label of "manipulation".

Cognitivism and analytic aesthetics have been mainly responsible for the attention that has turned towards the role of affect in film and literary studies in recent decades, as part of the general idea that bracketing cultural, psychological, and moral considerations is no longer an option in the study of works of art.

In film studies especially, cognitivist theorists (such as Murray Smith, James Wood, or Carl Plantinga) have investigated the engagement and responses of spectators to the characters in fiction. One of the main contributions of Plantinga's approach, in my opinion, is to reinforce the idea that there is no rational relationship between the spectator and the film (and with works of art in general) if we work regardless of the spectator's emotional reactions. In fact,

We make our way through the world by processing stimuli and responding to it in a constant interplay of thought and feeling. Affective charges direct us in one way or the other, draw our attention to one aspect of the world or another, attract us to something and repel us from something else. Thinking and affect are coupled, such that the appropriate way to consider most human thought is to build affect into

it. (Plantinga 2010, p. 48)

Carl Plantinga has put the focus on the particular relationship between moral judgments and nonmoral judgments regarding the reaction of the audience towards fictional characters in film. For Plantinga,

it is the capacity of filmic narratives to manipulate the spectator's judgments that provides films with much of their rhetorical power, because humans have a tendency to confuse moral and nonmoral judgments. (Plantinga 2010, p. 34-35)

In other words, spectator attitudes towards characters are not fully rooted in moral criteria, even if audiences tend to interpret their judgments as being supported by a legitimate moral force. In fact, "moral approval of a character might be considered to be something like an emotion or an intuition rather than a conscious and deliberate evaluation." (Plantinga 2010, p. 46) Thus, "manipulation" is a notion that Plantinga uses with a not necessarily pejorative (or negative) meaning.

One of the main examples in Plantinga's argument is the film *Legends of the Fall* (Edward Zwick, 1994). The story of the film is a conflict between two brothers, Tristan (played by Brad Pitt) and Alfred (played by Aidan Quinn). In that story, Tristan is connected with beauty, passion, vitality, health and courage (and also cruelty, violence and vice). Alfred, by contrast, is a more moral person, but lacks Tristan's vivacity and charm. In fact, Alfred says in a certain moment of the film: "I followed the rules, and

they loved you more". Indeed, Tristan is able to arouse the love of their relatives and close people, while Alfred cannot do that. A main narrative strategy of the film is simply based on projecting on the audience that inclination which Plantinga (after Smith) explains in terms of "allegiance". For Plantinga,

The filmmakers employ varied strategies to effect this allegiance, providing us with many reasons to both like and sympathize with Tristan despite his moral flaws. (Plantinga 2010, p. 50)

In this case, we cannot claim that allegiance is granted to Tristan by moral judgment alone, because

audiences [...] have been influenced by many nonmoral factors, from the filmmaker's techniques of storytelling and style, to cultural assumptions about heroic, 'natural' masculinity, to associations of Tristan's behaviour with nature and natural beauty. (Plantinga 2010, p. 51)

Nevertheless, Plantinga has to consider that, without detriment to many people Tristan becomes a figure to whom they lend their strong "allegiances" (using Murray Smith's term) and even a masculine ideal, although "the film fails to win the allegiance for Tristan of some audience members" (Plantinga 2010, p. 50), and Plantinga refers to some responses to the film on [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) as a proof of this.

My criticism starts at this point, on the problems that I find in

Plantinga's use of "manipulation" especially in those cases of failure to win allegiance. What is the cognitive status of this kind of failure to win allegiance? Is it the result of a purely rational decision? It seems that from the cognitivist approach the answer has to be 'no'. Plantinga seems to take care of this problem underlining that

It is not that clear thinking demands the bracketing of emotion, or that emotion is by definition irrational, but rather that the usual way that we interact with the world just is affective, and that what might be called 'thinking/feeling' can sometimes be irrational, sometimes not. (Plantinga 2010, p. 48)

Of course, following the cognitivist way of thinking, being inclined to consider Tristan's character as an unattractive character who is not morally justifiable because he is full of sexist prejudices cannot just be the product of a moral judgment, but of a mixture in a complex 'thinking/feeling' soup. Nevertheless, in this case, the 'thinking/feeling' package that elicits the failed allegiance for Tristan may be globally rational (not at all irrational), even though it integrates emotions.

Plantinga says that

The point of this brief exposition on the film is not to condemn its rhetorical use of sympathies and allegiance, although I find them troubling, but rather to explain their functioning. (Plantinga 2010, p. 50),

but I am not completely sure that Plantinga would be able to take account of this failure and consciousness of manipulation in his cognitivist framework. The problem of Plantinga's cognitivism is not that it would reject the explanation of this fact, but rather that his theoretical model does not place great importance on that fact and thus on the explanation of these kinds of facts. In other words, cognitivism does not go far enough when answering to the question: "Why can I not see *Legends of the Fall* as an epic film?" or "Why can I not see Tristan as an epic hero?"

I think that Plantinga's cognitivist approach set aside to explain the cases of failure to win allegiance is susceptible to criticism from three particular angles:

- 1) the moderate moralism underlying Plantinga's explanatory model; it especially concerns the balance between aesthetic values and other values (including moral values)
- 2) the atomistic conception of the "thinking / feeling soup" derived from the distinction between likings / sympathies / and allegiances
- 3) the effects of the manipulating device in the aesthetic experience of the spectator of the film

Close to my criticisms, I will propose an alternative (maybe complementary) approach based on a theory of aspects. The main idea of

that theory could be briefly summarised in the following way: understanding a work of art (or a part of that work) is being able to see it through the appropriate aspect. This paper is not the place to develop that theory, but rather to show its alternative power alongside to the particular elements of my criticism.

Now let us consider a more concrete example from *Legends of the Fall*. In the second homecoming, Tristan appears

riding home before the picturesque mountains of the Montana Rockies and feature rising swells of orchestral music featuring rich tones of brass, followed by tracking shots of joyous family members and friends rushing to meet him. (Plantinga 2010, p. 50)

Of course, the intended effect of narrative and filmic operations here is to excite the ‘thinking/feeling’ package of the audience in favour of a sympathetic attitude towards Tristan’s character in that sequence and ultimately in favour of the allegiance of the audience to Tristan’s character in the general frame of the film. Nevertheless, I myself, as well as many people, cannot see *Legends of the Fall* as a metaphoric tale on the *wild side* of the human being, or as a tribute to the old Indian beliefs valid for the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the exalted image of Tristan may fit in.

At this point, in order to explain that fitting in (at least in the cases of achieved allegiance), Plantinga deploys the distinction between *liking* / *sympathy* / and *allegiance*:

Liking and sympathy can be short term and rather shallow. Allegiance, however, is a deeper and more abiding psychological relationship with a character [...], it can overlook character flaws and unsympathetic actions, to a degree. [...] Spectator allegiance may not be generated solely by the spectator's moral judgment that the character in question is currently behaving well, but just as much by the estimation that he or she is 'fundamentally good' (whatever that may mean to the spectator) [...]. (Plantinga 2010, p. 42)

Briefly, after Plantinga,

Thus, we might say that allegiance is long term relatively speaking, and more centrally depends on the viewer's moral evaluation of a character, while sympathies may be a short term and more likely to be independent of moral evaluation. (Plantinga 2010, p. 41)

Plantinga's way to distinguish allegiances from sympathies and likings referring to their rigid dependence on moral evaluation is suspiciously coherent with his moderate moralism, as we will see in a moment. If we assume the thinking-feeling soup thesis of the cognitivist approach, then my general failure of allegiance to Tristan's character has to be made of thinking-feeling soup and the unsympathetic second homecoming also has to be made of a thinking-feeling soup. But Plantinga's model seems to tend to an atomistic structure in the interplay between the short term and the long term, on the one hand, and the interplay between aesthetic values and moral values, on the other, which makes it difficult to show how every phase is

something *thought* and *felt* at the same time, even in the cases of partially or totally failed intentions. It is not clear if I can conclude the immoral rating of Tristan's character *because* of the failure to feel sympathy for him, or if my progressive lack of sympathy for Tristan's actions and Tristan's look seals the possibility of feeling the final allegiance as nothing more than a verdict or a rational corollary.

Ultimately, it may be alleged that the concept of 'meta-emotions' proposed by Plantinga in other texts (Plantinga 2009, for example) could come to his aid: "The spectator may respond emotionally to his or her own prior responses, thoughts, or desires while viewing a film. Such emotions may range from shame and guilt to pride and a strong sense of self-satisfaction." (Plantinga 2009, p. 73). However, I think that that concept of "meta-emotions" would only be useful for a very restricted range of cases of "manipulation".

Returning to the *Legends of the Fall* example, it may be the case that I momentarily feel sympathy (or an euphoric state of mind) during the sequence of Tristan's second homecoming. Of course, I am not indifferent to the development of the story and the accompaniment of the characters (Tristan mainly) during the film, and maybe I am also sensitive to the young beauty of the character played by a handsome Brad Pitt, but in the end I feel deep shame remembering that feeling after viewing the bloody and cruel ending of the film. Maybe that particular case can be easily explained in terms of primary-emotions and meta-emotions. But let us now think of other possible cases: for example, my experience as a spectator of the film involves a continuous building up of evidences pointing to a ridiculous and

pretending effort to erect an epic hero for the audience. Then, the fanfare accompanying Tristan as he rides along with his long hair flowing in the wind sounds to me pompous and pretentious. And there is no room for a primary-emotions and meta-emotions structure in this case. Even Plantinga seems to slip a confessed argument in that way when he says:

This epic film [*Legends of the Fall*] is a good example of an adaptation that attempts to preserve too much of a novel. Too many melodramatic events in a relative brief presentation can seem faintly ridiculous. (Plantinga 2010, p. 49)

In fact, the way to define allegiances in that cognitivist model is *a priori* determined by Plantinga's moralist approach. Plantinga agrees with Smith's moralist thesis that "non-moral factors may modify and inflect but not *establish* or *transform* our allegiances" (Plantinga 2010, p. 41). Thus, the priority conceded to moral values is something generally established by the theory and at the same time it taints the moral component of the concept of allegiance. I think that this kind of approach distorts from the beginning the interplay between aesthetic properties and aesthetic values and other sorts of properties and values (including moral values). Instead I prefer the approach of moderate autonomism insofar as we have to evaluate case per case the range of an aesthetic feature in order to know if it can blind (or not) the moral values (or other kinds of values, such as the cognitive values, for example) of a work. And clearly that evaluation is not something of the nature of a *calculus* for the part of the spectator, but something *felt* (almost

partially). A critical judgement, on a case by case basis, is able to decide that balance, and to provide effective reasons in favour of it. There is not a definitive and general solution to be gained from the aesthetic theory or the philosophy of art concerning that problem.

Finally, Plantinga's cognitivism has perfectly assumed that those aesthetic values are in part dependent on the story telling procedures, but also on the cultural and personal influences. Concerning the first of these, that is, the story telling procedures (the close up, for example), am I able to become aware of the *manipulating device* and, at the same time, to participate to some degree in the effect of the *manipulating device*? Of course, to be aware of those telling procedures is not necessarily preventing us from having a genuinely aesthetic experience; in fact, that awareness may enrich (or not) an aesthetic experience when watching the film, and just in some extreme cases it can ruin the main intention of the film. The semiotic myth of the incompatibility of being aware of the illusion and participating in the illusion effect has been one of the most pervasive generalizations in the film theories since the sixties. But the aesthetic values are also dependent on cultural and personal influences. Some of them are part of our current baggage as spectators and can directly influence the moral judgments about the film, or they can modulate the specific role of aesthetic values. Evidently, Donald Trump would be more easily inclined to see Tristan as an epic hero than I would. Of course, I am able to understand the proposal by someone who asserts to see the film that way, and I can even understand how certain elements of the film would fit in that interpretation, and all that without being able to see the film that way automatically.

I cannot stop seeing *Legends of the Fall* as a very *dirigist* discourse based on a very vehement soundtrack, an overloaded story, an inane epistolary structure and the abuse of pretentious *atrezzo*, wardrobe and hairstyling at the service of the star-system. And so thus, I cannot stop seeing the film as morally flawed, insofar as it involves such values as cruelty, revenge or sexism (to the extent that the feminine roles are ballasted by their availability for men and a prior right to happiness always conceded to them by men).

In a positive vein, a complementary (if not completely alternative) approach based on the concept of aspect seeing, blindness towards aspects, dimensional understanding in aesthetic disagreements, etc. is able to assume the 'thinking/feeling' pattern, in order to offer a more fine-tuning of the different cases that Plantinga considers under the label of "manipulation". When I *see* (in an *aspectist* use of *seeing*) Tristan's attractive/moralism or Tristan's unattractive/immoralism in the film, the broad concept of *seeing* is able to assume the fact that it has to be something *experienced*, and experienced as a 'thinking/feeling' phenomenon, but at the same time, it opens up the possibility of different layers and dimensions of understanding (including pejorative and non-pejorative manipulations, and even the awareness of manipulation).

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***Hermeneutics and the Performative Turn;  
The Unfruitfulness of a Complementary  
Characterisation***

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ABSTRACT. After a long dominance of hermeneutics, in the last three decades aesthetics has been strongly influenced by the *performative turn*, which placed at the centre of theoretical analysis performative aspects of art, supposedly ignored by the hermeneutical approach. Accordingly, the *aesthetics of performativity* has been sometimes presented (Walburga Hülk) as *opposed* to hermeneutics. Not all the representatives of the performative turn adopted such extreme positions. However, even those authors (Erika Fischer-Lichte, Hans Ullrich Gumbrecht) who did not oppose hermeneutics to the performative turn, leaned towards characterising hermeneutics as an *artwork-centred, interpretation-focused and therefore performativity-incompetent* (unable to take performative aspects of art into account) aesthetic paradigm.

This paper intends to radically question such a characterisation by showing how Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his main work *Truth and Method*, displays a hermeneutical system which, in spite of putting the notions of *artwork* and *interpretation* at the core of the analysis, is able to take into account performative aspects of art. The main point of the analysis is not only the one of *rendering justice* to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, but also of offering a first basis for better identifying the differences between hermeneutics and the

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performative turn, differences which cannot be adequately individuated by characterising their reciprocal positions into a *complementary modus* (where performativity fills the space left empty by hermeneutics). In fact, performativity lies at the centre of Gadamer's hermeneutics (and most probably also of all hermeneutical approaches influenced by his work), articulated in a series of concepts which pledge for a *performativity-competence* of hermeneutics. The question is to understand *what happens* when such concepts are employed in an aesthetic context (the one at the core of performative turn) where the notion of artwork plays, in most cases, a marginal role (while performance acquires an autonomous value against it), and what is semantically entailed in this different use. The objective of this paper is, among others, to provide a first contribution for future answers to these questions.

## 1. Introduction

With this paper I intend to question a conceptual constellation, which has imposed itself together with the notion of *performativity*, involving the mutual positioning of *hermeneutics* and *performative turn*. The starting point is the following excerpt from Erika Fischer-Lichte, where the *performative turn* is implicitly characterised as a *post-hermeneutical* aesthetic paradigm:

Until the late 1980s, the notion of "culture as text" dominated cultural studies. Specific cultural phenomena as well as entire cultures were conceived as structured webs of signs waiting to be deciphered. Numerous attempts to describe and interpret culture were launched and designated as "readings." This notion specified the decoding and interpretation of texts as

the central activity of cultural studies. [...] In the 1990s, a shift in focus occurred, favoring the – hitherto largely ignored – performative traits of culture. Cultural studies increasingly employed this independent (practical) frame of reference for the analysis of existing or potential realities and acknowledged the specific “realness” of cultural activities and events, which lay beyond the grasp of traditional text models. This gave rise to the notion of “culture as performance”.<sup>2</sup>

In this quote, a *diachronic* relationship between hermeneutics and the performative turn is established, which seems in the first instance to be plausible. One could even characterise the development of humanities in the last half-century as a *sequence of three main dominant paradigms*, which respectively put at the centre of their discourses one linguistic dimension:

- (a) *Structuralism*, which has shaped the scene of cultural studies, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, attempts to understand cultural phenomena through the *syntactic* relationships between their various elements.
- (b) *Hermeneutics*, particularly predominant in the 1980s and 1990s, identifies the central element of cultural artifacts in the potentially infinitely *semantic* productivity of the text, activated by the various interpretations.

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<sup>2</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 26.

- (c) The *performative turn*, which has had a relevant impact within the humanities, particularly in the last twenty years, focuses on the *pragmatic* aspect of cultural objects, whereby what comes to the fore is not *what they tell us*, but *how they affect us*.

Regardless of the tenability of this schematisation, it seems to me that the characterising of the *performative turn* as a *post-hermeneutic paradigm* is defensible, as it has undoubtedly brought a new emphasis within a cultural panorama strongly influenced by hermeneutics. What is much more dubious, on the contrary, is the labelling of the performative turn as an *anti-hermeneutic gesture*, such as Walburga Hülk does in the following passage:

Even if the word performative may have [...] “no [...] great meaning”, it has nevertheless prompted a considerable 40-year word-history behind it, which today invites one to take a closer look at this word and to investigate the “paradigm performativity”, which has established itself together with it, in terms of its methodological sharpness and sensitivity. The fact that, as Austin says, the word “does not sound deep”, and thus suggests no “deeper meaning”, does not argue against this questioning; on the contrary, the lack of (meaningful) depth itself points to that fundamental, though *anti-hermeneutic, gesture*, which is exactly what must be studied.<sup>3</sup>

Such an anti-hermeneutic characterisation of the performative has not been

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<sup>3</sup> Hülk, 2004, p. 9, my translation.

always endorsed and has been substantially corrected recently, among others, by Fischer-Lichte (especially in Chapter 5 of *The Transformative Power of Performance*) as well as by other representatives of performative turn. However, while the compatibility between the performative turn and hermeneutics has in many cases been stated, in no case, at least to my knowledge, was it taken into account the possibility that some performative aspects of art could have already found a *theoretical place* within the hermeneutic paradigm.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that the diachronic posteriority of the performative turn towards such a dominant paradigm as hermeneutics has generated the need to refrain from looking for *traces of performativity* within the hermeneutic paradigm. For this reason, a *complementary constellation* was generated, almost as a *side effect*, as the following excerpt from Hans-Ullrich Gumbrecht clearly shows:

I deliberately do not designate the new questions, with which I am concerned, as “anti-hermeneutical”, because I do not expect (or not even wish) that they will ever completely remove and replace hermeneutics as the doctrine of identification of meaning. Rather, I believe I am observing the emergence of a scientific and cultural fascination *complementary* to interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> An important exception is constituted by Adriano Fabris. See Fabris, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 191, my translation, my italics. Another meaningful excerpt, taken from *Production of Presence*, which stresses the *emancipation effort from the dominance of hermeneutics*, is the following: ‘Now what would it mean – and what would it take – to put an end to the age of the sign? What would it mean – and what would it take – to end metaphysics? It can certainly not mean that we would abandon meaning,

In this excerpt, taken from a chapter whose title, *Das Nicht-Hermeneutische*, is more than explicit, Gumbrecht does not directly mention the *performative turn*. However, in that same chapter, as well as in the rest of the book, he regularly refers to notions (above all the notion of *presence*) which play a primary role in it. Besides, in Fischer Lichte's already quoted excerpt, it is stated that the performative turn took into account traits of art, which had been *hitherto* (including by hermeneutics) *ignored*. And (as will be shown in the third section) in many other passages of the same study she identifies several performative traits of art, which, according to her analysis, cannot find an adequate place within (or are incompatible with) hermeneutical aesthetics. Finally, in spite of sporadic exceptions, and as we will see in detail in the next pages: even when hermeneutics and the performative turn have not been opposed to each other, hermeneutics has been more or less explicitly characterised by eminent representatives of the performative turn as an *artwork-centred, interpretation-focused, and therefore performativity-incompetent* (unable to take performative aspects of art into account) aesthetic paradigm.

The main goal of this paper is to *radically question* such a characterisation of hermeneutics. More specifically, it intends to show how

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signification, and interpretation. [...] I think that [...] can only mean doing something in addition to interpretation – without, of course, abandoning interpretation as an elementary and probably inevitable intellectual practice. [...] The effort that it would take us to develop noninterpretative in addition to hermeneutic concepts would therefore be an effort directed against the consequences and taboos coming from the enthronement of interpretation as the *exclusive* core practice of humanities' (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 52).

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his main work *Truth and Method*, displays a hermeneutical system which, in spite of putting the notions of *artwork* and *interpretation* at the core of the analysis, is able to take into account performative aspects of art. This *radical questioning* will be articulated in two main *theoretical tasks*:

- (a) At a general level, I will argue that *Truth and Method* turns out to be an account of art and interpretation which, by adopting the notion of *play* for ontologically characterising artworks (including paintings and works of literature), consequently puts the *performance* at the centre of the analysis, as the moment in which the work of art comes into existence (it is *played*), inducing an essential *transformation* of the people who experience it. This first task will be accomplished in the *second section*.
  
- (b) At a more detailed level, I will on the one hand individuate *four pairs of concepts* at work in Erika Fischer-Lichte's seminal work *The Transformative Power of Performance*, through which the author articulates the (supposed) complementarity between the performative turn and hermeneutics, while on the other hand recover four central notions of *Truth and Method*, which should be considered as sorts of *hermeneutical (ante litteram) answers to the performative challenges* formulated by Fischer-Lichte, and which, in my view, pledge for the *performativity-competence* of Gadamer's hermeneutical approach. This second task will be accomplished in the *third section*.

In the *conclusion* I will give a brief evaluation of the results of the analysis, whose aim does not consist in denying or diminishing the break provoked by the performative turn in the aesthetic domain, but rather in positioning it in a *more fruitful* way in relation to hermeneutics.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. *Culture as Text?* A Criticism to a Usual Characterisation of Hermeneutics**

In order to start my argument, I will, artificially but (I hope) adequately, read the formula *culture as text*, through which the usual influence of hermeneutics in the aesthetic is often characterised (including in the excerpt quoted at the beginning) as the *result of an implicit inference*. This inference has its *first premise* in the classical, and more than legitimate, definition of hermeneutics as ‘the classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts.’<sup>7</sup> The *conclusion* drawn from this premise can be summarised (and, as always in such cases, simplified) in the following statement: ‘Whenever and wherever hermeneutics is adopted as a paradigm for a field of research, it will consider the corresponding research objects as texts to be understood.’

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper I intend to correct a usual interpretation of hermeneutics against the hermeneutic approach formulated in *Truth and Method*. I will consequently quote several passages (not only from Gadamer) in order to support my arguments.

<sup>7</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 157.

This inference seems in the first instance to be more than plausible. However, at a more attentive look, we have to recognise that the plausibility of the conclusion is grounded on the validity of a *second premise*, which is, so to say, *tacitly assumed*. This second premise can (again) be summarised in the following statement: ‘The exposure to fields which are *not* (Painting) or *not only* (Theatre, Music) constituted by texts does not provoke any significant transformation of hermeneutics.’ In other (metaphorical) words, the implicit assumption of the second premise is the *hermeneutical colonisation of humanities*, where hermeneutics is seen as a sort of *invader*, shaping all the fields which it occupies into the form of the element from which it started its *aggressive campaign*, namely the textual one. The main aim of this second section consists *in the rejection, at least in the case of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, of this inference by the falsification of the second premise*.

In fact, the following excerpt of Gadamer’s seems to bluntly confirm the characterisation of hermeneutic aesthetics that I intend to criticise:

In fact, hermeneutics would then have to be understood in so comprehensive a sense as to embrace the whole sphere of art and its complex of questions. Every work of art, not only literature, must be understood like any other text that requires understanding, and this kind of understanding has to be acquired. That gives hermeneutical consciousness a comprehensiveness that surpasses even that of

aesthetic consciousness. *Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics.*<sup>8</sup>

*So far so good:* it seems that the formula *culture as text*, in spite of the simplification which can be ascribed to every formula, is also valid in the case of Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, it would be enough to read the lines immediately following the previous excerpt in order to realise that things are quite different:

Conversely, hermeneutics must be so determined as a whole that it does justice to the experience of art. Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning of all statements—those of art and all other kinds of tradition—is formed and actualized.<sup>9</sup>

Here Gadamer's methodological turn is synthesised in two lines. In another passage, from the introduction, he is more detailed:

The following investigation starts with a critique of aesthetic consciousness in order to defend the experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art against the aesthetic theory that lets itself be restricted to a scientific conception of truth. But the book does not rest content with justifying the truth of art; instead, it tries to develop from this starting point a conception of knowledge and of truth that

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<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 157.

corresponds to the whole of our hermeneutic experience. Just as in the experience of art we are concerned with truths that go essentially beyond the range of methodical knowledge, so the same thing is true of the whole of the human science.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, Gadamer in this last excerpt not only explicitly states how hermeneutics should be shaped on the ‘experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art’, but also implicitly explains why he devoted the whole first section (out of three) of his main work, which intends to formulate a new hermeneutical theory, to aesthetics. Were Gadamer’s intent simply to apply hermeneutics to aesthetics, then it would make no sense to start with a first section devoted to aesthetics, and only in the second section to focus on hermeneutics. This order of exposition is rather justified by Gadamer’s whole approach, who intends to shape hermeneutics on our experience of art. Our *first interpretive thesis* sounds therefore as following: In Gadamer's *Truth and Method* the *colonising hermeneutics*, in its exposition to domains related to non-strictly textual cultural artifacts, and in order *to do justice to the experience of art*, undergoes an *essential transformation*. *It is shaped by the domains it intended (supposedly) to subsume*. The rest of this section will try to establish whether or not Gadamer *walks the talk*: is his hermeneutics really shaped on the experience of truth we make in the domain of art?

I will articulate my (positive) answer to the above question through an analysis of the whole argument of the second part of the first section of

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<sup>10</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. xxii.

*Truth and Method*, whose title, *The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutic Significance*, programmatically expresses Gadamer's ambition. We can structure Gadamer's argument into four main steps, which subsequently will be individually analysed:

- (a) 'Play' as a key notion for the characterisation of the work of art.
- (b) Application to Visual Arts.
- (c) Application to Literature.
- (d) Application to the totality of Humanities.

Let's start with the first step, which is the most important one and which therefore will be analysed in more detail, as the adoption of the notion of 'play' has a series of consequences, which are particularly relevant in this context. The first one is that the work of art is no longer characterised as an object to be *understood* or *contemplated* by a more or less *disinterested* subject, but rather an *event* (nowadays we could say a *happening*) to which all the involved subjects *take part*. In this taking part they undergo an essential *transformation*, through which the artwork acquires a truly *performative* character (while the *transformative power of performance*, which is also the very title of the English version of Fischer-Lichte's main work, is exactly one of the performative traits which are supposed to be ignored by hermeneutic accounts of art):

The work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The “subject” of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant. For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. [...] The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, the notion of play entails a series of related consequences, all relevant in order to evaluate the *performativity-competence* of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. First of all, the audience is seen not as something which *contemplates* the (already accomplished) work of art (from a supposedly neutral position, allowing its disinterested-aesthetic attitude), but rather as its *accomplishment*, as the element which *completes* it. With this point Gadamer articulates the commonsensical idea that, to take an extreme case, a book written and put away in a drawer without being read by anyone, is in a certain sense an *unfinished* artwork:

Thus it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is.

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<sup>11</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 103.

This point shows the importance of defining play as a process that takes place “in between.” We have seen that play does not have its being in the player's consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 109. The adoption of the expression ‘in between’, heavily employed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her analysis of the aesthetics of performativity, is also very indicative in this context. Besides, this same idea is also at work in the characterisation of *conversation*, one of the key notions of Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach (which is often labelled as *dialogical hermeneutics*), which is described as a process in which *we are involved*, and which is therefore not unilaterally controlled by any of the participants: ‘We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. [...] Everything we have said characterizing the situation of two people coming to an understanding in conversation has a genuine application to hermeneutics, which is concerned with *understanding texts*. [...] Like conversation, interpretation is a circle closed by the dialectic of question and answer. It is a genuine historical life compoment achieved through the medium of language, and we can call it a conversation with respect to the interpretation of texts as well’ (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 385, 387,391). In this excerpt another aspect is also stressed which is supposedly ascribed to the aesthetic of the performative turn, and formulated in the notion of *situation*, namely the *unpredictability of the performance*. This point will be separately treated in the third section.

Secondly, the *performance is seen as the central moment of the existence of the work of art*: in this respect, as we shall see, both interpretation and reception of works of art are regarded as *events*. And in fact, what Gadamer is looking for in the experience of art, which should later be applied to the whole world of humanities in order to elaborate a new hermeneutical approach, is exactly this centrality of performance, this *contingent situation*, in which both players and spectators are *exposed*. As stated in the previous excerpt, works of art (and more generally cultural artifacts) *happen in-between*. As a consequence, performance arts (music, theatre, et cetera) are taken as exemplary for the characterisation of *all* arts and humanities more generally:

In being played the play speaks to the spectator through its presentation; and it does so in such a way that, despite the distance between it and himself, the spectator still belongs to play. This is seen most clearly in one type of representation, a religious rite. Here the relation to the community is obvious. [...] The same is true for drama generally, even considered as literature. The performance of a play, like that of a ritual, cannot simply be detached from the play itself, as if it were something that is not part of its essential being, but is as subjective and fluid as the aesthetic experiences in which it is experienced. Rather, it is in the performance and only in it—as we see most clearly in the case of music—that we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in the religious rite. Here it becomes clear why starting from the concept of play is methodologically advantageous. The work of art cannot simply be isolated from the

“contingency” of the chance conditions in which it appears, and where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself. A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resonate.<sup>13</sup>

We are now in the position of drawing some *first provisional conclusions* relating to the adoption of the notion of play for the ontological characterisation of works of art:

(a) The notion of *play* is directed against a Cartesian characterisation of the subject-world relation<sup>14</sup>, which is typically (and, in part, correctly) attributed to hermeneutics, where the subject is *observer* and *interpreter* of the world standing *in front* of him (like a text to be deciphered). Gumbrecht speaks of *a horizontal axis of the hermeneutic field*, where the subject casts himself in an eccentric position against the world, almost at its limits.<sup>15</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> Anti-Cartesianism evidently plays a relevant role in the whole project of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, including the criticism of Dilthey. It is not only the notion of *method* which is targeted, but also, and more fundamentally, the configuration subject-object which is presupposed by such notion, a configuration in which the subject is, so to say, the *protected territory from which the reality can be methodically accessed*, without being exposed to it. Gadamer’s subject is on the contrary a subject *exposed to the contingency*, and therefore a *historical* one. In this respect, the heritage of Heidegger is more than evident.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Very schematically, we may then describe this new, early modern view in which Western culture begins, over several centuries, to redefine the relation between humankind

Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics however, the spectator is not the *limit* of the artwork, but rather *the element of it which achieves its realisation*.

(b) The notion of play allows Gadamer to underline the transformative power of art and the event-character of art experience, which are typically regarded as aspects of art not considered by hermeneutics. This performative aspect of art is maintained all along his hermeneutical analysis, informing also the characterisation of interpretation as *conversation*, which is seen as a process where at the end none of the parts remains unchanged.<sup>16</sup>

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and the world as the intersection of two axes. There is a horizontal axis that opposes the subject as an eccentric, disembodied observer and the world as an assembly of purely material objects, including the human body. The vertical axis stands for the act of world-interpretation through which the subject penetrates the surface of the world in order to extract knowledge and truth as its underlying meanings. I propose to call this worldview “the hermeneutic field”. Of course, I know that it was only centuries later that “Hermeneutics” became the name of the philosophical subfield that concentrates on the techniques and the conditions of interpretation. But long before the emergence of this academic subdiscipline, “interpretation” (and with it “expression”) had become the predominant – and soon afterwards, the exclusive – paradigm that Western culture made available for those who wanted to think the relationship of humans to their world’ (Gumbrecht, 2004, pp. 27-28).

<sup>16</sup> The last paragraph of the second section of *Truth and Method* is in this respect very significant, as it stresses both the *transformative power of conversation* and its happening *in between*: ‘Our first point is that the language in which something comes to speak is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors. Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language. Something is placed in the centre, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another. [...] To reach an

(c) The fact of putting at the centre of his analysis the notion of artwork (which in the case of the performative turn is not the case) does not refrain Gadamer from considering the performance as the very key for characterising the mode of existence of art. Performing arts are consequently seen as paradigmatic arts, which eminently exemplify an aspect of it pertaining to *all* arts, including the ones, like painting and literature, which typically are realised in physical artifacts.

This last point is what will be briefly investigated in the last part of this section. We want to see how Gadamer applies his ontological characterisation of art, modelled on the example of performing arts, to arts like painting and literature (which are supposed to be constituted by *objects, not by performances*), in order at the end to characterise thereby the whole domain of humanities.

In relation to visual arts, the intent of Gadamer is clearly expressed in the following words: ‘The methodological priority we have accorded the performing arts, will be legitimated if the insight that we have gained from them proves to be true of the plastic arts as well,’<sup>17</sup> Initially, however, Gadamer seems to suggest that the very notion of performance *does not* apply to this domain, as ‘in the plastic arts it first seems as if the work has

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understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were’ (Gadamer, 2004, p. 371). See also the footnote 12 for the further characterisation of conversation as unpredictable event.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 133.

such a clear identity that there is no variability of presentation. What varies does not seem to belong to the side of the work itself and so seems to be subjective.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, it seems that such objectivity is what allows pictures to be detached from their original context, which is what typically happens in the institution of museums. In a second moment, however, Gadamer develops the thesis that such a supposed context-independent-identity is not the *presupposition*, but rather the *result* of the very institution of museum, which is in fact the institutionalisation of a distorted way to experience works of art, by considering them as something to be *contemplated* by a subject which regards them, to use Nagel's well-known formula, *from nowhere*. Malraux's metaphor of the *imaginary museum*, in this respect, can be seen as the aesthetic counterpart of the disinterested and ahistorical look which should characterise scientific investigation, and which has been adopted by what Gadamer calls the *aesthetic consciousness*:

It is obviously no coincidence that aesthetic consciousness, which develops the concept of art and the artistic as a way of understanding traditional structures and so performs aesthetic differentiation, is simultaneous with the creation of museum collections that gather together everything we look at in this way. Thus *we make every work of art, as it were, into a picture*. By detaching all art from its connections with life and the particular conditions of our approach to it, we frame it like a picture and hang it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 131, my italics.

With this excerpt Gadamer suggests that his shaping of the whole domain of art on the model of performing arts is not to be understood as a *revolution*, but rather as a *restoration* of a way of experiencing art which nowadays has been almost forgotten, due to the (in Gadamer's view) distorted account of art which dominated aesthetics in the last two centuries. While works of art are nowadays considered objects for a subject, at one's disposal (in a museum, in a theatre, in a concert hall) in order to be contemplated, the notion of play, as already stressed, radically breaks with this idea. Works of art *are not* at our disposal. On the contrary, by taking part in them (by taking part in their performance) *we put ourselves at their disposal*, in a certain sense. In this taking part we expose ourselves to it, rather than enclosing ourselves in our interiority by their contemplation. It is in this exposition that we experience all works of art *as performances*, including the ones which are typically thought of as objects. In the specific case of painting, the performance-character of the picture is, among others, specified by differentiating the notion of *image* from the notion of *copy*, and by stressing how the image does not *reproduce*, but rather *presents* the original, producing what Gadamer defines as *increase in being (Zuwachs an Sein)*:

The relation of the picture to the original is basically quite different than in the case of a copy. *It is no longer a one-sided relationship.* That the picture has its own reality means the reverse for what is pictured, namely that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there. It does not follow that it is dependent on this

particular presentation in order to appear. It can also present itself as what it is in other ways. But if it presents itself in this way, this is no longer any incidental event but belongs to its own being. Every such presentation is an ontological event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, an *increase in being*.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, one can object that Gadamer's approach is untenable, that finally an image cannot present itself, as, strictly speaking, it cannot perform anything. Paintings, and more generally, images, are *neither performers nor performances, they are simply objects*. It is a plausible argument, but it is one that would reinforce my point. Because the conclusion to be inferred by accepting such an objection should be the following: *Gadamer's hermeneutical approach is so much 'performance centred' to have the ambition of also considering as performances works of art which are physical artifacts, and which more plausibly should be considered as objects, as things*.

These considerations remain valid when we analyse what Gadamer

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<sup>20</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 135. It has to be stressed that Gadamer's approach to image found an eminent representative in Gottfried Boehm, who fruitfully and originally developed Gadamer's insights in his works devoted to visual arts (see Boehm, 1978 and 2007). The fact that Boehm explicitly refers to Gadamer, with whom he studied and closely collaborated, demonstrates that Gadamer should not be seen as a mere *exception*, as he created a (sort of) hermeneutical school, where the notion of work of art gained performative elements. See also in the next footnote our considerations about Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser in the domain of literature.

defines as *the borderline position of literature*, whose performance-character is stressed, also in this case, against the commonsensical idea that a work of literature consists in the written text. Gadamer's point is that text, in a certain sense, *becomes a text only when it is read*, and that such a reading constitutes a modality of reproduction, through which the work of art, again, presents itself (in the language of performative turn we can say: *stages itself*). The fact that in this case, the accent is cast on the reader much more than on the work of art itself, and so on its reception, is not so relevant for the whole argument. If the work of art *happens in-between*, the question of whether the *first move* is performed on the side of the production or the reception of it becomes irrelevant. In both cases, something happens between art and public, and in fact *this happening is the accomplished work of art*:

Reading with understanding is always a kind of reproduction, performance, and interpretation. Emphasis, rhythmic ordering, and the like are part of wholly silent reading too. Meaning and the understanding of it are so closely connected with the corporeality of language that understanding always involves an inner speaking as well. If so, then it is just as true that literature—say in its proper art form, the novel—has its original existence in being read, as that the epic has it in being declaimed by the rhapsodist or the picture in being looked at by the spectator. Thus the reading of a book would still remain an event in which the content conies to presentation. [...] Literary art can be understood only from the ontology of the work of art, and not from the aesthetic experiences that occur in the course of

the reading. Like a public reading or performance, being read belongs to literature by its nature. They are stages of what is generally called “reproduction” but which in fact is the original mode of being of all performing arts, and that mode of being has proved exemplary for defining the mode of being of all art.<sup>21</sup>

The last, quite straightforward step of Gadamer’s *four-stage-argument*, as sketched before, consists in the application of the above quoted considerations about literature to the totality of textual domain: in fact those considerations do not primarily concern the supposed artistic value of literature, but rather the fact that any textual artifact, in order to be understood, has to be read, and this reading, in Wolfgang Iser’s words, is to be characterised as an *act*, through which the meaning of the text is actualised every time, and in different modalities, according to the different

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<sup>21</sup> Gadamer, 2004, pp.153-154. Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, among others, have been developing this account of literature, where the active role of reception in the very constitution of a work of art is stressed, even if in different ways and sometimes in explicit deviation from Gadamer (see Jauss, 1970 and 1991 and Iser, 1984). Again: this is to confirm that the analysis carried out in this essay, even if centred on *Truth and Method*, should not be understood as the recognition of Gadamer as an exception in the world of hermeneutics, but rather as the identification of a performance-centred current in hermeneutics, possibly nowadays no longer dominant, but that gave an enormous imprint to hermeneutics for several decades, and which therefore cannot be underestimated. As we will see, while Erika Fischer-Lichte is well aware of all this, she does not see in this hermeneutical approach something compatible with the analyses developed within the performative turn.

contexts of reception. It is in this very respect that the experience of art becomes exemplary for the whole hermeneutical task, including its central one, i.e., the understanding of a text. The meaning of a textual artifact is not (as the performative turn has often claimed, in relation to the hermeneutical approach to culture) a *thing to be discovered*<sup>22</sup>, but rather a *disposition to be actualised* in the performances of the reader:

Just as we were able to show that the being of the work of art is play and that it must be perceived by the spectator in order to be actualized (vollendet), so also it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning. We must ask whether what we found to be true of texts as a whole, including those that are not works of art. We saw that the work of art is actualized only when it is “presented,” and we were drawn to the conclusion that all literary works of art are actualized only when they are read. Is this true also of the understanding of any text? Is the meaning of all texts actualized only when they are understood? In other words, does being understood belong (gehört) to the meaning of a text just as being heard (Zu-Gehor-Bringen) belongs to the meaning of music? Can we still talk of understanding if we are as free with the meaning of the text as the performing artist with his score?<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In Gumbrecht’s characterisation of the *hermeneutic field*, the notion of interpretation as extraction of a hidden, already constituted meaning, constitutes its *vertical axis*. See footnote 15.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, 2004, pp. 156-157.

The (positive) answer to the questions cast in the last lines of this excerpt will be the object of the rest of Gadamer's work and will constitute the nerve of his hermeneutical approach. We don't have to follow it in detail: however, in the next section, we will highlight some key concepts of Gadamer's hermeneutics which will show how its performative approach is at work not only within the domain of philosophy of art. Before passing to it, however, I would like to conclude this section with the following consideration: If the self-understanding of the many representatives of the performative turn, as endorsing an approach to art *complementary* to the hermeneutical one, is based on the assumption that hermeneutics had the tendency to consider art, and more generally culture, as a *text to be deciphered*, then we have to conclude that such self-understanding is based (at least in Gadamer's case) on a false assumption. The analyses carried out until now should be sufficient to show that the very opposite is true: *Gadamer's main point does not consist in arguing that understanding of texts is paradigmatic for the experience of art, but conversely, that the experience of art, and more specifically of performing arts, is paradigmatic for the understanding of all artworks, including texts.* If the formula *culture as text* can *probably* still be maintained for describing Gadamer's main work, it should *surely* be completed by the formula *text as performance*.

### **3. The Fourfold Opposition Between Hermeneutics and Performative Turn and the *Performativity-Competence* of Gadamer's Hermeneutics**

In the last section I tried to show how Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics, in spite of being constructed around the notion of *artwork*, still puts performance at the centre of its interest, mainly by characterising works of art not as *things*, but as *plays*. This already entails a series of consequences which highlight, in my view, what I labelled in this essay as the *performativity-competence* of Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, we have to say that *performance* and *performativity* are not synonyms, in spite of being deeply interrelated. So, showing the centrality of performance in Gadamer's hermeneutics does not yet constitute, *per se*, a satisfactory argument pledging for its capability of taking into account performative aspects of art (even if it already offers some important hints). In order to provide a more satisfactory and articulated argument, in this section I would like, as it were, to *confront* some important notions of *Truth and Method* with some passages from the most detailed and articulated analysis of the aesthetics of performativity (at least to my knowledge), namely Erika Fischer Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*<sup>24</sup>, in order to

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<sup>24</sup> The original German title of this work, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, better expresses its ambition of formulating an *aesthetic theory of the performative turn*. I have chosen this text within the secondary literature exactly for its capacity of articulating the aesthetic insights, individually formulated within the framework of the performative turn, in

show how Gadamer's hermeneutics offers sorts of *ante-litteram-answers* to some challenging issues implicitly cast by Fischer-Lichte's seminal work. This duty will be split into two parallel tasks: a) firstly, I will analyse four *oppositional pairs of concepts* which emerge from Fischer-Lichte's analysis of the aesthetic of performativity, and in which one can, so to say, *articulate* the positioning of the performative turn and hermeneutics as two opposed aesthetic paradigms. This analysis does not have the ambition of being exhaustive, though it provides, in my view, an *effective guide for the reciprocal characterisation of these two aesthetic paradigms* which has been, implicitly or explicitly, broadly adopted in the secondary literature; b) secondly, and in parallel to the first task, I will try to show how Gadamer's hermeneutics furnishes, for each of these oppositions, a concept or a notion which matches the performative side of the pair, without having to be immediately identified with it.

By analysing some passages of Fischer-Lichte's text it is possible to articulate the opposition between hermeneutics and performative turn in four pairs of concepts, in which the different aesthetic approaches of these two paradigms are, as it were, *condensed*. The *first pair* I intend to take into consideration is the one between *work* and *event*, as explicitly formulated in the following excerpt relating to Max Herrmann's notion of *performance*, which is considered as one key forestalling of the performative turn:

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a comprehensive theory and, more specifically, in a series of concepts which can be, and in some cases have explicitly been seen as *performative counterparts* of hermeneutical notions.

By defining performance as “festival” and “play,” based on a fleeting and dynamic process and not an artifact, Herrmann excluded the notion of a “work of art” from performance. If he spoke of accomplished acting as the “true” and “purest work of art that theatre is capable of producing,” this is part of his argument to recognize theatre as an independent art form. The prevalent notion of art in his time necessitated such a reference to a fixed work of art. From today’s vantage point, however, Herrmann’s definition of “performance” circumvents the concept of a work of art. The performance is regarded as art not because it enjoys the status of an artwork but because it takes place as an event. [...] At the heart of Herrmann’s notion of performance lies the shift from theatre as a work of art to theatre as an event. Hermeneutic aesthetics as well as the heuristic distinction between the aesthetics of production, work, and reception are incompatible with his understanding of performance. The specific *aesthetics* of performance lies in its very nature as an event.<sup>25</sup>

In the last part of the quoted excerpt, what Fischer-Lichte implicitly states is that hermeneutics, as a work-centred aesthetic paradigm, cannot take into account the *event-dimension* of performance, which is on the contrary the

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<sup>25</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 35-36. As stressed in the following lines of the main text, it is curious to notice how the two key notions of *festival* and *play*, which characterise Herrmann’s notion of performance, are also central in all of Gadamer’s aesthetic. It is not, however, the mere terminological dimension which is at stake here: it is content-wise that we intend to show how Gadamer’s hermeneutics already characterise aspects of the artistic domain along lines which prefigure the analyses conducted in the performative turn, without having necessarily to be identified with them.

core interest of the performative turn. The implicit assumption is that in such a paradigm the performance is always appreciated in relation to the work it refers to (as an *instance of the work*), rather than in its very event-character. In fact, Gadamer's hermeneutics not only, as already seen, lays at the centre of its attention the very notion of performance, but also devotes an entire section of *Truth and Method* (as well as the very important essay *The Relevance of the Beautiful*) to the notions of *Play* and *Festival*, which are evidently also central in Hermann's account of performance. However, in this section I want to focus on a specific notion which shows how Gadamer's hermeneutics, in spite of being undoubtedly work-centred, is characterised by an idea of performance as something which justifies itself not exclusively in relation to the work it is performing, but to the moment and the situation in which the performance takes place. This notion is the hermeneutic technical term of *application*, according to which a text acquires different meanings corresponding to the different situations in which it is performed:

In both legal and theological hermeneutics there is an essential tension between the fixed text—the law or the gospel—on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching. [...] This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood

every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way.  
[...]. *Understanding proves to be an event.*<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that, in this excerpt, what is meant with application is not the implementation of a rule, as a procedure to be mechanically utilised in the different contexts, but rather the opposite. It is about the capacity of the performer and/or interpreter to actualise the aspects of a specific text which are responding to a specific situation. In fact, performer and interpreter are also *part of this situation*, and for this very reason *understanding proves to be an event* rather than the *deciphering of a code*. This does not make the hermeneutic notion of *application* something which can be immediately and uncritically transposed within the context of the performative turn: it seems to me that here at work also is the notion of *judgment (Urteilkraft)*, analysed in the first part of *Truth and Method* as capacity of understanding and decision in absence of unambiguous criteria, and according to the specific situation. All this hermeneutical aspect is absent in the notion of performance, which the performative turn intends to propose. But it would be in our view false to assume that Gadamer's hermeneutics is not concerned with the event-character of performance: on the contrary, it explicitly characterises the very notion of understanding as performance and therefore as event, as something that *happens*.

The second opposition is the one between *object* and *situation*. Let's read Fischer-Lichte:

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<sup>26</sup> Gadamer, 2004, pp. 307-308.

For hermeneutic and for semiotic aesthetics, a clear distinction between subject and object is fundamental. The artist, subject 1, creates a distinct, fixed, and transferable artifact that exists independently of its creator. This condition allows the beholder, subject 2, to make it the object of their perception and interpretation. The fixed and transferable artifact, i.e. the nature of the work of art as an object, ensures that the beholder can examine it repeatedly, continuously discover new structural elements, and attribute different meanings to it. This possibility was not offered in Abramovic's performance. The artist did not produce an artifact but worked on and changed her own body before the eyes of the audience. Instead of a work of art that existed independently of her and the recipients, she created an event that involved everyone present. The spectators, too, were not presented with a distinct object to perceive and interpret; rather, they were all involved in a common situation of here and now, transforming everyone present into co-subjects.<sup>27</sup>

In this case too, the implicit assumption is that hermeneutics, as a work-centred paradigm, cannot adequately consider the situationally-determined position of the spectator. The idea behind this assumption, and explicitly formulated in the above excerpt, is that hermeneutics thinks of cultural products as *things* that just stand *in front of the spectators* and independently of them, in order to be viewed and/or interpreted. Also in this case, the very notion of *play* and the connected characterisation of spectator as *part* of it,

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<sup>27</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 163.

and not as something staying *in front of the artwork, is already indicative of how Gadamer's hermeneutics* is generally not compatible with such a Cartesian constellation, as formulated in the first part of the passage above. In fact, such a Cartesian configuration of the relation between subject and object (Gumbrecht's *horizontal axis of the hermeneutic field*) is radically criticised by Gadamer as the configuration at the basis both of the aesthetic consciousness, which, as we saw in the previous section, *wants to make out of every artwork a picture to hang on a wall*, and the historical consciousness, which in a certain sense *aestheticised the history*, by simply framing the historical pictures hanging on the wall of the *imaginary museum of historical artifacts* in their corresponding historical contexts.<sup>28</sup> It is not by chance that Gadamer talks of an *unresolved Cartesianism* of Dilthey.

However, as in the previous case, I intend to show how Gadamer formulates in his hermeneutics a specific notion that somehow *falsifies in advance* the assumption that hermeneutics cannot envisage the role of the spectator in terms of participation and involvement in a situation. This notion is specifically the one of *hermeneutical situation*, which characterises

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<sup>28</sup> This excerpt is very significant in this respect: 'The implicit presupposition of historical method, then, is that the permanent significance of something can first be known objectively only when it belongs to a closed context—in other words, when it is dead enough to have only historical interest. Only then does it seem possible to exclude the subjective involvement of the observer' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 297). All this almost literally corresponds to the so-called *horizontal axis* of the hermeneutic field, as characterised by Gumbrecht in footnote 15. But this is exactly what Gadamer, throughout all his work, heavily criticises.

the *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*:

Consciousness of being affected by history (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical *situation*. To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished.<sup>29</sup>

We see how the whole subject-object schema utilised by Fischer-Lichte, and modelled on the Cartesian metaphysics cannot work in Gadamer's hermeneutics. The idea that Gadamer wants to plead for, in contrast with Dilthey's hermeneutics (at least according to his reading of it), is the impossibility of treating history as an *object of scientific investigation*, even if a scientific investigation regulated by an autonomous method, not modelled by the one valid in the natural sciences (if there is a single one). History cannot become the *object* of investigation, because we are part of it, we *participate* in it. So, when confronted with historical artifacts (included artistic ones), we cannot assume the position of a neutral observer, as our position will always and necessarily be determined by the specific historical (hermeneutical) situation in which we are situated.

The criticism of Dilthey's hermeneutics also constitutes a point for which Gadamer furnishes an answer to the third opposition formulated by

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<sup>29</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 301.

Fischer-Lichte, namely the one between *performativity* and *expressivity*:

Performative acts (as bodily acts) are “non-referential” because they do not refer to pre-existing conditions, such as an inner essence, substance, or being supposedly expressed in these acts; no fixed, stable identity exists that they could express. Expressivity thus stands in an oppositional relation to performativity.<sup>30</sup>

Even if in this case hermeneutics is not explicitly involved, the notion of expression immediately refers not only to Dilthey’s hermeneutics, but to the very (supposedly) hermeneutical notion of interpretation, as applied also to the aesthetic domain, according to which the aesthetic experience is mainly a question of *deciphering* something in order to reconstruct the original meaning *expressed* in it. According to such a vision, the hermeneutic approach to aesthetics should not be allowed to produce meaning, but only to reproduce a second time something which was originally in the mind of the author and consequently *expressed* in the text. This operation corresponds to the *vertical axis* of Gumbrecht’s characterisation of the hermeneutic field (even if this characterisation is not limited to the domain of artworks).<sup>31</sup> All this, however, could *possibly* be valid for Dilthey’s hermeneutics, but *certainly not* for Gadamer’s, which explicitly considers the interpretative act as a productive one, and alongside criticises the Diltheyan idea of cultural artifact as an expression of life:

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<sup>30</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 15.

Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. [...] Such a conception of understanding breaks right through the circle drawn by romantic hermeneutics. Since we are now concerned not with individuality and what it thinks but with the truth of what is said, a text is not understood as a mere expression of life but is taken seriously in its claim to truth.<sup>32</sup>

The last, possibly most important opposition, is the one between *understanding* and *experience*, where Fischer-Lichte explicitly states the incompatibility between the idea of the *transformative power of performance*, as characterised in the performative turn, and the central notion of hermeneutics, namely *understanding*:

Such a performance eludes the scope of traditional aesthetic theories. It vehemently resists the demands of hermeneutic aesthetics, which aims at understanding the work of art. In this case, understanding the artist's actions was less important than the experiences that she had while carrying them out and that were generated in the audience. In short, the transformation of the performance's participants was pivotal.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gadamer, 2004, p. 296.

<sup>33</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 16.

We saw already in the second section how the very notion of *play* already involved the idea of the transformation of the people who take part in it, including the spectators. However, also in this case, Gadamer formulated in the section of his work specifically devoted to hermeneutics a notion of experience, explicitly based on Hegel's one, and which remains valid for all hermeneutical situations (including the aesthetic ones), whose main feature consists exactly in the transformative power of it:

We use the word "experience" in two different senses: the experiences that conform to our expectation and confirm it and the new experiences that occur to us. This latter—"experience" in the genuine sense—is always negative. If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge. [...] We saw that one's experience changes one's whole knowledge. Strictly speaking, we cannot have the same experience twice.<sup>34</sup>

This last passage explicitly formulates a concept implicitly assumed in several sections of the first part of *Truth and Method* (for example the section devoted to Greek tragedy), where it was described how the very essence of the aesthetic experience is the *experience of a truth*, as one which changes, as it were, our *way of seeing things* (and this is the essence of the

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<sup>34</sup> Gadamer, 2004, pp. 347-348.

Hegelian notion of experience as formulated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Also in this case, we don't want simply to identify this phenomenon with the transformative processes analysed (particularly in the fifth chapter of her book) by Fischer-Lichte, which has clearly a specific character, evidently much more tightly aligned to corporeal aspects than to cognitive ones. It is clear that the transformation provoked by the typical performance envisaged in the performative turn is not a simple transformation of our *Weltanschauung*. It is more *and* less than that. But such differences, and this is the main point of this paper, are not, in my view, best described in terms of *opposition* or *complement*. In this case, the opposition between understanding and (transformative) experience does not help, as Gadamer is able to formulate within his paradigm a notion of understanding based on an idea of aesthetic experience entailing a radical transformation of the subject involved. The subject who understands something is, in Gadamer's whole system, not simply a subject who gains a *supplementary piece of knowledge*, but rather one who has experienced a radical transformation of his way of thinking. The fact that this transformation cannot be immediately identified with the one analysed by Fischer-Lichte is another question, which surely deserves utmost attention but which, in my view, cannot adequately be answered by considering performativity as what lies *outside*, or *beyond*, hermeneutics.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Both the second and the third sections have shown how Gadamer's hermeneutics can be labelled as *performativity-competent*; not only, as argued in the second section, by putting the notion of play at the centre of his analysis, does Gadamer focus on the centrality of performance in the characterisation of works of art, and therefore of the whole hermeneutic enterprise; the third section shows also that *Truth and Method* contains notions and theses directly related to some aspects of art, which, in Fischer-Lichte's analysis, could only have been taken into account by the performative turn, as, so to say, supposedly exceeding the explanatory power of hermeneutics. Finally, I would like to formulate a couple of last considerations:

- (a) The conducted analyses have not the ambition of being exhaustive, but rather of constituting a first step for a better understanding of the difference between hermeneutics and the performative turn. The main intent is not to deny the fundamental break that the performative turn has produced in the aesthetic research field. The performative turn undoubtedly brought a new emphasis on some aspects of art which, until that moment, did not receive enough attention in a field of research strongly influenced by a work-driven (instead of performance-driven) attitude. What is questionable, on the other hand, is the consequent characterisation of performativity as *what lies beyond and outside* hermeneutics. The above-conducted analysis tries to provide a different account of hermeneutics, as least in the case of Gadamer (who conversely exerted a noticeable influence on several

authors and who cannot therefore be considered as a simple exception). The main point of this different account is not only the one of *rendering justice* to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, but also of providing a first basis for better identifying the differences between the two paradigms, differences which cannot, in my view, be adequately individuated by characterising their reciprocal positions into a complementary modus.

- (b) A first, very provisory proposal for the characterisation of this difference is the following: the *aesthetics of performativity* should possibly be considered neither as the *opposite* (Hülk) nor as the *complement* (Gumbrecht) of hermeneutics, but rather as a *radicalisation* of notions relating to performative aspects of art and already formulated in Gadamer's hermeneutics. By recalling a formulation of Robert Brandom in his essay on Gadamer<sup>35</sup>, I do believe that not only is such a characterisation more *legitimate* (as I hope to have shown), but that it is more *fruitful*, as it should lead to a better understanding of the break between hermeneutics and the performative turn. Performativity lies at the centre of Gadamer's hermeneutics (and also most probably of all hermeneutical approaches influenced by his work), articulated in a series of concepts which pledge for its *performativity-competence*. The question is to understand *what happens* when such concepts are employed in an

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<sup>35</sup> See Brandom, 2002, p. 117.

aesthetic context (the one at the core of the performative turn) where the notion of artwork plays, in most cases, a marginal role (while performance acquires an autonomous value against it), and what is semantically entailed in this different use. The objective of this paper is, among others, to provide a first contribution for future answers to these questions.

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# ***Are Art and Life Experiences “Mostly Perceptual” or “Largely Extra-perceptual”?***

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ABSTRACT. These days, there's a lot of discussion regarding the role of perception in aesthetic experience. Philosophers of mind like Bence Nanay claim that aesthetics can be reduced to the philosophy of perception, while many more are actively debating the Cognitive Penetrability Hypothesis (CPH), whereby what “we think literally influences what we see.” Those who uphold CPH consider perception susceptible to internal factors (visual memories, color memories, "wishful seeing," concept possession, attentional bias, pre-cueing, or practical knowledge), as well as external ones (perceptual learning). If CPH is true, then our experiences of art and life share two basic features: 1) routine perceptions are coloured by factors that often lie largely beyond both our control (concept possession, prior experiences, memories, prejudices/biases, etc) and our awareness, and 2) the magnitudes of such factors are not only indeterminable, but they cannot be turned off/on at will during perception. One question remains, however, are art's contents mostly perceptual or extra-perceptual? Extra-perceptual contents refer here to after-thoughts, prompted more by the imagination, new information, curiosity, playful activities, emotions, and social engagements than *in situ* (real-time) perceptions. This paper claims that the contents of life experiences are primarily perceptual, while those of art experiences, which require interpretations, are largely extra-perceptual since such assessments typically occur post-perceptually.

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## **1. Introduction: An “Aesthesis Turn” (or Return)**

One of today’s hot topics in Aesthetics and Psychology concerns perception’s influence on aesthetic experience. After decades of aestheticians’ having developed strategies for articulating artworks’ mostly *immaterial* features, heretofore described as “work” (Martin Heidegger), aesthetic concepts (Frank Sibley), aesthetic terms (Peter Kivy), standard/contra-standard categories (Kendall Walton), “embedded” contents (Arthur Danto), and even non-perceptual perceptual properties (James Shelley); Aesthetics is currently undergoing what might be described as an “Aesthesis Turn” (or rather “return”) as circumscribed by New Materialism, Posthumanism, and Object-Oriented Ontology.

Closer to home, Bence Nanay’s 2016 book *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* claims that aesthetics and philosophy of perception share so many common features that it might be helpful to treat the former as exemplary of the latter. Elsewhere, I have argued that aesthetics is the “philosophy of our wordless world,” meaning that its subject concerns ineffable artworks that are hastily treated as effable, owing to aestheticians’ intentionalist inclinations (Spaid 2015, p. 181). On this level, both philosophical fields address how we phenomenologically experience material environments, rather than language. Problem is, the philosophy of perception primarily focuses on conceptualised contents, thus neglecting objects’ immaterial features and ignoring crucial aspects that fail to be conceptualised until much later. By contrast, aesthetic experiences remain largely unconceptualised, making inference, what Kant called the “free-play

of imagination and understanding,” aesthetics’ bailiwick. Were artworks so easily perceivable as familiar objects, participants wouldn’t have to infer interpretations, allowing aestheticians to focus more on artworks’ material features than their immaterial features. Unlike conceptualisation, which is rather immediate, interpretations are post-perceptual, since they occur after perception, and rarely in the object’s presence, though direct experiences prove more evidential than virtual ones. We direct our perceptual tools at whatever is under scrutiny. For these reasons, post-perceptual content is extra-perceptual, while extra-perceptual content such as hearsay could occur pre-perceptually, perceptually, or post-perceptually. The main point is that extra-perceptual contents, like cognition, not only influence perception, but facilitate it.

### **1.1. “What we Think Literally Influences What we See”**

Since the millennium, philosophers of mind have actively been debating the Cognitive Penetrability Hypothesis (CPH), whereby what “we think literally influences what we see,” a view that frankly challenges perception’s accuracy (Raftopoulos and Zeimbekus 2015, p. 1). Those who uphold CPH consider perception susceptible to cognition, whether internal factors (visual memories, color memories, "wishful seeing," concept possession, attentional bias, pre-cueing, or practical knowledge) or external ones (perceptual learning). And if perception is susceptible to cognition, then of course the conceptual content arising from aesthetic experiences is no less immune. Nanay thinks aestheticians ought to consider CPH’s impact on aesthetic

experiences, but of course, they do all the time, since cognition not only influences, but directs interpretive mechanisms. This is why philosophers since the 18th Century have emphasised the *aesthetic attitude*, known either as “disinterestedness” or “distanciation,” which offers a conscious corrective of human beings’ obvious biases.

If CPH is true, then our experiences of art and life share two basic features: 1) routine perceptions are coloured by factors that often largely lie beyond both our control (concept possession, prior experiences, memories, prejudices/biases, etc) plus our awareness, and 2) the magnitudes of such factors are not only indeterminable, but they cannot be turned off/on at will during perception. One question remains, however, are these contents entirely perceptual or could some be *extra-perceptual*?

In light of the fact that artworks are typically interpreted long after *in situ* (real-time) perceptions, extra-perceptual contents are usually after-thoughts, spurred by the imagination, additional information/hearsay, curiosity, playful activities, emotional reactions, social engagements, and especially some urgency to identify plausible referents (Susanna Siegel 2015, p. 423). As an example, I offer Marcel Duchamp’s 1912 painting *Nu Descendant un Escalier* (Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2), whose titillating title, not its depicted imagery, caused quite a stir, eventually inspiring Duchamp not to exhibit it in Paris. When it was finally exhibited the next year in “The Armory Show,” *American Art News* offered a \$10 reward to anyone who could identify this inscrutable painting’s nude figure, demonstrating that its original offense was not due to perceptual contents, but to extra-perceptual ones (fears of a scandal). Perhaps a more vivid

example is Emmanuel Frémiet's plaster sculpture *Female Gorilla Carrying off a Nègresse* (1859), which members of the public physically destroyed in 1861. Even though Frémiet clearly carved the words "Gorille Femelle" (female gorilla) on the sculpture's base for all to read, members of the public, including Baudelaire, routinely interpreted it as an aggressive male gorilla about to rape a woman. This sculpture's demise has been attributed to the fears it elicited, as well as the sense of moral outrage aroused by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), published the same year. Given that the public's reaction was not derived from perception (the figure of a female gorilla carrying off an indigenous woman, depicted imagery, and words), one recognises the greater power of extra-perceptual contents (hearsay, emotions, evolution's implausibility).

## **1.2. Interpretation's Reliance on Extra-Perceptual Contents**

What interests me is the tendency for audiences to rely on extra-perceptual contents when interpreting, and even evaluating aesthetic experiences (theater, film, opera, visual art, symphony, meals), a vector that Nanay not only overlooks, but remains underdeveloped in literature generated by the International Network for Sensory Research (a consortium of 25 philosophy departments). Extra-perceptual contents play a crucial role for several reasons: 1) Interpreting artworks can take years, so audience members often rely on public discourse, hearsay, and institutionally-available information such as theater/opera programs or museum labels to speed up access. 2) Spectators are typically overwhelmed by multi-sensorial aesthetic

experiences, making it difficult to zero-in on particular aspects, leaving parts a blur. 3) It's far more difficult to process art's unfamiliar references than those underlying familiar life experiences. 4) Art experiences require interpretations, which is not the case for everyday life experiences, which are taken at face value. As we shall soon see, perception plays a primary role in the recent wave of neuroaesthetic research cited by philosophers to explain why certain artworks, as well as nonart objects, hold our fascination. Research conducted in art exhibitions rather than labs rather indicates that extra-perceptual contents override perceptual ones.

To remain consistent with the philosophy of mind literature, I refer to recipients attempting to interpret artworks as subjects (undergoing cognition), who engage part-whole relationships, as they toggle back and forth from an artwork's ineffable aspects to the world, just as recipients move from an environment's myriad elements to its overall composition. Like eaters in the dark using a process of elimination to discern what they most likely just ate, one's experience with a novel artwork typically engenders post-perceptual *inferential* processes. Unlike interpretation, the process of conceptualising familiar artworks during its exhibition is comparatively direct (immediately processed via each visitor's cognitive stock, didactic panels, and selected artwork positions). Since curated exhibitions are typically designed to defend curatorial hypotheses concerning the displayed objects, there is less need for the kind of guesswork that often accompanies unfamiliar artworks that are presented void of any context (Spaid 2016, p. 88). As detailed in the next section,

recent exhibition experiments indicate that exhibition visitors routinely employ extra-perceptual content.

This paper thus juxtaposes everyday life experiences, which include *familiar* art experiences that don't require inferential processes, with novel art experiences that defy understanding and thus require ongoing assessments, sometimes occurring years later, and far from some original *in situ* perception, which is why I characterise them as *extra-perceptual*. Neither everyday life experiences nor novel art experiences are immune from cognitive penetration, which is why the aesthetic attitude still matters. Recall Ludwig Wittgenstein's view that interpretations are not properties of things. That we act like interpretations are matters of fact is yet another example of cognitive penetration run amok. Although most aestheticians consider artworks' contents "embedded," interpretations are often comparatively immaterial and imperceptible, though to succeed as plausible interpretations they must eventually be backed by material evidence that is perceptible. But they remain interpretations all the same.

### **1.3. The Folly of "Neutral Views" Conducted in Labs**

Since the 1990s, several philosophers have defended so-called "neutral views," ranging from Affect Theory and Neuroaesthetics to Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), all of which arose to safeguard mind-independence. As a result, scientists have conducted scores of laboratory experiments that measure people's responses to images or actual artworks in terms of pupil dilation, eye movements (reaction times, gaze duration, saccade length, scan

paths), heart rate, skin conductance, and neural responses as measured by EEG and fMRI. Such tests typically occur in laboratories, totally detached from actual art experiences, where perceiving subjects are not only wired to sensors, but they cannot wander at will, as they would in an actual exhibition. With the subject's agency effectively annulled and objects "flashed" on a screen, void of any context; it's no wonder researchers *erroneously* credit underlying objects with whatever "agency" is said to direct people's attention, prompt perception, trigger reception, and eventually inspire judgments. Most significantly, interpreting, and responding to art is time-intensive, yet "flash-by" art is comparatively quick.

## **2. Experiments in Actual Exhibitions**

Because lab environments are particularly well-suited to "neutral" views, vision scientists have started conducting experiments in actual art exhibitions. As we shall soon see, these experiments not only defy earlier lab results, but they capture extra-perceptual contents in action. As it turns out, visitors actively engage some combination of fore-knowledge, name-recognition, relaxation techniques, social interactions, label reading, and deep reflection. Although said researchers never mention "cognitive penetration," their experiments in actual exhibition affirm that there is more than meets the eye, which parallels the view of those upholding CPH, as described above. That scientists have recorded cognitive penetration influencing perception effectively denies objects their reputed "agency" and

negates any possibility for “neutral” views. Even if objects themselves *spur* visitor attention, experiments that occur in actual exhibitions demonstrate that individual objects, as opposed to a carefully selected and positioned set of objects, are insufficiently programmed to inspire reflection, let alone goad aesthetic judgment. In 2000, Falk and Dierking found a “close causal relationships between [1]) the physical context (alluding to the assessment of the exhibition itself: the choice of artworks; installation labeling; and didactics) and the scope of a contemplative experience, and between [2]) the socio-cultural context (alluding to group dynamics: talking while visiting, visiting for social reasons; seating opportunities) and the social experience” (Kirchberg and Tröndle 2015, p. 180). Hardly “causal,” such relationships exemplify Peirce’s semiotic triad, which ties the set of objects to some curator’s presentation (the sign) and audience reception (the interpretant), thus granting the visitor the last word.

## 2.1. Three Types of Exhibition Experiences

Attempting to repeat Falk and Dierking’s findings, Kirchberg and Tröndle followed up with a psychological test that actually mapped people’s physical behaviour throughout an exhibition. Statistical data led them to identify three kinds of exhibition experiences: *enthusing* (primarily students), *contemplative* (typically teachers), and *social* (mostly women); whose time frame stretched from pre-conception to exhibition experience to post-visit reception (174). After testing six potentially relevant factors: from 1) pre-visit expectations to 2) socio-demographic statistics, 3) personal

relatedness to art, 4) the visitor's mood upon arrival, 5) the post-visit assessment, and 6) potential social group dynamics, they concluded that "art knowledge positively impacts the enthusing experience of the exhibition." Knowledgeable visitors take pleasure in conceptualising artworks *in situ*, which means that a little art knowledge goes a long way toward ensuring enjoyable experiences. Fortunately, negative moods show little effect (176-177). Those characterising their experiences as contemplative credited "excellent" artworks, "good" information/didactic panels, and "fair to satisfactory" seating arrangements, factors that are primarily extra-perceptual, though evaluating artworks as "excellent" could be perceptual (personal assessment) or extra-perceptual (deference to experts). By contrast, those reporting social experiences rate exhibited artworks on par with seating arrangements, somewhere between "Satisfactory" and "Good" (179). Not surprisingly, "talking while visiting," yet another extra-perceptual activity, lessens contemplative experiences, yet it enhances social experiences (179).

Using a Likert Scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high), Kirchberg and Tröndle calculated 9 emotional and 8 cognitive index variables for each visitor. "Driven by an 'aha-effect'" (185), enthusing visitors have the greatest emotional connection (physiological reactions), yet they tend to exhibit just one cognitive assessment, that of beauty. Although contemplative visitors are design sensitive and tend to focus on particular artworks, they have less intense physiological reactions than other types, while social visitors casually stroll about, seeking objects of interest.

Comments like “This artwork made me think,” “This artwork moved me,” or “This work connects with that work” are indicative of contemplative experiences. “Deeply thinking about the art, being moved by it, assessing the interaction with the other exhibited works, and considering the specificities of presenting the selected artworks are also part of a contemplative experience of this exhibition” (181). Social visitors, who especially appreciate works by notable artists, primarily respond emotionally to works that make them laugh (181). “The determination of the social-experience type by cognitive reactions to the selected artwork reveals a counter-image to [that of] the contemplative-experience type” (181). “In other words, the less the visitor takes into consideration the content of the artworks, the higher is his or her level of social experience” (181).

## **2.2. Immediate Encounters and Assessments of Exhibition Aspects**

Kirchberg and Tröndle contend that their findings corroborate Antoine Hennion and Bruno Latour’s classically neutral approach, which frames “artworks and exhibitions as inherent aspects unto themselves” (181). Kirchberg and Tröndle proudly conclude:

[W]e found almost no impact of socio-demographic traits or expectations on the exhibition experience. Instead, causes for the tripartite exhibition experience could be found significantly through immediate encounters and assessments of exhibition aspects (artworks

and arrangements, information, and seating); imminent social context of the visit (company, talking); differing spatial behavior patterns; different physiological reactions to the artworks; and the individual rating of selected artworks by the correlation to one of the experience types (186).

I consider Hennion and Latour's "proposition that the sensual encounter with art objects has great significance for the recipient" more a *truism* than actual proof of object agency. The takeaway here is that people are most inclined to enjoy familiar works that don't necessitate extra-perceptual interpretations and are displayed in a compelling manner that affords physiological reactions and social situations. But of course, not every viewer is seeking immediate gratification. Moreover, I imagine viewers who have peers with whom they can continue discussing prior art experiences finding enjoyment long after the exhibition closes.

Either way, Kirchberg and Tröndle's experiment countermands the plausibility of neutral views that credit objects, rather than environments, with directing visitors' attentions. Kirchberg and Tröndle's experiment proves that "the museum experience has a much larger effect on the visitor than one might have thought" and that "the curator can indeed influence the visitor experience by paying more attention to the aspects of exhibition composition" (188). Their research incidentally demonstrates how visitors' varying cognitive states penetrate perception, since what they think or know totally influences their experience. Differing exhibition experiences not only indicate perceptual asymmetries, but they reflect the varying interpretative

tools visitors select, whether additional information, seating access, and/or shared conversations. Moreover, those visitors who exit the exhibition, yet continue to engage it via discussion or further reading, activate extra-perceptual contents.

### **2.3. Exhibitions Inevitably Favor Experts over Novices**

In contrast to standard experimental psychology models that treat individual artworks like visual stimuli, experiments conducted at UCLeuven's Laboratory of Experimental Psychology, where researchers routinely collaborate with artists, have shown that artwork reception involves the interplay of perception, cognition, and emotion. Moreover, their research characterises the "interrelationships between attention, perception, memory, understanding, and appreciation," which inevitably favor experts over novices (Wagemans 2011, 668). Seeking to balance obvious inequities among exhibition visitors, "We often found an effect of providing participants with additional information, a difference between novice and expert participants, and a shift with increasing experience with an artwork, in the direction of tolerating more complexity and acquiring more order from it" (Wagemans, 648).

To my lights, the scientifically proven need to provide more information, in order to inspire creative thinking/imaginative reflection, and thus influence visitors' cognitive states, indicates the significance of *extra-perceptual* contents, whose magnitude, thrust, and impact have thus far remained entangled in cognition, as "sub-personal factors." As discussed,

scientific research routinely captures art lovers employing extra-perceptual contents to spur interpretations. Absent any discussion of extra-perceptual contents, philosophers of perception presume that all contents are perceived. It is thus imperative that philosophers of perception distinguish extra-perceptual contents from perceptual ones. Furthermore, scientific experiments that demonstrate how extra-perceptual contents influence cognition should persuade philosophers of the impossibility of affording exhibited objects “neutral views.”

### **3. Distinguishing Extra-perceptual Contents from Cognitive Penetration**

Given that actual exhibition experiments highlight both the presence and necessity of extra-perceptual contents, one may wonder why I don't just consider them cognitive states, which influence perception. It seems, however, that viewers typically employ extra-perceptual contents to *precipitate* perception, that is, to experience something thinly that was initially invisible. Alternatively, cognitive penetration, which reflects some combination of available information (concept possession) and cognitive states (again, “what we think”) rather *saturates* perception, enabling us to have thicker (richer) experiences. If information improves perception, as the above exhibition experiments suggest, then more information grants visitors faster access to more contents, which augments enjoyment, as well as disappointment, since one now has good reasons to reject it. Either way, the

more one “knows about” something, the more one tends to like or dislike it, availing more material upon which to later reflect.

### **3.1. Delineating Perception from Cognition**

One problem that routinely dogs philosophers of mind is that it is nearly impossible to delineate perception and cognition, other than to consider the former early vision and the latter late vision, so one ought not to get too worked up about where the former ends and the latter takes over. Those who know how to distinguish crows from ravens, and readily apply this knowledge correctly, easily identify this as perception, since the subject correctly “perceives  $x$  as a crow” (and not a raven). Were one to use the app Merlin Bird Photo ID, ask a fellow bird watcher, or look up the image in a birding handbook, one would describe these contents as extra-perceptual, since identification requires interpretative tools beyond mere perception. By contrast, the next time one applies said knowledge without appeal to an outside source, such as a book or a colleague, it would ring as perceptual. As already noted, philosophers typically consider art experiences to be entirely perceptual, yet I contend that contents derived from experiences with unfamiliar artworks are rather extra-perceptual, since the process of ascribing contents often occurs at a remove from the actual artwork. Those contents derived from experiences with familiar artworks, which appeal to understanding in a manner that feels comparatively non-inferential, rather combine perception, cognition and emotion, as the above experiments indicate.

For these reasons, I find it easier to split extra-perceptual content from perceptual content than it is to sever perception from cognition, which is why extra-perceptual contents ought to carry more weight. As already mentioned extra-perceptual contents include available concepts or thoughts that are consciously aroused, exclusively for the purpose of interpreting novel art experiences. By contrast, consider a classic example of cognitive penetration, such that white wine tinted red tastes like red wine. When taste and sight combine, cognitive penetration (memories of how red wine tastes) overrides one's actual perception (Spence 2010). However, those knowledgeable of this illusion could employ extra-perceptual content (knowledge of this trick) to test whether white wine is actually masquerading as red.

### **3.2. Dining in the Dark**

Consider the case of “Dining in the Dark” eaters, who typically experience difficulties distinguishing flavours when they cannot see their food, lending credence to the adage “eye appeal is half the meal.” Although “Dining in the Dark” promoters claim that such experiences heighten eaters’ awareness of taste and aroma, psychologists rather doubt this, according eaters’ appreciation to “the constant feeling of surprise, based on the delivery of unusual sensory experiences that may really make such dark dining experiences so unusual and intriguing for customers” (Spence and Piqueras-Fizman 2012). Moreover,

We humans have only a limited attentional capacity, and vision tends to capitalise on the available neural resources. As a result, we often don't pay as much attention to the other senses as perhaps we should. Indeed, more often than not, what we see ultimately determines what we perceive, even when the other senses may be sending our brains a different message (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman).

Apparently, dining in the dark surveys have determined that there is no appreciable difference in enjoyment between eating under lights or in the dark, though people claim to pay more attention in the dark and eat larger portions, since they cannot see their plates (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman). Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman have also noticed that “a lack of sensory expectations can even lead to confusion and to the illusory identification of flavours that are actually not present” (Piqueras-Fiszman and Spence 2011). Apparently, “Whenever we consume a food that we can't recognise, we nevertheless still tend to create post-consumption beliefs about what the food actually was.” To my lights, post-consumption beliefs are actually extra-perceptual contents, since they are generated using inference, not perception.

The presence of extra-perceptual contents eventually persuades Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman to dismiss claims that dining in the dark bears any resemblance to dining while “blind.” They note that:

Normally sighted individuals typically have a great deal of stored knowledge concerning the appearance of properties of foods and

beverages. This means that once they have recognised it via their other senses, they can't help but create in their minds a potentially vivid mental image of what the food or beverage actually looks like. They may even retrieve information concerning how it has been cooked, and how much they like it (Simmons et al., 2005). This multisensory mental image might well then serve as an input and in some sense feed the cognitive eating process. (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman 2012).

Not surprisingly, sight, or at least sighted persons' familiarity with relevant food concepts, finds a way to dominate even when dining in the dark.

Regarding a different kind of novel experience that also takes place in the dark, I ask: What truly compels our admiration for a particular presentation of "La Boheme"? Is it the opera director's particular staging, the imaginative costumes, Puccini's score, the precise set design, the singers' voices, or Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa's libretto based on Henri Murger's story? Could it also be the excitement of getting dressed up for an evening on the town, a rousing discussion afterwards with friends over wine in an "underground" bar, or the romanticisation of creatives surviving poverty and compelling characters falling victim to yesteryears' disease? If friendly "art debates" enhance our art experiences as much as the opera, art exhibition, or film itself, why are neuroaestheticians, like vision scientist Semir Zeki (University College London), focused more on spectators' physical responses to particular scenes or imagery than total art experiences that *flourish* long after the actual perceptual experience?

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

In addition to having epistemological and ontological dimensions, this debate is of particular importance to neuroscientists, as well as aestheticians, who typically treat perceptual processing with great confidence. In light of what I've presented, I would argue that extra-perceptual contents play distinct roles in aesthetic evaluation. Because they are rarely available until after actual exhibition experiences, they often play greater roles in meaning-making than perception itself, and thus threaten the "shared" nature of "embodied meaning," as well as the grounds for conceiving it thusly. The experiments discussed above outright challenge reams of aesthetic research currently collected in brain labs from immobile participants, void of actual art experiences. Although I challenge perception's total domination in terms of art experiences, I hardly deny the importance of human beings' perceptual apparatus or the relevance of neuroscience research. I rather recommend that the philosophy of perception and their neuroaesthetic collaborators find a way to factor in the existence and far-ranging influence of extra-perceptual contents, which has thus far been ignored by their research, primarily because they fail to distinguish extra-perceptual contents from cognitive penetration. In fact, most consider extra-perceptual contents exemplary of cognitive penetration, and therefore reducible to cognitive penetration, which means that these researchers will continue to overlook its impact. Even if the time-frame for cognitive penetration is extended indefinitely, their research will fail to grasp, let alone distinguish each type of visitor's exhibition experience. Cognitive penetration's focus on the

influence of knowledge, memories, beliefs, and moods suitably accounts for perceptual inaccuracy, but it fails to explain how people eventually generate contents, despite grave perceptual difficulties. As sections 2 and 3 indicate, all three types of visitors, especially those experiencing art in the dark, rely on extra-perceptual contents to infer contents otherwise unavailable perception. This is no doubt the imagination at work. But I leave this thought for a future paper.

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# *John Cage's 4' 33'': Unhappy Theory, Meaningful Gesture*

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ABSTRACT. During the premiere of Cage's famous 'silent' piece *4' 33''*, the audience was irritated from not hearing anything. Nevertheless, Cage insisted that the piece was not silent but full of accidental sounds that were music. However, were the first listeners truly mistaken? Can an artwork such as this one determine ways of perception or establish a fact? More generally, how can an artwork such as this one mean anything? To develop these questions, I will first define what *4' 33''* is and examine what makes it appealing. After considering whether *4' 33''* is a musical work, or a conceptual (symbolic) work, I will focus on Cage's aesthetic principles and conclude that there is no determinate way of interpreting the meaning of *4' 33''*, in that its underlying principles are contradictory. I will suggest that in order to explain the attractiveness of *4' 33''* as an artwork, it is helpful to consider how gestures can bear their meaning.

## **1. Introduction**

During the premiere of Cage's famous 'silent' piece *4' 33''*, or *Four Minutes and Thirty-three Seconds*, consisting of no intentionally composed sounds, the audience sitting in the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York,

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was irritated from not hearing anything, and the discussion that followed revealed that the audience was angry. One of the local artists even stood up and suggested: 'Good people of Woodstock, let's drive these people out of town' (Revill 2014, 156). This is interesting, because most of the audience were partly Cage's fellow artists, professional musicians of the New York Philharmonic on vacation, people close to avant-garde art, and local music lovers, all of them well aware of the context of the presentation of the work. Nevertheless, Cage was misunderstood, and after the event, he repeatedly insisted that the first listeners had

missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out. (Cage quoted in Kostelanetz 2003, 65 f.)

The piece was not silent. Silence did not exist, Cage claimed; there were only sounds, and sounds were music.

Despite a discrepancy between what Cage intended to show and what the original audience actually perceived, Cage (and many after him) believed he had established that sounds can be music and that we cannot hear silence. If the first audience did hear silence, they heard it wrong.

However, were the first listeners truly mistaken? Alternatively, can an

artwork such as this one determine ways of perception or establish a fact? Or, more generally, how can an artwork such as this one have meaning? To develop these questions, I will first examine what *4' 33''* is, as different kinds of artworks have their meanings in different ways. Next, I will focus on Cage's aesthetic principles and conclude that they do not help us understand the meaning of the work, in that they are contradictory. I will suggest that in order to explain the attractiveness of *4' 33''* as an artwork, it is helpful to consider how gestures can have meaning.

## 2. Is It Music?

The work has some *formal* characteristics of music. It has a title, suggesting that it is a deliberately created work, and this indicates the work's fixed duration. It also has a score that can be bought in music shops, giving instructions that qualify certain performances as adequate interpretations of the work. The work is performed by musicians together with other works of music, in venues where music is performed.

The fact that there are three different versions of the score need not trouble us that much, in that they differ slightly only in *how* the instructions are to be performed.<sup>2</sup> It is important that the performer produce no sounds

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<sup>2</sup> Originally, Cage issued a score in conventional notation consisting of an empty treble and bass stave (there are neither notes nor rests), indicating a work for piano, with the metronome marking of sixty beats per minute indicating that the tempo should not change during the performance. (Interestingly, the metronome marking is graphic; it applies to the

intentionally, according to all three of them: the score presents either an empty stave or an instruction: *tacet*. Literally, the work's score contains silences, not any (intentional or environmental) sounds (this plays an important role in how we interpret the meaning of the work; cf. also Dodd 2018).

More disturbing is the fact that, if music is an organization of sound (which is a rather broad definition initially proposed by Edgar Varèse,

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tempo of *reading* the score: 2.5 cm of a bar are equal to one second of physical time. Thereby, Cage emphasizes that the whole piece has a defined duration in physical time.) Although the score is unconventional, it makes clear that the performer performs the piece by following the score and keeping time, by not producing any sound intentionally during the performance. The metronome marking also attaches the piece to the musical tradition, especially to Beethoven, whom Cage sharply criticized in other ways. Beethoven required an exact reading of his scores, and he was thrilled when accurate metronome indicators replaced older verbal indications of tempo. – Later, Cage issued a graphic notation, comprising six horizontal pages on which vertical lines illustrate the duration of the three parts of the work. A performer does not follow the lines but the gap dividing the two lines, defining the duration of a movement. This score also adds that the work is for any instrument or combination of instruments. It is interesting mainly for the fact that, in Irwin Kremen's words (to whom it was dedicated), the score 'marks a transition from one form of musical notation to another' (Gann 2010, 181), thus strengthening its connection to musical tradition again. – Finally, there is a typewritten or hand-written *tacet* version of the score, which simply gives a verbal instruction 'tacet' for all three movements of the work that are numbered in Roman numerals. This version of the score was published without a title, but Cage added an explanatory note stating that 'the work' was premiered at Woodstock under the title *4' 33''*, which indicated its duration. Importantly, he also added that the performance of the work may 'last any length of time' (ibid., 184).

which Cage appears to accept and further develop), the score of *4' 33''* cannot be a record of a musical work. In the score of *4' 33''*, Cage notated silences to frame environmental sounds to present them to the audience for aesthetic appreciation.<sup>3</sup> By doing this, Cage *included* some sounds in the work (all environmental sounds) and *excluded* some other sounds from the work (all 'musical' or intended sounds). All sounds *intentionally* produced by the performer count as ambient: they do not belong to the performance of the work.

However, this is not an organization of sound proper. Although framed environmental sounds are *presented* to the listener (and it is clear which sound does belong to the performance and which does not), the sounds presented are not given any structure. As Stephen Davies has argued, by creating the frame, we do not yet organize what is within the frame; we do not yet create an artwork (Davies 2005, 25). (Cage's other work, *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, is a good contrast example to *4' 33''* in that it presents *and* structures presented sounds; cf. Dodd 2018, 637).

We could be more favourable to Cage and consider another option. We know that Cage *composed 4' 33''* using a composition technique called chance operations, through which he wanted to relinquish control over his

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<sup>3</sup> Levinson accepts the notion of framing as an organizational device and reads 'organization' of sound (a necessary condition of music) in the broad sense of 'designing' or 'arranging' (Levinson 2011, 270). Silence in Cage's score delimits the work's boundaries and thus frames certain environmental sounds as belonging to the work. His suggestion concerning *4' 33''* is that it is a limiting case of music considered as an organization of sound-and-silence. See also Carroll 1994, 95.

work and open it to chance (a technique previously used by Marcel Duchamp, Hans Arp and later Pierre Boulez).<sup>4</sup> For example, in his other work, *Music of Changes*, Cage determined pitch, dynamics and duration of sounds and silences by applying separate chance charts. Cage compares creating *4' 33''* to composing *Music of Changes*: 'I wrote it [*4' 33''*] note by note, just like the *Music of Changes*. (...) It was done like a piece of music, except there were no sounds – but there were durations' (Cage quoted in Fettermann 1996, 72). In *4' 33''*, Cage determined only durations of silences, arriving at the resulting four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence,<sup>5</sup> and he divided the work into three unequally long parts, a form which suggests a traditional sonata – as if the work should be considered as belonging to the tradition of western tonal music (cf. Gann 2010, 167).

Chance operations is a compositional system that does not have its perceptual correlate. When we listen to *Music of Changes*, we can hear no trace of its intentional organization, no system or rule; it is merely chance sounds or tones. Nevertheless, we can distinguish the lack of an organization as a composer's intention, because we can hear what is

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<sup>4</sup> Boulez's use of chance operations was quite different from Cage's, in that Boulez wanted to control (rationalize) chance. The term 'aleatoric', often applied to Cage's chance music, comes from Boulez.

<sup>5</sup> Cage had probably planned to arrive at this length – it would correspond to the length of Cage's *Silent Prayer*, a predecessor of *4' 33''* that Cage conceived in 1948 but never composed. Originally, Cage meant to sell *Silent Prayer* to the Muzak company, probably hoping to interrupt the stream of background music that the company broadcasted into public spaces since the 1940s (see Cage 1992, Kahn 1997); the standard length of a Muzak song was approximately three to four and a half minutes.

presented to us. However, what about the silences of *4' 33"*? What is their intention, and can we distinguish that intention from an unintentional failure to do music, without having any background knowledge of the work? Perhaps we could say, together with Cage, that silence is a structural element of music of equal importance, and that, since duration is the only parameter that sounds have in common with silences, we can define music as the organization of *time*:

It is very simple. If you consider that sound is characterised by its pitch, its loudness, its timbre, and its duration, and that silence, which is the opposite and, therefore, the necessary partner of sound, is characterized only by its duration, you will be drawn to the conclusion that of the four characteristics of the material of music, duration, that is, time length, is the most fundamental. Silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: It is heard in terms of time length. (Cage quoted in Gann 2010, 79 f.)

However, we should be cautious before agreeing with Cage that time is a structural element of his music proper. If music is an organization of time, it has to organize some audible events in time. Nevertheless, silences (empty durations) isolated from sounds are not events but absences of events that, on their own, cannot organize audible events. Thus, *4' 33"* does not provide any structure to audible events, even according to that definition.

Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* is a good illustration of the way he worked with time in his music. A conductor does not *coordinate*

(organize or unify) the actions of individual players according to the parameter of time – he functions as a timekeeper. (A performer of 4' 33" has a similar task.) Time does not serve to impute a structure to musical sequences; it is not used as a tool to create a musical form. In Cage's music, time is a unifying element of the work in the sense that is no different from how physical time is a unifying element of perceiving an event. In short, then, we have good reason to balk at the idea that 4' 33" is music.

### **3. 4' 33" as a Conceptual Work of Performance Art**

It appears that the only event that is organized here is the *performance* of 4' 33". During its premiere at the Maverick Concert Hall, David Tudor closed and opened the piano lid to indicate the beginnings and endings of its three parts, measured the lengths of each movement with a stopwatch when following the score, and stood up at the end of the performance to receive applause, thus setting the standard for performing this piece. For this reason and because 4' 33" was originally presented as a work for performance, it has been categorized by Kendal Walton (2008) as a dramatic work resembling the theatre of the absurd, or, by Daniel Herwitz (1988, 1993), Stephen Davies (1997/2005) and, most recently, Julian Dodd (2018), as a work of performance art – an instance of a happening.

According to Julian Dodd, performance art is a medium-specific art *form* belonging to the *genre* of conceptual art. Art forms, such as music, literature, or sculpture, are all medium-specific; they are 'kinds that explain why works are in the media that they are in: that is, why some technologies

and not others are used in the work's production' (Dodd 2016, 256). Art genres, such as satire, comedy, feminist or conceptual art, can be cross-media. Genres 'group together works according to the purpose for which they are produced and appreciated, not according to the media with which they are created' (Dodd 2018, 639). The purpose of works of conceptual art is to afford us an intellectual interest. When Dodd says that *4' 33"* is a work of performance art, he has in mind a specific art form that emerged in the art contexts of the 1960s, suggesting that the *medium* that is specific to these works is *performance* as such (cf. Dodd 2016, 251).

There is a debate surrounding how we appreciate works of conceptual art, but for the sake of brevity, I follow Dodd in accepting that 'performance' is a 'medium' of the work, and not a 'mean', as Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (2010) would have it. There are several reasons why Dodd's suggestion is helpful *in general*. For example, it seems that we do need a medium to appreciate works of conceptual art *as artworks*. Moreover, we do not have to think of the 'conceptuality' of the works in a narrow, propositional sense but consider that the artistic statement of a work can be non-propositional, as Dodd suggests, 'that which the artist presents to us as the focus of our appreciative attention' (Dodd 2016, 253). Importantly, these works can be considered as *continuing* in the artistic tradition, and not as breaking with it (cf. Wilde 2007).

The suggestion that performance is the medium of the work of performance art, and not its idea, is particularly useful as far as Cage's *4' 33"* is concerned. If the execution of a work were inessential to the work, it would be very hard to say what the work is appreciated for being a work of

art. If we wanted to appreciate Cage's work for having as its content a meaning that is propositional in a strict sense, what we would have to appreciate is a set of contradicting ideas as that content. Although it is not impossible to adore theoretical inconsistency, it seems implausible that the work has been successful because of this.

Before we turn to Cage's aesthetics and to the question of the meaning of the work, let me briefly raise an objection. Perhaps performance is not the form, or the medium, specific to *4' 33"*. The work *can* achieve its purpose in an alternative, 'conceptual' way, for example, when we read its score, or when we learn something about the purpose of the work by reading Cage's commentary. Perhaps Cage's work is an example of a new category of conceptual music.

Cage indeed indicates that a performative aspect of the work is *not* essential to it. He speaks as if the work itself were an *idea* or a strategy of how to listen, to be applied in everyday life:

Well, I use it constantly in my life experience. No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. I listen to it every day... I don't sit down to do it; I turn my attention toward it. I realize that it's going on continuously. So, more and more, my attention, as now, is on it. (Cage quoted in Fleming & Duckworth 1989, 21 f.)

Cage appears to be talking about the focus of the work rather than about the work as such. Nevertheless, he comments on what happens when we

actually *execute* the instruction ‘tacet’ prescribed by the score, implicitly emphasizing that performance is an essential element of the work. Attentively listening, Cage follows his own score. The score can be a vehicle of Cage’s idea only via prescribing *gestures* of silencing oneself, be they performed publicly or in private. In this sense, the work *has* an essentially performative aspect. Without executing the instruction, one cannot have the experience with the work. One can have an experience with what one believes the idea of the work to be, and one can think about it, yet this is not the experience with the work itself. Reading a score invites us to perform the work at least privately at home. The medium of the work thus appears to be *performance*.

#### **4. How Does the Work Express Its Idea and What Is It?**

There are two opposing suggestions as to how works of conceptual art can have their meaning or ‘point’ originating from conceptual artists themselves. According to the first, ‘purely conceptual’, way, indicated by Joseph Kosuth’s *Art After Philosophy* (1969, in Alberro & Stimson 1999), works of conceptual art are appreciated for the ideas they convey, through intellection. The natural way to understand the work is to analyse the propositions that underpin the work and expound its idea, either in an accompanying commentary or in an independent text. Sol LeWitt, in his *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, formulated the alternative: ‘Conceptual art is not necessarily logical. (...) Ideas are discovered by intuition’ (1967, in

Alberro & Stimson 1999, 13).

Let us begin with the former suggestion. There is no doubt that Cage *wants* to present an idea about music and listening in his work. The standard way of interpreting the work's point follows Cage's explanation: the work is about the aesthetic qualities of environmental sounds. However, this does not follow so clearly when we study Cage's commentaries and other written work concerning his music aesthetics. There are two major claims that he makes in his texts: the first has to do with composing music, the second with listening practices.

1) Cage generally presents environmental sounds or noises not merely as *aesthetically* interesting, but as a new and better *music*. In western tonal music, that is at the centre of Cage's criticism: the aesthetic quality of sounds depends on intentionally composed and perceived relations between tones. However, according to Cage, tonality is normative and artificial (Cage 1961, 152). It is a device of a composer to convey his musical ideas and to prescribe ways of listening and of feeling emotions. For this reason, sounds lose something of their original quality and become a means to a pre-determined end. Sounds 'themselves', as Cage used to call any environmental noises, present no particular taste of the composer. They just occur as they are and are not manipulated and organized by the composer. Therefore, these sounds do not arouse any particular emotion. Cage therefore renounced every form of musical language and proposed a conception of a 'naturalized' or 'ecological' music that does not privilege tone over noise and includes any environmental noises. In Cage's conception, sounds are *not only* to be included in musical works as a

material that would be subject to further creative practice (as is indeed the case for his many works such as *Music of Changes*). Sounds, as Cage's most radical example *4' 33''* illustrates, literally *become* music: there is no perceptible or definitional distinction between music and sounds occurring in the environment. As a consequence, music does not have to be intentionally composed (created or 'mediated'), and it is everywhere: 'When standing on a pavement, we are present at the concert of nature' (Cage 1990, 431).

2) There is a corresponding claim that pertains to a listener of Cage's music. Listeners should attend to any audible events present, without expecting anything and without evaluating what they hear according to their musical preferences, in order not to amend the listening experience of 'pure' sounds: listeners should listen to 'sounds themselves'.

According to Cage, expectations add a content that we *hear in* sounds but that is not actually *in* sounds. For instance, when we listen to Bach's first prelude of the *Well Tempered Clavier*, we do hear the tones as harmonic or 'correct' (or true): we hear that every tone has its determined, fixed position in the whole piece. However, when we switch to Wagner's *Tristan*, there will be tones, which we will be hearing as dissonant or 'incorrect' (or false), as if they should not belong to where Wagner posits them: their correctness is defined by a given position in a musical order. (Or we can imagine how the incorrect tones of a badly performed piece of music that we know well 'feel'.) In short, when we hear a sound as 'correct' or 'incorrect', we hear it as an appropriate or inappropriate response to an expectation raised by a preceding phrase of tones. We thus do ascribe

aesthetic value to sounds as listeners not on the grounds of their audible qualities (not on the grounds of the qualities of a sound as a material) but on the grounds of assigning of the truth-value that we hear *in* sounds (as if sounds *had* it). Therefore, we do not appreciate *what* we hear, but rather *how* we hear.

Cage emphasizes that, since there is no truth-value in sounds, listeners should *actively* free themselves from their listening habits by not expecting any relations between sounds and by not evaluating a sound as correct or incorrect. In this way, listeners will be able to listen in a non-evaluative way, which is an aesthetically proper and correct way of listening. (Although Cage's observations concerning the fact that the tones we hear are 'interpretations' based on previous expectations, as was evidenced by David Huron (2008), Cage does not appear to be right in supposing that it is possible to hear without structuring or evaluating sounds that we hear *at all*, even if tones or sounds are released from tonal relations.)

There are two contradictions involved in these principles:

- 1) If there is no difference between works of art and works of nature, one can intentionally produce works of art that are *not* intentional.
  
- 2) One can listen in a non-evaluative way to the audible events present in the environment and at the same time evaluate such listening as more valuable in comparison to listening, during which one *does* evaluate the aesthetic qualities of sounds. Moreover, one would have to be active in order to listen in a non-active way to avoid expectations

that naturally arise in listening.

In short, both Cage's principles are based on the notion of immediacy, but in the indicated sense, immediacy cannot be consistently claimed to be a principle of artistic creation<sup>6</sup> and reception.

The medium that an artist chooses to work in is neutral as far as its artistic value is concerned. Sounds have no intrinsic *artistic* value, and the way they are present in the environment raises no demand concerning how sounds should or should not be treated artistically, or how they should be listened to. Once immediacy is evaluated (as 'artistically interesting'), it ceases to be immediacy. What is immediate simply is, and a positive or negative evaluation is imparted to it additionally. Once environmental sounds are presented as worthy of being preferred, they are not presented as immediate. To accept an aesthetics of immediacy is to accept a theory based on contradiction.

The problem of Cage's aesthetics is similar to the paradox of spontaneity.<sup>7</sup> The command 'Be spontaneous!' is self-refuting, in that it is not possible to act spontaneously in obeying a command. Similarly, it is not possible to execute Cage's instruction to listen to environmental sounds as

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<sup>6</sup> According to Cage, sounds do not have to be manipulated or 'mediated' in order to be music. In this sense, music is 'immediate'. The above-mentioned claim does not concern the practice of artistic improvisation (such as in cases of jazz or dance improvisations), in the creation of which an artist is essentially involved, and the artist's intention to create is also preserved.

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Vojtěch Kolman for bringing this to my attention.

music. We either perceive sounds during 4' 33'' as music, but then, they are not perceived as environmental sounds (their qualities are transformed, or 'transfigured', to use Danto's term from his 1981 book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*), or we perceive the aesthetic qualities of sounds themselves, but then, we no longer perceive a work of art (cf. Davies 2005, 17 f.). In short, if Cage presented only his 'ideas', he would probably not receive so much attention and success.

Let us now consider the alternative suggestion of Sol LeWitt. If the suggestion of uncovering the ideas in a conceptual artwork by intuition is to be meaningful, the 'discovery' cannot be a matter of blind guessing. Rather, and more symbolically, a work must 'lead' us towards the idea that an artist wants to convey via something implicit, by viewing a not necessarily realized or rationalized procedure. We do not have to *interpret* the point of the work; rather, we apprehend it directly when we encounter the work.

Relating this to 4' 33'', Noel Carroll's suggestion that 4' 33'' is an 'exercise in exemplification' (Carroll 1994, 95) comes to mind. Carroll draws on Nelson Goodman's (1969) notion of exemplification, one of the two fundamental forms of reference together with denotation.

Insofar as the work is presented within a context of musical practice, Carroll suggests, it exemplifies (highlights, or symbolizes) aesthetic qualities of ambient sounds or noise. By using silence that frames ubiquitous sounds, Cage conveys his idea to the listener to attend to the aesthetic qualities of sounds.

According to Goodman, a sample exemplifies if it highlights *a selection of some* particular, constitutive qualities of what it is a sample of,

and he gives the example of a tailor's swatch. A tailor's swatch exemplifies only some of the qualities of a fabric, such as the structure of the weave, the colour, and patterns, but not others, such as size or shape.

However, in Cage's 4' 33" there are no particular sound qualities that are highlighted as constitutive or, in our case, aesthetic. All kinds of noises are included in the performance of the work, and no sound-quality is excluded. Noises, therefore, do not seem to have a symbolic function if there is no particular sound quality, which they would symbolize as aesthetic (see Dokic 1998, 110). Hence, such an 'intuitive' understanding of the work does not appear to operate when we encounter Cage's 4' 33". This would also explain its first audience's rejection. The question of 'how' 4' 33" can have a meaning remains open.

## **5. 4' 33" as a Gesture**

Nevertheless, the idea that the work is symbolic is not irrelevant. Perhaps Cage's idea is not *referred to* (via exemplification, as Carroll suggests) or 'said', but rather, as Dokic suggests, employing Wittgenstein's notion, is 'shown'. 4' 33" can have its symbolic meaning via introducing into the art context gestures that accompany its performance: negative gestures of not performing music.

We often talk about works of conceptual art as gestures, yet the suggestion – in regard to questions about meaning of works of conceptual art – is often overlooked. Gestures are symbolic in that they do not directly

designate or articulate propositionally their meaning. They show their meaning, which depends on the way the gesture is produced, in the context of presentation *and* in the reception of the gesture. Gestures are not universal (with the exception of some facial expressions), so we must learn their meaning, and they can also have more than one meaning depending on the culture in which they are used. Gestures can take on new meanings in different contexts (like the 'time out' gesture used during a football match or shown by a teacher in a classroom).

The way gestures are made (their physical appearance) is crucial to understanding what they communicate. (In our case, the fact that there are silences contained in the score of 4' 33'' matters for interpreting the meaning of the work as much as does the context of its presentation.) Some gestures do have a conventionally established meaning in a given culture (such as pointing with an index finger or with a chin) or in a community (in case of gestures employed within sign languages).

On the other hand, gestures of conceptual artworks are interesting for their unresolved nature for the fact that their meaning *has to* be specified. In the moment of their first presentation, a reference framework for interpreting the artwork (its socio-historical and cultural background) is only being established. Therefore, it is understandable that their meaning is not easily deciphered immediately, or that the work can remain meaningless if the original reference framework is not known. (A performance of Cage's 4' 33'' by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 2004 broadcasted over the radio illustrates this well. The recorded reactions were conspicuously similar to those of the original audience, cf. Gann 2010, 14 f.) Whereas the meaning of

a manual gesture can be well established, the complex gestures of conceptual art are not 'complete' or 'resolved' once and for all, and they will urge us to respond to them. In this sense, a work of conceptual art such as *4' 33''* has no single meaning or point: works of art, as with some other gestures (such as in sign poetry), have a creative potential. The meaning of an artistic gesture depends on the *relation* between someone who makes a gesture and someone who receives it.

So, was the first audience mistaken about the point of *4' 33''*? Although Tudor's original interpretation was not successful in transmitting Cage's intention to the audience, and although the audience did not know anything about *4' 33''* (as we do now), the work guided the first listeners to one of its points. They claimed to hear nothing – silence, or perhaps the silencing of music – which they conceivably perceived as the political revolt of a composer renouncing to take part in the music establishment. If music rather than politics was expected during the Maverick Concert Hall recital, it is easy to understand that the audience began to leave, rejecting the act of power that the composer was willing to exercise over his listeners, who had no wish to become involved in a composer's rebellion.

Some later orchestral interpretations of the work in which orchestra members emphasize the act of not playing their instrument suggest a different reading of the work.<sup>8</sup> In facilitating the shift of the listener's attention to the very act of not playing an instrument, as an intentional act of

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<sup>8</sup> For an orchestral interpretation by the EBU Euroradio Orchestra directed by Emil Tabakov, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OovYr0w7BMA>

producing an artistic content, a shared act of attention emerges, one whose intention is not necessarily sounds, but the shared, intentional silence itself. Although the four-and-a-half-minute silence, as a standard for interpreting the piece has it, may not be objectively audible (we begin to hear environmental noises after a while), the content of the work enables us to experience the expressive power of communal silence, an experience that can be unexpectedly interesting and enriching.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, I suggested that Cage's 4' 33'' succeeded precisely because Cage presented his idea in the form of an artistic gesture. 4' 33'' is a work of performance art that does not, and does not have to, present a single meaning or a statement that could be exhaustively grasped either via an analysis of its propositional content or via exemplification, as conventional interpretations would have it. It is conceptual in the broad sense of the term: it invites us to ask questions important to us, such as what music is, and even ontological questions, such as whether there is such a thing as objective silence, or epistemological questions, such as whether we can hear silence. However, as an artwork, it is not obliged to answer those questions. Cage's 4' 33'' can have a meaning and can be appreciated thanks to the introduction of gestures of silencing accompanying a public performance. The work thus invites us not only to think about music but also to

experience a shared intentional silence.<sup>9</sup>

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# *Challenging the Biopolitical through Animal-Human Hybridization*

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*Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis*

ABSTRACT. With the series *K-9\_topology* Maja Smrekar is challenging anthropocentrism with linking biology and culture, in particular addressing interaction between human and animal species. The artist builds upon the recent scientific findings that not only the dog species has been domesticated, but domestication that took place during evolution is to be considered mutual. Not only the dog has been mastered by human, but also the dogs have had an active role in “using” the human species for a more comfortable survival. Both species coexist. Within the project *Hybrid Family* from the *K-9\_topology* series she nurtured a puppy. The artist refers to this process as to the process of becoming, of becoming-animal, becoming-woman and becoming m(Other). Deeply rooted in her own experience, when in the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium “the liberal capitalism finally struck hard into the newborn Slovenian economy,” as she writes in her blog, and her parents lost their business, house, cars, forests, meadows, wine yards and her father committed suicide, she finds her way of resisting, which is in submitting herself to a “dog-human kinship relationship as a radical intimate action of ‘returning home’.” The process of becoming mother is analyzed in relation to the process of becoming animal and furthermore the process of becoming (m)Other is to particularly examined in reference to the mother and child unity, as regards the notion of *die Umwelt* and Hegelian, existentialist feminist and post-structuralist discussion of the identity and difference. The

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process of becoming (m)Other is finally examined as the biopolitical statement or intervention with the investment of artist's body with the purpose to re-gain the position of power, i.e. as an act of resistance to bio-power – the exercise of power on and through bodies.

## 1. Introduction

In 2017 Maja Smrekar won the main prize at the largest media art festival worldwide, Prix Ars Electronica, for her artistic *K-9\_topology* series of projects devoted to the relationships between dogs and humans, inviting to reinvent ourselves with our nonhuman others. With the series *K-9\_topology* Maja Smrekar is challenging anthropocentrism with linking biology and culture, in particular addressing interaction between human and animal species. The artist builds upon the recent scientific findings that not only the dog species has been domesticated, but domestication that took place during evolution is to be considered mutual. Not only the dog has been mastered by human, but also the dogs have had an active role in “using” the human species for a more comfortable survival. Both species coexist. In the project *Ecce Canis* Maja Smrekar built upon the sense of smell as an interface used to trigger the emotional connection between the species.

*Hybrid Family* is another project in the *K-9\_topology* series. In this performance she nurtured a puppy. By submitting herself to a two and a half months of physiological training she achieved milk production in her breasts. The artist refers to this process as to the process of becoming, of becoming-animal, becoming-woman and becoming m(Other). The project is

deeply rooted in her own experience, as she writes in her blog. In the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium “the liberal capitalism finally struck hard into the newborn Slovenian economy”,<sup>2</sup> so her parents lost their business, house, cars, forests, meadows, wine yards and her father committed suicide. In this regard *Hybrid Family* is her way of resisting the neoliberal power over the bodies and lives of people.

The joining of her egg cell with the somatic dog cell within the project *ARTE-mis* presents the culmination of the *K-9\_topology* series’ investigations of the close and traverse relations between the species.

## 2. Becoming Mother

Maja Smrekar has bought a young puppy, which has been taken away from its primary dog-mother, and has got the artist for the new parent. The new parent has not only taken care of assuring a new home for the puppy as an ordinary dog keeper, but has also assured the nurture in the most possible literal sense, with breast-feeding it. Let us consider the significance of this act more carefully.

With breast-feeding the puppy and the artist get connected biologically, if biologically means through and with investing their own bodies. The artist “hunts nature”. She has not only become a sort of social parent to the puppy, assuring care and protection. Becoming the breast-feeding “parent” to the puppy puts this human dog keeper in a corporeal

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://majasmrekar.org/post-no-1-history-of-tears>> 31. 10. 2016

relationship with the dog.

“Naturally” milk is produced within *the exchange process* between the mother and the child and means a production realized by the mother, yet evoked by the child. Mother’s capacity to produce milk is enabled only with child’s evocation. The production of milk by the woman’s body is thus a process that originates from the tight *connection* between the mother and the child or *the unity* mother-child.

Breast-feeding is a process significant for the mother-child formation, in which the two are mingled together. Julia Kristeva ascertains that in this phase the child does not yet have narcissist attitude, which he or she gets only after the intervention of the third, who becomes the object of mother’s desire. The third breaks apart the diade. According to psychoanalytic analysis this moment signifies the beginning of the process of autonomization or the formation of the self. (Kristeva 1987) In our case we are not paying attention to the moment, in which the formation of the self begins, but to the moment, which is here originally performed, that is in which the mother-child formation gets to be established. The project thus establishes the situation before the moment of quitting the breast-feeding appears, in which the boy is protected against regret that he is no longer a breast-feeding baby or a girl, as ascertained by Simone de Beauvoir, since from then on he will embody his transcendence and his arrogant sovereignty in his sex. (de Beauvoir 2010) If this moment would signify the becoming of the first or the second sex, to paraphrase de Beauvoir, the project performs a “reverse” process of becoming, of becoming the breast-feeding mother for the artist and of becoming the human breast-fed baby for the dog.

Mother and child are in this formation of breast-feeding mingled to such a degree that they exist as an entity. The mother is not *the other* of the child's self, but she is as part of child's own subjectivity, of child's own self.

This moment of unity could also be examined with a reference to the notion of *the Umwelt*, introduced by Jakob von Uexküll in 1934. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century zoologist and one of the founders of ecology Jakob von Uexküll examines the notion of the environment that is bound to an animal. For Uexküll animals don't experience the same world and time. The bee, the tick and the fly that we observe don't move in the same world and don't share the same world with us, the observers. Each *Umwelt* is a closed unity within itself.

For Uexküll there exist also *die Umgebung*, a rather objective environment, but one that changes according to one's perspective, since actually there is no objective space per se, there is only a forest-for-a-woodcutter, a forest-for-a-botanic, a forest-for-a-wanderer, etc. Uexküll does not find much interest in the notion of *die Umgebung*, but offers a very interesting examination of the structure of *die Umwelt*, in which the world and the animal are intrinsically or existentially linked.

Uexküll takes into consideration the case of a tick. The fundamental aspects of the structure of *die Umwelt*, the environments that valid for all animals can be derived from the example of the tick. Out of the egg crawls a not yet fully developed little animal, yet even in this state it can already ambush cold-blooded animals such as lizards, for which it lies in wait. Once the female has copulated, it, the eyeless and deaf creature, finds its way to

the warm-blooded animal from which it pumps a stream of warm blood. Uexküll ascertains that the tick uses the sense of smell and has no sense of taste. It takes in any liquid, so long as it has the right temperature. For the tick it is existentially relevant to get the meal: after getting it, it will fall to the ground, lay its eggs and die. The tick gets into a “functional cycle as a subject and the mammal as its object.” (von Uexküll 2010, p. 50)

In *die Umwelt* there are carriers of characteristics or significance, in semiology these would be marks [*Merkmalträger*], which are also carriers of meaning [*Bedeutungsträger*]. These carriers are everything that interests an animal. An animal has receptive organs that are assigned to perceive the mark [*Merkorgan*] and to react to it [*Wirkorgan*].

Uexküll believes that in the manner he explains the interconnectedness of the subject with the object in *die Umwelt* biology has finally connected with Kant’s philosophy by emphasizing the decisive role of the subject, because there can be no time and no space without a living subject. (Ibid., p. 52)

In analogy with Uexküll we can postulate that in the case of the child and the mother, the child undertakes a similar role as the tick. The functional cycle of the breast-feeding makes the mother the object of the child in the sense that she is required for the child to survive, she is the child’s host, the nourisher, the food, the existential expansion of the parasite child. Together they form this significant environment, *die Umwelt*, which is a closed unity within itself. With not being part of it, we don’t share their world. And there is one very relevant ascertainment we have to formulate in this moment: there is no mother per se, there is no objective mother, the

mother is the mother-for-the-child. The fact that the artist voluntarily undertakes the “objectification” of herself for the puppy with becoming mother-for-the-puppy through breast-feeding, as well as through becoming a sort of the puppy’s social parent, opens a new dimension of the project. One may not forget that the dog keeper is legally responsible for assuring proper care for the animal. The role of the caretaker is somehow similar to the role of the parent, however the dog is considered as the dog keeper’s property, an object with an ability to suffer, whereat suffering may not be caused. Yet, punishment in the case of violation of rights in case of the child and the puppy speaks most about the hierarchical difference between human and animal, as consent in the society. The difference between the two species has been recognized within historical materialism, as ascertained by de Beauvoir, which assured a relevant recognition that “[h]umanity is not an animal species; it is a historical reality.” (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 87) Therefore, if Maja Smrekar is becoming mother-for-the-puppy this makes a significant dimension of this process of becoming, in which she is simultaneously becoming an animal-mother. With objectifying herself for the dog, she is resisting the politics over the animals, considering the domestic animals as proprietary objects of humans. The hierarchical differentiation of human and animal species is here subverted.

### **3. Becoming Animal, Becoming Other**

Saying that one is becoming an animal seems senseless since man *is* an animal, a speaking animal, if we agree with Jacques Derrida. (Derrida 2008)

For Martin Heidegger however there exists a difference between animal and human and stone; it lies in the relation of each of them to the world: “the stone is worldless [*weltlos*]; the animal is poor in the world [*weltarm*]; man is world-forming [*weltbildend*].” The origin of Heidegger’s consideration on the relation of the being and the world is to be found in Uexküll: what Uexküll defined as marks or carriers of meaning, Heidegger calls disinhibitors and what Uexküll defined as *die Umwelt*, Heidegger calls disinhibiting ring. Heidegger examines the relationship of the animal to its disinhibiting ring further in order to define what he called the “poverty in the world” significant for the animals. Heidegger differentiates between the animal existence in the world and the mode of the human world. Mode of existence, proper to an animal, is signified in its relation with the disinhibitor – it is in a state of *captivation*. As an example of captivation Heidegger presents a case of a bee described already by Uexküll. A bee, placed in front of a cup full of honey, begun to suck it, then its abdomen is cut away, yet the bee happily continues to suck while the honey visibly streams out of its open abdomen. The animal is captivated, stunned, but also taken away, blocked [*benommen*], as well as taken in, absorbed [*eingnommen*]. The animal is essentially captivated and wholly absorbed in its own disinhibitor. It cannot truly *act in relation to it*, it can only behave. (Agamben 2004, p. 52)

The animal is being-alongside-itself, the animal does not recognize the situation, the bee does not recognize the presence of too much honey neither the absence of its abdomen. It is *taken by* [*hingenommen*] the food. “This being taken is only possible where there is an instinctive ‘towards ...’

[*treibhaftes Hin-zu*]. Yet this being taken in such a drivenness also excludes the possibility of any recognition of any being-present-at-hand [*Vorhandensein*]. It is precisely being taken by its food that prevents the animal from taking up a position over and against [*sich gegenüberzustellen*] this food.” (Heidegger 1995, p. 263; Heidegger 1983, p. 383)

The baby is *taken by* the mother’s milk. When the animal comes in contact with its disinhibitor, it gets taken by [*hingenommen*] the food, it is captivated, because the “very possibility of apprehending something as something is *withheld* [*genommen*] from the animal, and it is withheld from it not merely here and now, but withheld in the sense that it is ‘not given at all’”. (Ibid. 1995, p. 253; *ibid.* 1983, p. 269) We can make an analogy with the captivation of the animal and the breast-feeding child. The breast-feeding baby gets into disinhibiting ring. The baby is driven toward the breast. It gets into instinctive drivenness “toward”. Being taken by the milk prevents the child to take up a position over the milk or apprehending something as something. In this case, however, the subject experiencing the “poverty in the world” is not the animal as in the case discussed by Heidegger, but the child, which is a pre-state of human being.

The captivated subject, the breast-feeding child, does not, according to the presented Heidegger’s theory, fulfill the criteria for the human being. The difference between man and animal lies in human’s capability to act in relation to it or to act against the world according to Heidegger. It would not be correct to say that this child is becoming human through the process of breast-feeding or this performance. Recalling Derrida saying that man is a speaking animal, let us make a reflection upon the *communication aspect*.

Uexküll refers to the decisive role of the subject enlightened by Kant when conceptualizing the notion of *die Umwelt* to show how space and time depend on the subject, the animal in that case. With Kant we get the notion of existence of things *for* the subject. So how does the baby exist for itself? The environment, time and space are formed according to the subject, they exist *for* the subject. But as being in the state of captivation the child is not capable of apprehending something as something. Accordingly, it is not capable of apprehending itself. The same holds for the animal. There is a certain difference between the baby and the grown up. If man is a speaking animal and other animals are not speaking, the baby is a non-speaking animal, the animal as all other non-speaking animals. The mother, on the contrary, is a speaking animal.

One might say, the mother is capable of reaching the state of being-for-herself. She is thus a conscious being, whereat consciousness would make the difference between human and animal. Jean-Luc Nancy disagrees that consciousness is the criterion and claims there is no difference between man and animal. There is no consciousness, but there is *exchange*.<sup>3</sup>

Let us consider the breast-feeding performance as a *communication event*. Jean-Luc Nancy recalls Edmund Husserl's reflection upon the silent voice of the self, talking to itself, listening to itself. The self communicates with the self. One aims to be present to oneself. Yet, to see oneself can only happen if there is a difference between the presence one and the presence

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy in a Ph.D. seminar for the Humanities program, Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

two. There is an “Augenblick”, a moment, it takes a while. The self starts to go to the self, however the self will never find itself. There is a *différance* at work. With the term Jacques Derrida refers to the double meaning implied in the root of it: French verb *differe* means *to be different of* or *to delay something*. The delay of the *différance* is an infinite delay. To be becomes suspended. It is a continuous, never ending process of *becoming*.

If the baby does not have a capability to apprehend itself as itself, to be present to itself, it does not even start to go to the self. Mother on the contrary, has the ability to aim to be present to herself as the mother. Yet, this to be, the identity, is suspended. The mother gets in a continuous process of becoming mother.

Considering the existence of an identity, Hegel introduced the notion of an *other*. The relationship between the two, the mother and the baby, is essential for the establishment of their identities. It is the baby that makes the mother the mother. According to Hegel, something is existence, whereat the relationship to others determinates this existence: “[s]omething is a determinate existence, this something is in relationship to *others*, and also to a perceiver among these others.” (Hegel 2010, p. 64)

Identity is being established not essentially, but through a differentiation process in relation to that what something is not, i.e. through negative relational defining. Something is defined through relations and differentiations, negations (and confirmations).

Furthermore, for Hegel, something is also *becoming*. The two moments are not that of abstract being and nothing, but an existence, something, and another existence, which is the negative of something. “The

other moment is equally an existent, but determined as the negative of something – an *other*. As becoming, something is a transition, the moments of which are themselves something, and for that reason it is an *alteration* – a becoming that has already become *concrete*.” (Ibid., p. 90)

With breast-feeding the puppy, the artist positions herself in a kinship relationship with the dog. She gets in a process of differentiation and of becoming the negative of herself as the speaking animal, that is the non-speaking animal. And the same time the puppy gets in a process of becoming human. Humanity enters its differentiating identity, an identity of a non-speaking animal, which an animal that is not speaking, having the speaking animal as its other. This equalization of the two processes of becoming is significant for the artist. Agamben’s finding that “[t]he total humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man” (Agamben 2006, p. 77) is a relevant reference in the *K-9\_topology*.<sup>4</sup>

In short we will focus upon the political implications of this equalization. But first we need to enlighten the striving of the artist for de-hierarchization, since the two species do not enjoy political equality. The original positioning of the artist lies in making herself a disinhibitor for the puppy. In this disinhibiting ring she does not take over the “higher” state of being as regards the relation to the world, but a “lower” one, as far as one can gather a hierarchical positioning of the human, animal and the stone in Heidegger. She enters a transubstantiation process of becoming a “defined”

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<sup>4</sup> <[http://majasmrekar.org/k-9\\_topology](http://majasmrekar.org/k-9_topology)> 1. 11. 2016

being, an animal, as Heidegger comprehended the animal. At the same time the animal gets “privileged” with the transition to human.

The becoming a non-speaking animal is however at work also in the mother-child formation through breastfeeding if we infer from Heidegger that the baby is as well a “defined” being as other animals. It is the state and the relation to the disinhibitor that defines the being as “defined” or “non-defined”. The “defined” being is not in a state in which the subject would be able to apprehend something as something, itself as itself, or would aim to reach the comprehension of itself. In this state the subject lets itself to the instinctive drivenness “toward”, *it is the state of captivation*. With putting herself in this state Maja Smrekar can discard the “privilege” of human to be a “non-defined” being. Because, as this project demonstrates, the mother is not a mere host that harbors the parasite, the breast-feeder, but the giver of the suck also gets captivated by the breast-feeder in this functional cycle. The giver of the suck is dependent on sucking, as is the whole process of breast-feeding dependent on a breast-feeder. The existence of this breast-feeding *Umwelt* is established on breast-feeding, since without sucking there is no milk. Therefore, it is relevant to conceive the *Umwelt* of the breast-feeding mother and the child, as well as of the *Umwelt* of the artist and the puppy as an *exchange circuit*.

For Maja Smrekar this physiological captivation is of extreme importance. It becomes her means of resistance: “Becoming (- animal) is a molecular process: in my case the molecular process of my pituitary glands being so much triggered by systematic breastpumping, they would get connected with hormone prolactin to accumulate milk in my body. As a side

effect of that triggering, hormone oxytocine increases, which evokes empathy.”<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Biopolitical Resistance: Becoming Bare Life

“I hunt nature and culture hunts me,”<sup>6</sup> says the artist with the title of another *K-9\_topology* performance. Aiming at becoming “nature” is aiming at escaping culture, as the nothing of culture, whereat culture is the management of life, the biopolitical. Maja Smrekar aims at becoming “zoē”, bare life, the domain once reserved only for the animals. Yet, what can we today say of the distinction between zoē and bios? In Giorgio Agamben’s observation anthropological machine produced the *humanitas* by de-ciding every time between man and animal. There is a “total management” of biological life at work today, that is, of the very animality of man. Humanity “has taken upon itself the mandate of the total management of its own animality”. (Agamben 2006, p. 77)

Maja Smrekar responds to the situation, when bio-power is being exercised on and through the bodies, as ascertained by Michel Foucault. “As an artist I feel I need to use my own body (and bodies of my dogs) to re-gain the position of power. To re-gain my body. Our bodies.”<sup>7</sup> The project of becoming (m)Other is to be comprehended as a biopolitical statement or

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<sup>5</sup> <<http://majasmrekar.org/post-no-2-involution-of-m-mother>> 19. 10. 2016

<sup>6</sup> The title of another Maja Smrekar’s performance with wolves.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://majasmrekar.org/post-no-2-involution-of-m-mother>> 19. 10. 2016

intervention with the investment of artist's body with the purpose to re-gain the position of power and her own animality, i.e. as an act of resistance to bio-power.

Her artistic gesture is additionally to be read as a response to neoliberal capitalism: "The global economy threatens to homogenize people by means of the lowest common denominator – the ability to consume". The artist feels the urge to resist with using her own economy of emotions: "Therefore I am submitting myself to the dog-human kinship relationship as a radical intimate action of 'returning home'."<sup>8</sup>

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# *Aesthetics, Scientism, and Ordinary Language: A Comparison between Wittgenstein and Heidegger*

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ABSTRACT. Wittgenstein and Heidegger's objections against the possibility of an aesthetic science were influential on different sides of the analytic/continental divide. Heidegger's anti-scientism is tied up with a critique of the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic experience. This leads him to an alethic view of artworks which precedes and exceeds any possible aesthetic reduction. Wittgenstein too rejects the relevance of causal explanations, psychological or physiological, to aesthetic questions. His appeal to ordinary language provides the backdrop for his critique of the philosophical tradition's focus on a narrow range of evaluative aesthetic terms, thus excluding most of the language we ordinarily employ in the relevant cases. The main aim of this paper is to compare Heidegger with Wittgenstein, showing that: (a) there are significant parallels to be drawn between Wittgenstein and Heidegger's anti-scientism about aesthetics, and (b) their anti-scientism leads them towards partly divergent criticisms of what I will call 'aestheticism'. The divergence is mainly due to a disagreement concerning appeals to ordinary language. Thus situating the two philosophers' positions facilitates a possible critical dialogue between analytic and continental approaches in aesthetics.

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## 1. Introduction

There is one particular common aspect of Wittgenstein and Heidegger's discussions of aesthetics which has, to the best of my knowledge, so far been overlooked by scholarly debate. Though the similarities of their positions against scientism may come as no surprise to anyone who has an interest in their views on aesthetics, scholars have not hitherto undertaken a detailed comparison of their positions against the possibility of establishing an aesthetic science.<sup>2</sup> Intriguingly, both thinkers' relevant critical commentaries on aesthetics were first publicly delivered during the 1930s. For Heidegger, the central texts I will look to are 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (Heidegger, 2002) delivered as lectures in 1935 and 1936, and the closely related lectures on Nietzsche (Heidegger, 1991) delivered between 1936 and 1940. As far as Wittgenstein is concerned, I will discuss one of his few sustained investigations into aesthetics, the 1938 'Lectures on Aesthetics' (Wittgenstein, 1967).<sup>3</sup> Chronologically, the relevant texts on aesthetics and psychology by Wittgenstein and Heidegger both fall into

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Mulhall's (2014, 156-195) comparative account of the two philosopher's aesthetics does not explicitly address their positions concerning an aesthetic science. Efforts to compare Wittgenstein and Heidegger's general outlooks have, nonetheless, included relevant comparisons of their views on the relationship between philosophy and science; see e.g. Carman, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the 1938 lectures are preceded not only by the well-known, yet brief, mentions of the identity of ethics and aesthetics in Wittgenstein's early notebooks and the *Tractatus*, but also by various discussions of Aesthetics in the notes taken by G. E. Moore of Wittgenstein's (2016) lectures at Cambridge between 1930-1933.

periods when some change of outlook was underway (though scholars have disputed as to whether, and to what extent, these changes of outlook were drastic).

This paper will demonstrate that in Heidegger and Wittgenstein's discussions of the origin of the work of art there is not only a parallel rejection of the possibility of establishing a science of aesthetics, but also a concern about the relation that such a science would have to psychology and physiology. Thus what follows is first of all an attempt to compare Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's points of view. Having shown that they are partly in proximity, however, I will take a comparative approach in order to argue that Wittgenstein's view of the mismatch between the relevant ordinary ways of speaking and the limited vocabulary of aesthetics is at odds with Heidegger's move away from ordinary language in his attempt to look at conditions of possibility for aesthetic concepts.

Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein's philosophical predecessors (including Frege, Russell, and Husserl) were, arguably, responding to the rise of experimental psychology as a discipline distinct from philosophy (see Kusch 1995; Nasim 2008). The problem of demarcating between the two had been central in philosophical debates during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This question was not simply part of the background in both thinkers' philosophical development; it was also of concern throughout their careers. Heidegger's work was, from its outset, concerned with extruding 'psychologism' from a version of philosophy that is purified from it. Similarly, Wittgenstein crucially distinguishes between philosophy and psychology throughout his work (even in those later instances where the

work involves a kind of philosophical psychology (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1982, 1992; see Brusadin, 2017, pp. 283-284)).<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I will discuss Heidegger's criticism of the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic appreciation, which furthermore includes an account of the artwork's resistance against psychologistic or physiologistic reductions. Wittgenstein, as I shall show, has a similar account of the irrelevance of psychology to aesthetics. This paper will demonstrate that there is a certain tension between Wittgenstein and Heidegger's contrasting approaches to what I shall call 'aestheticism'.

Wittgenstein and Heidegger's lines of influence, within aesthetics as in philosophy more generally, have tended to lead towards different sides of the analytic-continental divide.<sup>5</sup> By drawing parallels between their brands of anti-scientism, while also making explicit their particular points of divergence, this paper can hopefully facilitate future critical dialogue between the divergent traditions influenced by each thinker. For example, the current state of debate in analytic aesthetics is roughly divided between those who accept various attempts at offering causal justification for aesthetic statements, and those who accept Wittgenstein's criticism of such projects (see e.g. Currie, 2003). Though historically examining the latter Wittgensteinian position, this paper will not engage in a systematic attempt to defend it (or, for that matter, Heidegger's parallel position) in light of

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<sup>4</sup> Different subsequent versions of anti-psychologism were developed partly in an attempt to interpret Wittgenstein (see Bäckström, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> I further discuss issues concerning the viability of this notion in Vrahimis (2018) and (2013).

recent controversies. In other words, the primary goal of this paper is to compare Heidegger with Wittgenstein, rather than highlight their worth for contemporary aesthetics. In particular, what I aim to show is that, (a) despite, to the best of my knowledge, being ignored in the relevant scholarship, Wittgenstein and Heidegger's positions with regard to what I will call 'aestheticism' parallel each other, and that (b) Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's brands of anti-scientism in aesthetics nonetheless lead them towards partly divergent criticisms of 'aestheticism'.

## **2. The Historical Background: Aesthetics and Psychologism**

At its birth in the 1870s, experimental psychology promised to offer a new scientific way to study the human mind. Among the consequences of the creation of experimental psychology, and the severing of psychology away from philosophy, was a crisis with regard to philosophy's self-conception. Given that the new experimental psychology had not been strictly delimited, it was unclear what could, and what could not, become its object of study. For a while during the end of the nineteenth century, it seemed possible that psychology could end up providing the data on the basis of which the majority of traditional philosophical questions would be answered.

Franz Brentano, the founder of the phenomenological tradition in which Heidegger's work belongs, had seen what he called 'descriptive psychology' as the ground on which aesthetics could be rendered into a science. Both Brentano (e.g. 2002) and his disciple Edmund Husserl (e.g. 2001) agreed that aesthetics, as well as ethics and logic, were what they

called ‘practical disciplines’. ‘Practical disciplines’ cannot themselves provide justification for the norms they produce, which in the case of aesthetic norms concerns an account of the correctness of taste and the production of the beautiful (see Huemer, 2009). Brentano thought that such norms can only be justified by being correctly connected with a prior discipline, one that is purely descriptive. Whereas Brentano thought ‘descriptive psychology’ could play such a role, Husserl’s anti-psychologism led him to see what he called ‘phenomenology’ as grounding the practical philosophical disciplines (thus paving the path towards philosophy as a ‘rigorous science’).

The Husserlian project of developing an anti-psychologistic phenomenological grounding for the philosophical disciplines is also one of the starting points of Heidegger’s (1914) work (see also Kusch, 1995, p. 121). The distinction of his own approach from biologism, anthropologism, and psychologism forms a crucial part of the introduction to *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1996, pp. 42-47). It is indeed the danger looming in the fusion between psychologism and a form of biologism that constitutes the backdrop of Heidegger’s understanding of the pitfalls of aesthetics, both in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s ‘physiological’ aesthetics, and in his discussion of aesthetics in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’.

### **3. Heidegger’s Overcoming of Aesthetics**

In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger’s discussion of artworks is at its root an attempt to oppose a particular reductionist account of artworks.

The particular kind of reductionism that Heidegger addresses allows us to slip to a further chain of positivistic reductions. According to Heidegger, the first step that makes the subsequent chain possible is one that involves the relation between art and aesthetics:

Almost as soon as specialized thinking about art and the artist began, such reflections were referred to as 'aesthetic'. Aesthetics treated the artwork as an object, as indeed an object of αἴσθησις, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense. These days, such apprehension is called an 'experience'. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to inform us about its essential nature. Experience is the standard-giving source not only for the appreciation and enjoyment of art but also for its creation. Everything is experience. But perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying proceeds so slowly that it takes several centuries. (Heidegger, 2002, p. 50)

According to Heidegger (2002, 50-52), then, aesthetics becomes the particularly modern and specialised philosophical subject which takes a certain type of experience (and, following Hegel, the particular type of experience that can be induced by art works) as its object. This, as Heidegger points out, is a historically contingent form of understanding of what art is, and only exists within a particular form of Western culture in the modern age. For Heidegger, this understanding of art is derivative of a particular early modern philosophical conception of subjectivity and objecthood. In Heidegger's understanding of the history of Western philosophy, modern aesthetics is born from Descartes' reconfiguration of

the philosophical significance of the subject (but see Shockey, 2012).

Modern philosophy, after Descartes, opens up the possibility of seeing the work of art in terms of aesthetics, and thus in terms of subjective aesthetic experience. This reduction is presupposed by the further chain of reductions which Heidegger discusses. The aesthetic reduction of the artwork may be followed by the reduction of aesthetics to psychology (in the vein of Brentano). From there onwards, the path is paved for the further reduction of psychologistic aesthetics to physiology.

According to Heidegger, once we have defined the ‘aesthetike episteme’ as ‘the [subject’s] relation of feeling toward art [*qua* object] and its bringing-forth’ (Heidegger, 1991, p. 78), then the road is paved towards its reduction to psychology. Furthermore, once this path is treaded on, then why should the psychologist be limited to giving first-person descriptive accounts of the relevant ‘aesthetic’ feelings? Is there something to prevent the further reduction of a descriptive psychological aesthetics to a genetic account of brain states or other bodily states involved in aesthetic feelings (now reduced to psychological states)?

Heidegger attempts to imagine a possible defence of such a reduction in the interpretation of Nietzsche he develops during the 1930s. His main task, here, however, is primarily interpretative: he aims to argue against interpreting Nietzsche as a proponent of a crude biologistic understanding of the ‘physiology of art’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Heidegger’s work on Nietzsche

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<sup>6</sup> Heidegger here unconventionally interprets Kant’s aesthetics in a manner which exempts it from the overall Heideggerian critique of modern aesthetics (see Torsen 2016),

does not argue against reductionism per se, but rather against a reductionist interpretation of Nietzsche.

If what is sought after is something like a Heideggerian argument against reductionism, then the place to look is Heidegger's discussion of aesthetics in 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. The transcendental argument we find Heidegger offering there does not, however, attack psychological or physiological reductionism in aesthetics, but rather something even more fundamental. I shall hereafter refer to Heidegger's target, namely the aesthetic reduction of the work of art, by using the (perhaps awkward) term 'aestheticism'.<sup>7</sup>

What Heidegger has to say about aesthetics relies on his previous work, e.g. in *Being and Time*, where he had developed a sustained critique of specialisation in philosophy and science that is a consequence of Western metaphysics. Heidegger's thesis (derived, to a large extent, in critical dialogue with the Brentanian conception of science discussed above) claims

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while blaming Schopenhauer for interpreting Kant in a way which paves the path towards psychologistic and biologicistic reductionism.

Interestingly, Appelqvist (2018) has shown that Wittgenstein's commentary on aesthetics also involves a Kantian conception of aesthetic normativity. Thus, interestingly, both figures could be seen as working out different renditions of a broadly speaking Kantian aesthetics. Schopenhauer is a point of divergence: as opposed to Heidegger's rejection of Schopenhauer's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics, Schopenhauer's views influenced Wittgenstein's overall outlook, including his views concerning aesthetics (see e.g. Glock 1999).

<sup>7</sup> By using this term I mean to suggest a parallel with 'psychologism', rather than any association with the movement in favour of 'art for art's sake'.

that any specialised field of study into one particular type of being must somehow rely on a prior understanding of Being in general. Such an understanding is necessarily presupposed by each type of specialist inquiry into some being, though it may not be provided by the enquiry itself. This leads Heidegger to content that in order to enter into modes of questioning about beings, these specialised forms of inquiry are required to become oblivious to fundamental questions about Being in general. A forgetfulness of the ground from which they stem is necessary for their existence.<sup>8</sup>

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger applies this overall approach to aesthetics, which is a specialised way of studying one particular type of being (and, as such, an outgrowth of Western metaphysics). Heidegger's conviction seems to be that aesthetics, *qua* specialisation, reduces the work of art, which exceeds its field of study, to the type of entity which can become an object for aesthetics. In this reduction, aesthetics has to forget about everything in the artwork that cannot become its object of study. Heidegger thinks that aesthetics thus becomes oblivious of the most fundamental workings of the artwork. The work of art is not primarily an object for aesthetics, but something altogether different.

For Heidegger, what specialised enquiry (whether in the guise of aesthetics, psychology, or physiology) into the artwork fails to capture has to do with a particular relation between artwork and truth. Heidegger, as is well known, sets aside the traditional philosophical conception of truth as

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<sup>8</sup> Note here that this concern for grounding is connected to Brentano's and Husserl's concerns for the descriptive phenomenological grounding of the 'practical disciplines'.

*adequatio rei et intellectus*, replacing it with a view of truth as a process of disclosedness (see Heidegger, 1996, pp. 204-220). In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, he traces this back to the Greek notion of *aletheia*, which he (questionably) interprets etymologically as ‘the unconcealment of beings’ (Heidegger, 2002, p. 16). According to Heidegger, works of art involve this process of unconcealment, which precedes and exceeds any aesthetic reduction.

As Heidegger would later point out, his project in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ should be understood as an attempt to *overcome* the Western tradition of philosophical aesthetics, which is in turn seen by Heidegger as an aspect of his overall project of overcoming metaphysics.

The question of the origin of the work of art [...] stands in the most intrinsic connection to the task of overcoming aesthetics, i.e., overcoming a particular conception of beings—as objects of representation. The overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical confrontation with metaphysics as such. Metaphysics contains the basic Western position towards beings and thus also the ground of the previous essence of Western art and of its works. Overcoming metaphysics means giving free rein to the priority of the question of the truth of being over every ‘ideal’, ‘causal’, ‘transcendental’, or ‘dialectical’ explanation of beings. The overcoming of metaphysics is not a repudiation of philosophy hitherto, but is a leap into its first beginning, although without wanting to reinstate that beginning. (Heidegger, 2012, p. 396)

In other words, what Heidegger is concerned with in his discussion of aesthetics is a way of reaching towards some original primordial essence of the work of art (see Dill, 2017). Reaching out to this origin is only possible once aesthetics is overcome. Furthermore, the retrieval of this origin of the artwork is somehow related to his overall project of overcoming metaphysics. The reduction of the artwork to an object of aesthetic experience is also its subsumption under a particular metaphysical conception of things and of beings. The origin of the artwork is something non-metaphysical, which he would elsewhere call a 'saving power' (see Dill, 2017, pp. 3-4). What he calls *aletheia*, the process of unconcealment that the artwork allows for, is not graspable in terms of aesthetic experience. Rather, the entire field of aesthetics forgetfully covers over some original aspect of artworks that Heidegger seeks to indicate in his attempt to overcome aesthetics.<sup>9</sup>

The above is the gist of Heidegger's transcendental argument against aesthetics. The argument is transcendental in the following sense: what aesthetics leaves out in the reduction of the artwork to aesthetic experience is, according to Heidegger, also what makes aesthetics as a discipline possible. The condition of possibility for aesthetics is the work of art which precedes aesthetics. The artwork exceeds its reduction to an object of study

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the positive account of the artwork that follows Heidegger's negative attitude towards 'aestheticism' remains incomplete. For example, Heidegger nowhere clearly states exactly what type of artwork has in mind as relevant to his project, and scholars disagree as to how we should envisage such artworks (see e.g. Dill, 2017).

for aesthetics.

Heidegger here reverses the process of grounding aesthetics in a prior discipline such as psychology or physiology. He undertakes this reversal by pointing to a specific process at work in the artwork itself as that which makes aesthetics possible. Heidegger does not ask us to give up on aesthetics, but simply to see that aesthetics is: a) a historically situated, modern way of thinking about art, and one among many possible others, b) a discipline that is dependent on a prior understanding of the work of art, c) a reduction of the work of art that does not exhaustively account for its workings, and d) a discipline that is somehow more viable once a), b) and c) are acknowledged as part of its self-understanding. Given a)-d) above, though, there is nothing that prevents Heidegger from accepting the reduction of aesthetics to psychology or physiology. Though his criticism consists in showing that aesthetics relies on a reduction of the artwork to an object of aesthetic experience, there is nothing in it that says why, once the reduction is acknowledged as partial, it is impossible to reduce aesthetics, *qua* reduction (rather than the work of art itself), to (physiology *via*) psychology.

#### **4. Wittgenstein's Objections against a Science of Aesthetics**

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Wittgenstein is also concerned with the question of the relation between aesthetics and psychology or physiology. He diagnoses a general misapprehension of aesthetics as a kind of science, which has a particular worrying application, that of the attempt to answer

aesthetic questions through psychology:

People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything – all the mysteries of Art – will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, this is roughly it.<sup>10</sup>

Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way.  
(Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 17)

Notice that, by contrast to Heidegger, the question of the relation between aesthetics and psychology that Wittgenstein addresses is not directly that of the *reducibility* of aesthetics to psychology.<sup>11</sup> Rather, more specifically, Wittgenstein is concerned with the language in which questions are posed and answered. Wittgenstein attempts to cure us of the type of misunderstanding about the nature of aesthetic questions that occurs once psychological experiments are thought capable of providing answers to them. Given Wittgenstein's construal of psychology as a search for causal

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<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein repeats his ridiculing remarks on the idea of the reduction of aesthetics to psychology in the following lecture, where he says it is 'very funny – very funny indeed' (1967, p. 19). Perhaps Wittgenstein is involved in self-ridicule here directed at his own failed experimental attempt to respond an aesthetic question (see Wittgenstein, 2016, pp. 358-359).

<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein may, nonetheless, be interpreted as arguing against psychologistic reductionism (see e.g. Brusadin, 2017, p. 284).

mechanisms,<sup>12</sup> his divorcing of aesthetic descriptions from psychological explanations revolves around a discussion of the different roles played by causal explanation in either case.

Wittgenstein notes that the kinds of questions involved in aesthetics (of the type, e.g., that answer the question ‘why?’ as previously noted) are of a completely different type than those involved in psychology. Someone could respond to the question ‘why did Jones like artwork x?’ with some particular causal account that attempts to ultimately explain Jones’ aesthetic response by appeal to neurological facts about the activity of Jones’ brain (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 20). One could even give the answer in such a way as ‘might enable us to predict what a particular person would like and dislike’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 20) (perhaps one of the more fashionable topics in recent applications of psychology). One could repeat an experiment, such as playing a piece of music to different subjects, under some particular drug, at a laboratory, in order to get a statistical result regarding the effect of the music (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 21).<sup>13</sup> This could result in a list of ‘concomitant causal phenomena’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 17) or mechanisms that explain why human brains respond in such and such a manner to this particular piece of music. Yet that would not be an answer to the real question that had been posed. When one asks ‘why’ in this case, what is sought after is not information about an underlying psychological or physiological mechanism that determines one’s aesthetic preferences and

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<sup>12</sup> See also Wittgenstein (2016, p. 342).

<sup>13</sup> See also Wittgenstein (2016, pp. 358-359), where he describes a similar experiment he once himself conducted.

judgements. A causal explanation simply does not provide an answer to the aesthetic question that had been posed.

Thus neither Wittgenstein's nor Heidegger's accounts preclude the possibility of conducting psychological experiments which could give an informative account of the causal mechanisms involved in the perception, response to, creation of, and other interactions with works of art. Wittgenstein, like Heidegger, however, shows that a psychological analysis of the experience of a work of art would be completely unrelated to a significant aspect of that experience. What is needed, in both Wittgenstein and Heidegger's view, is a clear separation between the task at hand when doing psychology and physiology (i.e. that of providing causal explanations), from some task involving significant interactions with works of art (whether those be the aesthetic responses described by Wittgenstein, or the alethic participations in artworks described by Heidegger). Unlike Heidegger, Wittgenstein gives a compelling explanation of how particular manners of speech lead to the mistaken view that psychology could possibly attempt to solve problems in aesthetics by offering causal explanations. Causal explanations, Wittgenstein shows, simply will not do the required work for responding to aesthetic puzzles.

## **5. Wittgenstein and Heidegger against 'Aestheticism'**

At first glance, Wittgenstein and Heidegger seem to disagree on one fundamental issue: whereas Wittgenstein appears content to invoke a separation between 'aesthetic' and 'psychological' questions, Heidegger

wants to show how the work of art exceeds its reduction to an ‘aesthetic experience’. Thus Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s accounts, though parallel up to this point, might falsely appear divergent in the following manner: while Wittgenstein’s account seems primarily directed against aesthetic psychologism (or any other forms of aesthetic scientism), Heidegger’s main emphasis lies on overcoming what I have previously called ‘aestheticism’ (i.e. the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic experience). Nonetheless, upon closer inspection, Wittgenstein might turn out to also have an interesting response to ‘aestheticism’.

Wittgenstein notices that the kinds of terms usually employed in philosophical discussions of ‘aesthetics’ are, in fact, not those terms that we are accustomed to using in our ordinary discussions about works of art.

It is remarkable that in real life, when aesthetic judgements are made, aesthetic adjectives such as ‘beautiful’, ‘fine’, etc., play hardly any role at all. [...] The words you use are more akin to ‘right’ and ‘correct’. (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 3)

This view, one which frames the discussion of aesthetics and art in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, at least partly accounts for the phenomenon of aesthetic discourse’s irrelevance to the appreciation or creation of artworks that Heidegger observed. In this we find the Wittgensteinian construal of what with Heidegger we had called ‘aestheticism’: it is the restriction of the vocabulary we employ when talking of art works only to those terms traditionally discussed by philosophical aesthetics (such as ‘beautiful’,

‘ugly’, ‘fine’, ‘sublime’, etc).<sup>14</sup> Misleadingly, the terms which philosophical aesthetics primarily discusses are evaluative terms rather than, for example, regulative terms such as ‘correct’ or ‘right’ (as in the abovementioned quote). Thus, forgetting the multitude of terms employed, and games played, in ordinary language, philosophical aesthetics focuses on a very narrow array of terms. Whereas aesthetics is in fact complex, philosophers mistakenly think it to be simple. Thus, forgetting the multitude of terms we ordinarily employ, philosophical aesthetics focuses on terms largely irrelevant to ordinary usage (e.g. in our responses to art). Whereas aesthetics is a complex field, philosophers in the grasp of ‘aestheticism’ artificially oversimplify it.

Wittgenstein has a related point of criticism arrived at through his analysis of the employment of language in philosophical aesthetics. When debate in aesthetics narrowly focuses on terms such as ‘beautiful’, it presupposes a kind of essentialism concerning their definition. In other words, what is commonly sought in traditional philosophical discussions of beauty is a necessary and sufficient definition of the term that is applicable to its use in all contexts. Yet, as Wittgenstein painstakingly points out in his analysis, we use such terms ‘in a hundred different games’ (2016, p. 335), in various manners which defy any essentialist attempt to reach a univocal definition. Essentialism oversimplifies the complexity involved in the multiplicity of contexts in which we employ aesthetic terms (broadly

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<sup>14</sup> Note that in this Wittgensteinian construal the question is not that of the reducibility of one discipline to another (as found in Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger), but rather about the limitations and confusions of the relevant vocabularies.

conceived).

As Wittgenstein points out from the beginning of his lecture (1967, p. 1), aesthetics is traditionally misunderstood as being more narrow than it should be understood to be once correctly conceived.<sup>15</sup> To allow an expanded vocabulary (including e.g. regulative, as well as evaluative, terms) to enter into the domain of aesthetics would entail extending it much further the philosophical tradition's oversimplified conception. The overall framework in which Wittgenstein proposes this is an attempted therapy for the philosophical obsession with simplification. One example of the temptation to simplify is that which takes place when the complexity of aesthetic language is narrowed down to the limited vocabulary employed by debates in philosophical aesthetics.

In partial agreement with Heidegger, Wittgenstein's appeal to the complexity of an expanded aesthetic vocabulary shows that the problem with 'aestheticism', construed as a favouring of a limited aesthetic vocabulary, would be its irrelevance to our ordinary ways of speaking about artworks. If one were to imagine a person that is, for some reason, restricted to speaking only in aesthetic terms, it would become apparent that their discussion of artworks would not go very far. It might, perhaps, go deep into questions of defining the terms, or deciding when to apply a term correctly or not. It is easy to see that this kind of discourse will soon become very remote from any discussion about actual artworks.

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed account of the significance of aesthetics to the later Wittgenstein's overall conception of philosophy, see Day (2017).

In Wittgenstein's case, the remedy for this kind of 'aestheticism' does not involve, like in Heidegger's case, a further shift away from our ordinary ways of speaking. According to a Wittgensteinian diagnosis, Heidegger's fault would lie in his attempt to express what had been inexpressible in the terms employed by aesthetics by using an obscure philosophical terminology that attempts to dig beneath aesthetic terms. For example, for Heidegger, 'form' and 'matter', as employed in aesthetics, are only manifestations of a prior working of the artwork which he sees as a clash between 'world' and 'earth' (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 22-38).

There are three interrelated criticisms against Heidegger's position that can be made from Wittgenstein's perspective. In the first place, Heidegger's position presupposes an essentialist conception of the aesthetic terms it attempts to dig beneath. This, as Wittgenstein shows, fails to address one of the basic problems faced by 'aestheticism', namely its failure to acknowledge that the terms it discusses have manifold uses in different games. Heidegger's essentialist attempt to uncover the conditions of possibility for aesthetic terms presupposes that the terms are univocal in all contexts of use (and thus preceded by the prior terms Heidegger uncovers). Wittgenstein's examination of the ordinary uses of aesthetic terms is meant to show such essentialism to be untenable. Here Heidegger is making a similar mistake to that made by his targets: as Wittgenstein shows, essentialism about the definition of aesthetic terms is presupposed both by the modern philosophical tradition in aesthetics, and by the scientific attempt to reduce the aesthetic term to a bundle of feelings.

Secondly, by making the choice to ground aesthetic terms in prior

terms, Heidegger is incapable of remedying the problem of the limitations of aesthetic language (as opposed to ordinary language used in connection to artworks). In other words, Heidegger's (2002) transcendental project (which sees 'world' and 'earth' as conditions of possibility for 'form' and 'matter' (pp. 22-38), or a process of *aletheuein* as a condition of possibility for aesthetic experience (pp. 32-50)) merely 'deepens' the restrictive manner of speaking involved in aesthetic language. Thus Heidegger does not overcome the limitations of the vocabulary that the philosophical tradition discussed under the banner of 'aesthetics'.

Thirdly, it seems that the attempt to go beyond aesthetic language by 'deepening' our ways of talking of artworks is in fact prompted by the very strictures that aesthetic language imposes. In other words, Heidegger's opposition to aesthetics is based on a diagnosis of its reductive nature, and furthermore on the incompleteness of this reduction. A Wittgensteinian critic might say that the seeming incompleteness involved in reductive 'aestheticism' is nothing other than a linguistic restriction, i.e. that aesthetics appears reductive only insofar as it has restricted our ways of talking about artworks. The effort to dig beneath aesthetic language in order to find what underlies it provides no remedy for this restriction; it is, rather, simply founded upon it.

The threefold Wittgensteinian critique developed above presupposes the validity of appeals to ordinary language, and the later Wittgenstein argues that there is no higher court to which philosophers may meaningfully appeal. Contrary to Heidegger, Wittgenstein specifically argues against probing deeper to look at whatever is thought to underlie our ordinary

employment of language. A common problem faced by criticisms that rely on appealing to ordinary language is a difficulty in finding traction with opponents who are dissatisfied with such appeals.<sup>16</sup> This is precisely the later (though perhaps, interestingly, not clearly the middle) Heidegger's standpoint. Contrary to Wittgenstein, Heidegger's later thought turns towards a highly critical position concerning the concealing function of mere *Gerede* within ordinary language. Indeed, the positive direction which the later Heidegger's negative critique of aestheticism points to is that of the power of *alētheuein* involved in poetic (in Heidegger's special sense), as opposed to ordinary, language. The former, as opposed to the latter, can unconceal, as all artworks do, something fundamental about the world.

Thus the Wittgensteinian *elenchus* based on ordinary language quickly leads to an *aporia* concerning different metaphilosophical and methodological preferences. Both philosophers have elaborate justifications, for appealing to ordinary language in the later Wittgenstein's case, and for the (poetic) leap away from it in Heidegger's later work. The task of critically examining these contrary justifications remains beyond the bounds of this paper, which limits itself to pointing out the *aporia* reached by the parallel critiques of scientism in aesthetics. Further appreciation of the various parallels between Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's overall outlooks, which any critical examination of their disagreements needs to keep in mind, also remains beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say that to note their disagreement regarding ordinary language is not to say that their

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Cavell (1979, Part II).

overall philosophical projects are not otherwise aligned.

Though the Wittgensteinian critique developed above may not be convincing to a Heideggerian, it is useful in allowing us to clarify, compare, and historically situate Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's positions. Wittgenstein's approach shows Heidegger to be closer to the modern aesthetic tradition than his own rhetoric suggests. Heidegger decries modern aesthetics for its reductionism, while at the same time failing to convincingly argue directly against scientific reductionism in aesthetics. Instead, he shifts his focus towards the conditions of possibility for aesthetics, ultimately presenting no reason for abandoning a kind of revised aestheticism (or any further type of reductionism) which acknowledges such conditions of possibility. Wittgenstein's examination of ordinary linguistic usage avoids, though perhaps not unproblematically, focusing on conditions of possibility. Given an acceptance of appeals to ordinary language, which opponents (and of course, Heidegger is only one among many) might resist, Wittgenstein shows us how to expand our oversimplified conception of aesthetics, while also arguing against the possibility of an aesthetic scientism. Comparatively situating the two philosophers' positions allows us to see that the basic divergence of the conclusions reached by their critique of aesthetic scientism relies on a different view of appeals to ordinary language. This acknowledgement helps to clarify some of the conflicting conceptions of aesthetics in either thinker's line of influence, and thus may facilitate critical dialogue between them.

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# *Kant's Two Approaches to the Connection between Beauty and Morality*

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I distinguish between two approaches in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* concerning the relationship between the aesthetic and the practical. The first is a *formalistic* account of an intellectual interest in the beautiful. Against the prevalent reading, I argue that beauty itself does *not* exhibit nature's specifically moral purposiveness. The second is Kant's *semi-substantive* approach to the mediation between the domains of nature and freedom. In judging the *beautiful*, through a *practical* necessity, we conceive of nature as cooperative with practical ends and, thereby, reinforce our hope in realizing them.

## **1. Introduction**

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant characterizes the judgment of taste as *disinterested* and universal; and yet, in §42 of the third *Critique* he declares an intellectual, moral *interest* in the beautiful (KU 5: 298–303).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kant's works are cited by abbreviation and volume and page number from *Immanuel Kants gesammelten Schriften, Ausgabe der königlich preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–). Abbreviations: Anthro = *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; KpV = *Critique of Practical Reason*; KU =

On a prevalent interpretation, we take the intellectual interest in the beautiful because beauty itself exhibits nature's specifically moral purposiveness and indicates that nature will cooperate with our practical pursuit.<sup>3</sup> As I shall show, such a substantive connection between the aesthetic and the practical would be untenable; nevertheless, this interpretation does inquire into the general task of the third *Critique* that is the mediation between the domains of nature and freedom.

In this paper, I distinguish between Kant's two approaches in the third *Critique* concerning the relationship between the aesthetic and the practical. The first is Kant's strictly *formalistic* account in §42. Insofar as both the realization of practical ends in nature and the existence of natural beauty correspond to disinterested and universal satisfactions, our intellectual interest in the former grounds a similar interest in the latter. In judging the beautiful, we assume some entirely indeterminate, amoral purpose underlying nature. The second is Kant's *semi-substantive* approach to the mediation between the domains of nature and freedom. In judging the *beautiful* but through a *practical* necessity, we conceive of nature as cooperative with practical ends and, thereby, reinforce our hope in realizing them.

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*Critique of the Power of Judgment*; MS = *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translations are sometimes modified. I replace bold in the translations with italics.

<sup>3</sup> Most prominently, Allison 2001: 262–263, Ostaric 2010: 33–34. See also Munzel 1995: 322, Guyer 1998: 351, Recki 2001: 139, Wenzel 2005: 115.

## 2. The Intellectual Interest in the Beautiful

According to the third *Critique*, a judgment of taste is *disinterested* and indifferent to an object's existence (KU 5: 204). For an object's beauty consists in its mere form, which is "the combination of different representations" (KU 5: 224), and which is composed through our imagination, namely, the faculty of intuition "*without* the presence of an object" (Anthro 7: 153). For Kant, from the disinterestedness of the judgment of taste we can already "deduce" its freedom from personal idiosyncrasies and its intersubjective universal validity (KU 5: 211). Analogously, a moral judgment is also disinterested and universal, for morality consists in the accordance of our power of choice with the *a priori* moral law.

On the other hand, we may take an interest in something in light of its beauty; and the moral satisfaction, disinterested as it is, always produces an interest. And so, in §42 of the third *Critique*, Kant proposes an intellectual interest in the beautiful:

since it also interests reason that the ideas (for which it produces in the [*im*] moral feeling an immediate interest) also have objective reality, i.e., that nature should at least show some trace or give a sign that it contains in itself some sort of ground for assuming a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction that is independent of all interest (which we recognize *a priori* as a law valid for everyone, without being able to ground this on proofs), reason

must take an interest in [an] every manifestation in *nature* of a correspondence similar to this; consequently the mind cannot reflect on the beauty of nature without finding itself at the same time to be interested in it. (KU 5: 300)<sup>4</sup>

I break down Kant's rather cryptic reasoning into three steps.

Firstly, the faculty of desire is morally good insofar as its disposition accords with the moral law or with ideas of practical reason. For Kant, the "moral feeling" is the "susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to law of duty" (MS 6: 399). The pleasure produces an interest in the objective reality of the ideas in nature, that is, in the execution of moral actions or in the existence of practical ends. Now that the satisfaction, which we perceive through our moral feeling, gives rise to this interest, it is an interest "in the moral feeling".

Secondly, since the interest in the practical ends is necessarily produced by the satisfaction in morality, there is a "lawful correspondence" between the ends and the satisfaction that is "independent of interest" and "valid for everyone". Meanwhile, Kant maintains that we cannot "ground

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<sup>4</sup> With my modification. Guyer and Matthews translate Kant's phrase "*sie im moralischen Gefühle ein unmittelbares Interesse bewirkt*" as "it produces an immediate interest in the moral feeling", which is not incorrect but can be misleading. In view of the term "*im*" (i.e., *in dem*), what interests reason is the reality of practical ends (determined by the moral feeling) rather than the moral feeling itself. In contrast, when Kant writes in the same paragraph "reason must take an interest in [an] every manifestation in nature", the proposition "*an*" indicates that the manifestation interests reason.

this [satisfaction] on proofs”, because the practical law is reciprocally implied by freedom (KpV 5: 29), which is, much like the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, a postulate without theoretical proofs (KpV 5: 312).

Thirdly, since we are interested in the practical ends, which must be realized in nature, and which correspond to a certain satisfaction, we are, *by extension*, interested in whatever objects correspond to a similar satisfaction. Therefore, we must take an interest in natural, beautiful objects, insofar as they similarly correspond to a disinterested and universal satisfaction. In contrast, the satisfaction in beautiful art is “not combined with an immediate interest” (KU 5: 301), for artistic genius “presupposes a determinate concept of the product, as an end” (KU 5: 317). In other words, we are not immediately interested in art exactly because its appreciation is preoccupied with a mediate, non-moral interest.

Kant characterizes the interest in beauty as “moral”, for it derives from our moral interest in practical ends; as such, one’s interest in beauty indicates one’s “predisposition to a good moral disposition” (KU 5: 300–301), which is why we expect it of others (KU 5: 302). On my reading, the derivation is possible due to the merely *formalistic* analogies in our reflections on aesthetic and practical objects, that is, due to the similarities in the *satisfactions* these objects correspond to. In the next section, I shall examine a prevalent interpretation, which argues quite differently.

### 3. The Prevalent Interpretation and its Difficulties

On Guyer's reading, Kant's idea of intellectual interest implies that the natural existence of beauty "suggests the possibility of the realization in nature of the highest good" and, therefore, "symbolizes the possibility of the natural fulfillment of the rational intentions of morality" (1998: 351). In the same vein, Allison declares natural beauty to "express or symbolize the same rational idea" that is the thought of "nature's moral purposiveness" (2001: 262). Recki contends that we are interested in that "nature at least 'gives a sign' on the objective reality of our rational ideas" (2001: 139).<sup>5</sup> According to these commentators, insofar as beauty and morality bring about similar satisfactions, beautiful objects in nature indicate that nature will cooperate with our practical pursuit, such that we must be as much interested in the existence of natural beauty as in the reality of moral ideas. Should this be the case, beauty itself would exhibit nature's specifically moral purposiveness, and the connection between the aesthetic and the practical would be more than formalistic but indeed substantive.

According to Kant, insofar as the "mere universal communicability" of the satisfaction in beauty must "in itself already involve an interest", we can explain why "the feeling in the judgment of taste is expected of everyone as if it were a duty" (KU 5: 296). In view of this, Allison further

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<sup>5</sup> My translation. Munzel also comments: "We are seeking to show that nature has an inherent purpose coinciding with our moral purpose" (1995: 322). Wenzel makes similar remarks (2005: 115).

argues that we have an “indirect duty” to take an intellectual interest in beauty, because the capacity of aesthetic appreciation is a “moral facilitator” which reinforces the sense that nature is on our side and that our moral efforts will not be futile (2001: 233–234). Ostaric also states that works of artistic genius, much like natural beauty, serve as a “source of moral motivation” on their own terms and strengthen our feeling that “nature is cooperative with our moral ends” (2010: 34).

Despite its merits, I find the prevalent interpretation untenable in three respects.

Firstly, as I have shown, Kant does not directly refer the existence of beautiful objects in nature to the objective reality of moral ideas, as if the former indicates the possibility of the latter. Rather, Kant argues that our intellectual interest in practical ends extends to natural beauty insofar as they correspond to similar satisfactions. In fact, Kant explicitly states that natural beauty interests us not through its association with moral ideas but through “the quality inherent in it by means of which it qualifies for such an association” (KU 5: 301–302). The association in question presages the symbolic link between beauty and morality in Kant’s later discussion (KU 5: 350–354). Beauty does not interest us by being a symbol of morality; rather, it is the “inherent quality” of beauty, namely, its correspondence to a disinterested and universal satisfaction, that qualifies beauty for an indirect association with morality and, simultaneously rather than consequentially, attaches beauty to an intellectual interest. Hence, beauty does *not* interest us by symbolizing morality, let alone by exhibiting nature’s moral purposiveness.

Secondly, what Kant claims to be “as if it were a duty” is not the intellectual interest in beauty (as in Allison’s reading), but rather the “feeling in the judgment of taste” (KU 5: 296). For Kant, since both satisfactions in beauty and morality are universally valid, the beautiful experience brings to our mind “a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions” (KU 5: 353). Given that we are obliged to cultivate and strengthen the moral feeling (MS 6: 399–400), the aesthetic satisfaction becomes a duty, as if it were. We explain this duty in terms of the universal validity of the satisfaction, which “must in itself already involve an interest” (KU 5: 296), but this does not entitle the interest as a duty.

Thirdly, to regard beauty as the sign of nature’s moral purposiveness would render the judgment of taste determinable by moral concepts and undermine its autonomy. While a beautiful object arouses an aesthetic *satisfaction* which resembles the moral one, this does not entail that the *object* itself should resemble a practical end. The correspondence between certain natural objects and an *aesthetic* satisfaction does not suggest that nature would contain in itself some sort of ground for assuming a correspondence between its objects and the *moral* satisfaction, as if nature would, through its products, harmonize with our pursuit for the good.

Despite these difficulties, the commentators’ attempt at a substantive interpretation is rich in suggestions, as it addresses the central question of the third *Critique* that is the mediation between the domains of nature and freedom. As I shall show in the next section, Kant’s approach to this mediation is semi-substantive: the experience of beauty directs us to some

*indeterminate* purpose underlying nature, such that practical reason (rather than taste itself) can further *determine* this substrate for the sake of moral motivation. Beauty itself does not manifest nature's moral purposiveness; rather, through a practical necessity, reason ascribes a moral purpose to nature's supersensible substrate.

#### **4. The Mediation between the Domains of Nature and Freedom**

According to Kant, the judgment of taste is the subjective representation of "the purposiveness of nature" (KU 5: 188). We call something "purposive" insofar as we cannot conceive of its possibility without assuming "as its ground a causality in accordance with ends" (KU 5: 220). In representing a beautiful form, our cognitive faculties undergo a harmonious and free play, as if the form is produced according to some concept which we cannot determine, such that we judge the form to be subjectively purposive for our faculty of subsuming under concepts in general, and we represent this purposiveness aesthetically through the mere feeling of pleasure. Therefore, a judgment of the beautiful evokes in us the conception of an indeterminate purpose underlying nature, although we have no insight into its objective reality.<sup>6</sup>

According to Kant, the experience of beauty facilitates our assumption

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<sup>6</sup> For Kant, even artistic genius is a mental predisposition through which *nature* gives the rule (KU 5: 307).

(rather than knowledge) of some utterly indeterminate purpose in the supersensible substrate of *nature*, which is then determinable by practical reason and its law of *freedom*. I break down Kant's reasoning into three steps.

Firstly, the pure concepts of the understanding enable our cognition of nature as mere appearance and indicate its noumenal substrate. But, in this regard, we cannot justifiably ascribe any purpose, let alone a moral one, to nature's supersensible substrate. Meanwhile, in accordance with our moral vocation, we are to realize the final, practical end in the same sensible world. The problem is how to determine the as-yet "entirely *undermined*" substrate of nature in such a way that it would harmonize with our moral pursuit (KU 5: 196).

Secondly, on account of the free mental harmony in judging the beautiful, taste necessarily appeals to some purpose in nature's substrate and, thereby, provides the latter with "*determinability*" (KU 5: 196). In other words, we could not explain the possibility of beauty except by assuming as its ground a causality according to a concept of end. Although taste still leaves the exact content of this purpose undetermined, the mere assumption of a *purpose* already makes nature's substrate determinable.

Thirdly, our "intellectual faculty", namely reason, necessarily postulates this purpose's consistency with the practical law (KU 5: 196). For Kant, "from a practical point of view", we must assume "a moral cause of the world" in order to "set before ourselves a final end, in accordance with the moral law"; and so, the assumption is as much necessary as the final end itself (KU 5: 450–453). Hence, reason gives a specifically moral

“*determination*” to the otherwise indeterminate purpose underlying nature (KU 5: 196).

In my view, Kant’s account of the reconciliation involves two necessary assumptions: the first is based on the subjective purposiveness we represent in judgments of taste, the second on reason’s practical necessity. Accordingly, without theoretical cognition of nature’s supersensible causality, we are justified to conceive of nature as harmonizing with our practical ends. My interpretation finds more textual support in §42. As a side note to his analysis of the intellectual interest in beauty, Kant writes:

To that is further added the admiration of nature, which in its beautiful products shows itself as art, not merely by chance, but as it were intentionally, in accordance with a lawful arrangement and as purposiveness without an end, which latter, since we never encounter it externally, we naturally seek within ourselves, and indeed in that which constitutes the ultimate end of our existence, namely the moral vocation ... (KU 5: 301)

We admire nature insofar as its beauty displays “purposiveness”, that is, as if it were intentionally and lawfully arranged according to some as-yet indeterminate concept of end. Since this purposiveness of nature is “without end” and the determination of the concept cannot be encountered in nature, we must turn to the ends of our own practical reason. For Kant, this “admiration” concerning nature’s moral purposiveness neither grounds nor derives from the intellectual interest in beauty but rather, externally, “further

added” to it.

To conclude, in the third *Critique*, Kant presents a formalistic account of the intellectual, moral interest in the beautiful and a semi-substantive account of the mediation between the domains of nature and freedom. The two approaches, clearly distinct, are consistent with each other and convincing in their own right.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This paper's earlier and longer version, entitled "Beauty as the Symbol of Morality: A Twofold Duty in Kant's Theory of Taste", has been published online in March 20<sup>th</sup> in *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie*. My gratitude to Canadian Philosophical Association, the copyright holder of that paper, for granting me the permission to reuse the material. I also thank the audience at the ESA Conference (Maribor, 2018) and Di Huang (my former colleague in the University of Leuven) for their helpful comments.

**Weijia Wang** *Kant's Two Approaches to the Connection between Beauty and Morality*

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# ***Rosalind Krauss: From ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ to the ‘Spectacle’ of Installation Art***

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ABSTRACT. In her recent writing, the prominent art critic Rosalind Krauss dismisses installation art as a ‘spectacle of meretricious art’. By contrast, her earlier canonical writing on sculpture, particularly ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (1979), had sought to encompass site-specific works within an expanded field of sculptural practice. Krauss, once more, seeks refuge in medium; she now champions ‘knights of the medium’ – artists that, in ‘inventing’ a medium, seek to counter the ‘post-medium condition’, here conceived as the collective amnesia of contemporary art. This begs the question of whether individual artists can, indeed, invent their own medium, while many of her ‘knights’, such as Harun Farocki, are widely known *as* installation artists. I propose that installation art’s intrinsic hybridity makes it a *transmedia* rather than a *post-medium* practice. By arguing artists must invent *entirely new media*, rather than develop novel positions or juxtapositions of existing media, Krauss misrepresents a dynamic evident in the work of someone like Farocki. Indeed, what appears to be at stake for Krauss is *not* the notion of spatial assemblages per se, but rather the need to ‘lay bare the device’ – the technical support – in an act of self-reflexive criticality. However, Krauss’s notion of critical self-reflexivity, now tethered to medium, is manifest only within the internal arc of the work’s production, omitting an account of the situated beholder’s share. In an attempt to rescue installation art from the critical mire into which it is being dragged, the paper

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– which concludes with one of my own installations – proposes an alternative account of installation art as an art form that foregrounds configurational properties of the artwork’s production (revealing material processes, rules, instructions or appropriations), but also its staging (its situated reception and apparatus of display).

## 1.

In the first sentence of her 2011 book *Under Blue Cup*, the art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss confesses her ‘disgust at the spectacle of meretricious art called installation’ (Krauss, 2011, p. ix). This aversion, which had been seething for over a decade, predated the near-fatal aneurysm that had led to Krauss’s critical silence during an extended period of rehabilitation. It manifested itself in an intense reaction to the 1997 *documenta X* in Kassel, Germany. The work that rankled most was Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel’s project *Ein Haus für Schweine und Menschen*, where real pigs — living readymades — are, in Krauss’s words, ‘invested with the condition of “art” by the mere fact of occupying its domain’ (Krauss, 2011, p. 55). Having literally constructed a concrete pig house, Höller and Trockel’s work allowed spectators to observe the animals through a one-way looking glass, such that the artists claimed: ‘Watching pigs alive must remind the gaze that it is always life which is at stake’ (Höller and Trockel, 1997, p. 50).

But rather than confront *this* particular work, with its strong associations with relational aesthetics (which Krauss unjustifiably fuses with installation art), Krauss rejects installation art as an entire art form, despite

(or perhaps because of) its prevalence in contemporary art practice. With echoes of Michael Fried's notorious critique of so-called 'literalist' art in his 1967 'Art and Objecthood' (Fried, 1998 [1967]), the aesthetic status of installation art is called into question, condemned as mere spectacle — what Fried would call 'theatricality'. In this paper I want to argue that Krauss's attack on installation art is flawed in its designation of installation art as a 'post-medium' rather than a *transmedia* art practice; thus construed, Krauss constructs a false divide between those artists that 'invent' their own medium (which she champions as her 'knights of the medium') and those that might be said to inventively explore the intrinsic hybridity transmedia practices afford.

## 2.

Krauss's writing from the late 1990s was already fully suggestive of the direction in which she had been travelling (Krauss, 1999a; 1999b). Nonetheless, this rage against installation art might be surprising for those primarily familiar with her earlier work, which has taken on canonical status in art history: such as *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Krauss, 1977) and the essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (Krauss, 1979), the latter which — with its famous structuralist use of the Greimas Square — had sought to encompass minimalist and site-specific works within an expanded field of sculptural practices. While Krauss's relation with minimalism remains complex—now casting it as a break with modernism — 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in the words of Hal Foster, projected 'a minimalist

recognition back onto modernism so that she can read minimalism as a modernist epitome' (Foster, 1996, p. 42). Krauss defended minimalist artists such as Robert Morris and Richard Serra against the likes of her one-time mentor Clement Greenberg and colleague Fried, both of whom saw minimalism — with its opening up of a 'situational' art — as a threat to the autonomy and medium-specificity of high modernism, exemplified by Anthony Caro. Indeed, Krauss's earlier works—with their phenomenological emphasis on notions of passage — are still routinely invoked by those attempting a definition of the very thing she now professes to hate: installation art.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' Krauss states 'it is obvious that the logic of the space of postmodernist practice is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material, or, for that matter, the perception of material' (Krauss, 1979, p. 43). Here, talk of medium is banished, at least in Greenbergian terms of defining its essence; rather, postmodern practice operates within an expanded field developed (though this is another story) from the binary of not-landscape, not-architecture.

So what has changed? Has Krauss simply repudiated her earlier position? Or might we find in 'Expanded Field' seeds of her future discontent with the mutable term installation art? After all, for some years prior to its publication Krauss had been on a self-confessed 'rampage against the notion of *pluralism*' (Krauss, 2014, p. 2) — a fallback position

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Anne Ring Petersen, who argues that 'installations can best be understood as passage works' (Petersen, 2015, p. 27).

for many of her coeditors at *Artforum* when faced with the ‘post-medium’ proliferation of art practices characterising emergent art in the 1960s and 70s. Krauss had attempted to organise, and delimit, the ‘field’ into which such a diverse range of different sculptural practices were operating. So in many ways Krauss is merely replicating her earlier critique of pluralism. But perhaps, in confronting confusions in the terminology which Krauss uses to conduct the debate, we might rescue an aesthetics of installation art from the critical mire into which it is being dragged.

### 3.

The situation is made more complex by Krauss’s choice of artists bucking this apparent trend toward spectacle. Krauss champions her ‘knights of the medium’ — artists that, in ‘inventing’ a medium, seek to counter the ‘post-medium condition’, conceived as the collective amnesia of contemporary art — an amnesia which has, as its object of loss, the engagement of a medium (Krauss, 2011). And yet these very knights are more generally regarded as installation artists. Yve-Alain Bois, co-author with Krauss of *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Bois & Krauss, 1997), when interviewing Krauss makes just this point: ‘some of the artists that you call the “White Knights” — the knights who are coming to save the medium formerly made possible by the white cube — do installations. Harun Farocki, Sophie Calle, or Christian Marclay, they do work in this “thing” — if it’s a medium, I don’t know — called installation’ (Bois, 2102).

Krauss responds by neither clarifying Bois's confusion about the difference between an art form and a medium, nor by denying that such works are, indeed, installations, but rather by stating that these are works that are not 'merely' installations — in other words, they do something else. Here she uses the analogy of the swimming pool to argue that these works 'bounce' against the sides of the pool — a metaphor for our relation to the wall of the museum or white cube gallery (Bois, 2012). Krauss thus defends the white cube against Catherine David, who in curating a succession of choreographed installations at *documenta X* immerses us in 'a narrative about the obsolescence of the white cube' (Krauss, 2011, p. 12). Krauss compares Farocki's work favourably with immersive 'installations by artists such as Bill Viola, in which the viewer is embraced by the video surround'; with Farocki 'the distance from bench to [video] monitor here objectifies the work, allowing the critical reflection essential to aesthetic experience' (Krauss, 2011, p. 113).

Now I am also sympathetic to this critique of uncritical immersive video art. But this suggests that what appears to be at stake for Krauss is *not* installation art per se, as seems to be demonstrated by her endorsement of numerous spatial assemblages, such as those by Farocki, but installations that neglect to lay bare their devices or to establish aesthetic distance — in other words, those works that fail to establish a reflectively uncertain relation characteristic of the aesthetic stance.

#### 4.

I want to draw out some of the underlying theoretical problems with Krauss's position: firstly, around the viability of artists 'inventing' their own medium, where she draws upon Stanley Cavell, an issue that Dairmuid Costello has comprehensively addressed in *Critical Inquiry* (Costello, 2012); secondly, around her neglect of the role of the beholder in, to use a phrase Krauss takes directly from the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, 'laying bare the device' (Shklovsky, 2005). Crucially, I want to argue that these problems are closely interlinked; it is the intrinsic hybridity of installation art that makes it, quintessentially, a *transmedia* rather than a post-medium art form, where different media can be combined in new and inventive ways that reflect upon their own conventions. The resulting spatial and durational dynamic, which typically introduces something of the real — the extra-aesthetic — is crucial to the defamiliarisation that Shklovsky identifies as the function of art: in other words, to shift us out of the automatic or habitual perception (or acts of ideation) associated with literal objects. Installation art, in juxtaposing the real and virtual in ways that draw attention to its situatedness, might be said to construct a dialectic relation between theatrical and antitheatrical modes, literality and autonomy — a dynamic evidenced by the work of the very artists Krauss cites as her knights.

## 5.

Krauss takes her recurring image of the knight's move directly from Shklovsky: 'the best writer on the conventions of art' (Krauss, 2011, p.

101). The chess analogy refers to how the knight is restrained by the board (its technical support) and the conventions of permitted moves. For Krauss, a medium is just such a technical support, articulated through conventions, and thus ‘technical support’ is used as a substitution for the traditional idea of a physical medium. Krauss claims that ‘[t]he device is the recursive formal ruse that “points” to the work’s source of aesthetic pleasure’, and is discovered through a reflective criticality emerging from the engagement with such a support (Krauss, 2011, p. 101). For Krauss, contemporary technical supports are typically ‘borrowed from available mass-cultural forms, like animated films, automobiles, investigative journalism, or movies’, a list that correlates with works by her knights: William Kentridge, Ed Ruscha, Sophie Calle, and Christian Marclay. This need for substitutions arises ‘from the “discursive unity” of postmodernism, which decrees the very idea of a medium obsolete’ (Krauss, 2011, p. 16).

Krauss here draws upon Cavell, and his notion of an *automatism* — an invocation of the deeply ingrained conventions of a medium. Cavell argues that traditional art bequeaths these automatisms, so that they appear both necessary and natural (not even noticed), whereas the modernist artist ‘has to explore the fact of automatism itself’ (Cavell, 1971, p. 107). Indeed, both Cavell and Krauss associate the ‘modernist’ laying bare of the conditions of an artwork’s own existence with the development of a medium. Cavell writes:

Modernism signifies not that the powers of the arts are exhausted, but on the contrary that it has become the immediate task of the artist to

achieve in his art the muse of the art itself — to declare, from itself, the art as a whole for which it speaks, to become a present of that art. One might say the task is no longer to produce another instance of an art but a new medium within it. [...] It follows that in such a predicament, media are not given *a priori*. The failure to establish a medium is a new depth, an absoluteness, of artistic failure. (Cavell, 1971, p. 103)

However, as Costello has pointed out, we need to disentangle Cavell's terminology (Costello, 2012, p. 822). Cavell develops his account in relation to contemporary music, and the reinvention of its conventions. As Costello notes, Cavell's 'account operates at the level of genre or what Cavell calls the "media of the medium" of music — the aria or sonata form, for example — and not at the level of whatever psychological mechanisms or empirical processes might be posited as *enabling* a particular artist to reconfigure the conventional forms they inherit' (Costello, 2012, p. 840). Thus Cavell's position might be reconfigured as 'outlining something like the (defeasible) criteria of competence in a given field' (Costello, 2012, p. 840).

Cavell does not therefore provide the credible support Krauss craves; Krauss's contention that individual artists must invent *entirely new media* is untenable, negating the intrinsically public, shared nature of a medium. To remove it from its cultural practice is to slip, as Costello suggests, into 'a form of artistic solipsism analogous to fantasies of a private language' (Costello, 2012, p. 847).

Juliane Rebentisch has likewise picked up on Krauss's confusion between the invention of *media* and *genres*. In noting the proliferation of the latter in contemporary art, she states:

But I think it is characteristic of these new works of art, which simultaneously constitute new genres, that their means of (re)presentation are explicit about and even exhibit the fact that they precisely do not constitute a distinct domain separate from other arts or from the extra-aesthetic. In most cases, these are intermedial phenomena that, moreover, often also employ means of (re)presentation that are also in use outside the aesthetic. (Rebentisch, 2012 [2003], n. 15, p. 85)

Krauss concurs with the last point with regards the extra-aesthetic, acknowledging that contemporary technical supports are 'borrowed from available mass-cultural forms' while incongruously insisting that they establish a distinct domain within art. As Costello concludes, 're-describing what such artists are doing as modifying and thereby extending or transforming — even beyond recognition — existing media remains an open and compelling option. But it is not an option available to Krauss' (Costello, 2012, p. 844).

By contrast, I want to claim that this modifying or transforming media is something that not only *characterises* installation art, but is integral to the laying bare of the device in a process of the becoming-unfamiliar of the object. In rejecting the defensible claim of novel juxtapositions, Krauss

negates a defining feature of installation art (namely its trans- or intermediality) — a feature, moreover, that might feasibly do some work for Krauss in distinguishing the self-reflective practices she celebrates from those that degenerate into spectacle.

## **6.**

Krauss's use of Shklovsky is also partial. Shklovsky saw the 'device' as a means to dehabitualise perception. For Shklovsky, perception — when associated with ordinary practical language becomes automatic or habitual, and it is therefore the function of art to defamiliarise such ordinary engagement with objects. This is clearly something Krauss's knights do; there is, however, a vital distinction between Krauss's production-oriented model (an emphasis on medium, with all its attendant problems) and Shklovsky's reader- or beholder-oriented approach, which is precisely why he is widely cited as a precursor to reception theory as it developed in Germany, shifting the emphasis from the work and its production to the relationship between text and reader (or work and beholder). As Robert Holub notes defamiliarisation 'refers to a particular relationship between reader and text that removes the object from its normal perceptive field' (Holub, 1984, pp. 17-18). In terms of installation art, that uncertainty characterises the aesthetic encounter afforded. Crucially this involves an extended duration. Shklovsky states:

The device of art is the device of ‘defamiliarization’ of objects and the device of the form made difficult, a device that increases the difficulty and length of perception; for the process of perception is in art an end in itself and must be prolonged. (Cited in Holub, 1984, p. 18)

From a positive, rather than negative, perspective this is remarkably close to Fried’s characterisation of literal art as a durational art. As Krauss herself notes in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*:

With regard to sculpture, the point on which the distinction between itself and theater turns is, for Fried, the concept of time. It is an extended temporality, a merging of the temporal experience of sculpture with real time, that pushes the plastic arts into the modality of theater. While it is through the concepts of ‘presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theater’. (Krauss, 1977, p. 202-4)

This extended temporality is an even more prevalent feature of installation art that it is with the minimalist object Fried critiques. Nevertheless, even with her knights, Krauss’s notion of critical self-reflectivity is cast within the internal arc of the work’s production, omitting an account of the situated beholder’s share. While she discusses aesthetic distance, she underplays the beholder’s embodied durational engagement that is necessary to complete the work — to enact its uncertainties or indeterminacies (its blanks or gaps). By contrast, I would claim that the beholder’s orientation — spatially, temporally, and ideologically — is brought into play, whereby the virtual

space of the installation and the actual space of the situation are brought into a complex juxtaposition.

Drawing upon the literary scholar Wolfgang Iser, I have argued elsewhere (Wilder, 2018) that installation art facilitates the *configurational encounter* — an encounter which not only foregrounds configurational properties of the artwork's production (that is, explicitly revealing material processes, rules, instructions or appropriations), but also its staging (in other words its situated reception and apparatus of display). The configurational encounter compels beholder to find connections and relations for what is intentionally disconnected, through acts of ideation which are constrained by the work. For Iser, representation opens up a liminal space which oscillates between the real and imaginary, as we are forced to confront both that which is said (or shown) and that which is not said (the situation the text, or artwork, seeks to negate). This 'doubling' conditions our responses, providing an unformulated background against which what is presented transcends its literality.

## 7.

Installation art therefore encompasses a spectrum of possibilities as to how the juncture between real and virtual is negotiated, from the highly theatrical immersion of one of Ilya Kabakov's 'total' installations (like walking into an abandoned film set) to the self-reflective acknowledgment of the museum's limits of an assemblage by Farocki, to the architectural interventions of Gordon Matta-Clark (interventions into an ordinary

domestic situation made extra-ordinary by a process, literally, of removal). This juncture must be acknowledged for the necessary aesthetic distance to transform this into an aesthetic encounter; but even Höller and Trockel's pig house involves the framing of the two-way mirror — whether one thinks this is interesting or not is another matter. But the white cube is, in itself, not the only context available to lay bare the device.

I want to end with an example, one that I know well — one of my own installations. *Skylights* (2016) was a temporary site-specific installation, commissioned by the children's charity Coram, within the former London Foundling Hospital mortuary (fig. 1). As a charity, Coram is a direct continuation of the London Foundling Hospital, founded in 1742 by Thomas Coram, and is still located on part of the original site in Bloomsbury. As well as its historic connections with patrons such as the painter Hogarth and composer Handel, the Foundling Hospital is perhaps best known for its extraordinary historic collection of tokens, or bits of fabrics, left by the mothers of the 'abandoned' children to identify the anonymised child if the mother's circumstances changed (which, sadly, they very rarely did).

The mortuary, and adjacent swimming pool, survived the demolition of the original eighteenth-century buildings in 1926, when the Hospital was relocated outside of an increasingly polluted London, eventually occupying a new site in Berkhamsted. 90 years later, both mortuary and swimming pool have been removed to make way for The Queen Elizabeth II Centre, a new national centre of excellence for children. The installation was commissioned to mark a poignant moment immediately prior to the mortuary's demolition.

For many years the mortuary functioned as a general purpose store, neglected and filled up with anything from paint to garden equipment. As an artist, I felt it was important that people experience its spaces once again without this clutter, in such a way as to reflect upon its original function. Timed to coincide with the summer solstice, the light and water installation flooded the boys' and girls' rooms, visually doubling the space through the reflections (fig. 2). The spaces were stripped back to their bare minimum, the outer roof covering removed, and two new skylights inserted into openings that had been covered up for at least 90 years: one, in the girls' mortuary (fig. 3), oriented towards the evening sun, and one in the boys' mortuary (fig. 1), to the midday sun. (It is a sad fact that boys and girls were separated as foundlings not only in life, but even in death.) These skylights were reflected in the flooded interiors (fig. 4).

The installation functioned at two levels: children — who needed no encouragement to enter the space — were invited to splash in the puddle rooms (fig. 5), while the installation prompted adults to reflect on the deeper significance of the historic spaces. The installation was thus both a space for play and a space for quiet reflection — an attempt to reanimate a space inexorably linked to the death of children prior to the building's demolition. Indeed, the need for the on-site mortuary was prompted by the high rates of nineteenth century infant mortality, its commission following an outbreak of 35 cases of typhoid fever at the Foundling Hospital in 1891. Yet it took this defamiliarisation of the space to allow people to 'see', as it were, the space for the first time. In opening up the voids that once included skylights, thus opening the flooded interior directly to the sky, the installation functioned as

a prop for associational imagery. Responding to the patterns of reflected light, where, weather permitting, at particular times of the day shafts of sunlight hit the water that fills the two spaces, *Skylights* was interpreted by many as allowing the ‘spirits’ of children who passed through its spaces to rise up out of the building, prior to its demolition. Others spoke of a malign presence, as though the space was somehow possessed. More importantly for me was that the work’s indeterminacies facilitated such conflicting associations. More importantly, the light patterns were only triggered by the movement of the water — requiring participation (or agency) to activate the wave forms. The ambient sounds of the site were also amplified inside. In the film (conceived, from the beginning, as integral to the project, in that it would be all that remained of the spaces) one can hear shouts from the nearby football pitches, children playing on Coram Fields, the constant passage of planes, and poignantly birdsong and the rustle of leaves, emanating from trees that were planted at the time of the original Foundling Hospital. The latter are in some senses the enduring legacy of the original site. Onto this sound track is overlaid György Ligeti’s 1966 *Lux Aeterna, a Requiem Mass for 16 voices*, which ends with the words: *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis* (Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them).

While the ‘immersive’ installation might be said to function as a temporary memorial to the lives of the children it once housed, it nonetheless exploited a number of characteristics of installation art, and crucially was transparent about its configurational properties — laying bare its devices. It required the active participation of the literal beholder in order

to trigger its light effects; this was a real space, defamiliarised through a minimal intervention into a ‘found’ space; the installation blurred the boundaries between architecture and art, drawing the real situation (and its distinct history and social role) into the imaginative encounter; and the installation was durational, such that time was manifest in different way. With regard to the latter, not only was this a temporary intervention, but the opening was timed to coincide with the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, and thus exploited aspects of the site’s orientation. Moreover, the space was responsive to both time of day and weather conditions, rain occasionally entering the structure through the open skylights, while engaging the constantly changing patterns of light on cloudy day. And, most importantly, the *in situ* installation engaged the history of the site, and its poignant function, through ambient sounds that we normally edit out. I hope such an installation is not to be dismissed as mere spectacle.

The film of the installation can be viewed at:  
<https://vimeo.com/222335889>

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**Figure 1.** Ken Wilder, *Skylights* (2016), film still of installation, boys' mortuary (photo: author)



**Figure 2.** Ken Wilder, *Skylights* (2016), film still of installation, boys' mortuary (photo: author)



**Figure 3.** Ken Wilder, *Skylights* (2016), installation shot, girls' mortuary (photo: author)



**Figure 4.** Ken Wilder, *Skylights* (2016), installation shot, boys' mortuary (photo: author)



**Figure 5.** Ken Wilder, *Skylights* (2016), child playing in installation (photo: Colin Priest)

## *Tales of Dread*

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ABSTRACT. ‘Tales of dread’ is a genre that has received scant attention in aesthetics. In this paper, I aim to elaborate an account of tales of dread which (1) effectively distinguishes these from horror stories, and (2) helps explain the close affinity between the two, accommodating borderline cases. I consider two existing accounts of the genre, namely, those of Noël Carroll and Cynthia Freeland, and show why they are inadequate. I then develop my own account of tales of dread, drawing on two theoretical resources: Freud’s essay on ‘The “Uncanny”’, and Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of *The Fantastic*. In particular, I draw on Freud to help distinguish tales of dread from horror stories, and I draw on Todorov to help explain the fluidity between the genres. I argue that both horror stories and tales of dread feature apparent impossibilities which are threatening; but whereas in horror stories the existence of the monster (the apparent impossibility) is confirmed, tales of dread are sustained by the audience’s uncertainty pertaining to preternatural objects or events. Where horror monsters pose an immediate, concrete danger to the subject’s physical wellbeing, these preternatural objects or events pose a psychological threat to the subject’s grasp of reality.

### 1.

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll identifies a narrative genre that

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he calls ‘tales of dread’. Unlike horror stories, Carroll claims, tales of dread do not feature monstrous *entities* or *beings*, but rather a distinctive kind of preternatural *events*. These events are designed to elicit in audiences an emotion which Carroll calls ‘art-dread’:

The uncanny event which tops off such stories causes a sense of unease and awe, perhaps of momentary anxiety and foreboding. These events are constructed to move the audience rhetorically to the point that one entertains the idea that unavowed, unknown, and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe. (1990: 42)

Tales of dread have been prevalent since the late-Romantic period. Examples of the genre include short stories by Edgar Allan Poe (‘The Fall of the House of Usher’), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (‘The Yellow Wallpaper’), Guy de Maupassant (‘Le Horla’), and Robert Louis Stevenson (‘The Body Snatcher’). Tales of dread can also be found in contemporary works of literature, including novels by José Saramago (*The Double*) and Mark Z. Danielewski (*House of Leaves*); and films by David Lynch (*Lost Highway*), David Cronenberg (*Videodrome*), and Duncan Jones (*Moon*). Moreover, recent episodes of the television series *Twin Peaks* and *Black Mirror* show the continuing appeal of the genre, and how these stories have adapted to encompass new uncanny technological possibilities, such as artificial intelligence and simulated consciousness.

Given the enduring popularity of tales of dread, it is unfortunate that the genre has received scant attention in aesthetics. In this paper, I aim to

address this deficit by elaborating an account of tales of dread which (1) effectively distinguishes these from horror stories, and (2) helps explain the close affinity between the two, accommodating borderline cases.

I consider two existing accounts of tales of dread, namely those of Carroll and Cynthia Freeland, and show why they are inadequate. I then develop my own account of the genre, drawing on two theoretical resources: Freud's famous essay on 'The "Uncanny"' (2001), and Tzvetan Todorov's account of literary genre of *The Fantastic* (1975). In particular, I draw on Freud's account of the uncanny to help pinpoint what is distinctive of these stories by specifying the object of 'art-dread', and I draw on Todorov's account of the fantastic to help explain the fluidity between the genres.

Notwithstanding certain challenges that it faces, in what follows, I shall assume that Carroll's account of horror is broadly correct. Carroll defines monsters as 'beings not believed to exist now according to contemporary science' (1990: 27). Monsters are presented in horror stories as both *threatening* and *impure*. This combination of features is intended to elicit in audiences a peculiar blend of fear and disgust, which emotion Carroll calls 'art-horror'. I argue that both horror stories and tales of dread feature *apparent impossibilities* which are *threatening*; but whereas in horror stories the existence of the monster (the apparent impossibility) is confirmed, tales of dread are sustained by the audience's *uncertainty* pertaining to preternatural objects or events. Borderline cases are those that are designed to centrally evoke both art-dread and art-horror. This can be achieved either by withholding confirmation of the monster's existence until relatively late on in the narrative, or by maintaining some degree of

ambiguity as to the monster's existence.

## 2.

Carroll only briefly mentions the tales of dread in *The Philosophy of Horror*; he comments that 'art-dread probably deserves a theory of its own', though he does not have one 'ready-to-hand' (1990: 42). Since then, two attempts have been made to elaborate an account of the genre. First, in a chapter titled 'Horror and Art-Dread', Cynthia Freeland sets out to describe tales of dread, but without accepting that there is a clear distinction between these and horror stories. For Freeland, tales of dread are rather a subset of horror—one in which the 'horror is subtle and lingering, a matter of mood more than monsters' (2004: 189). Second, Carroll has elaborated an account of tales of dread in the television series *The Twilight Zone*. In this text, Carroll narrows his notion of the genre by making it a necessary condition that a character is punished for some wrongdoing in an ironic or 'mordantly humorous way', such that 'audiences entertain . . . that the universe is governed by an all knowing and controlling intelligence that metes out justice with diabolical wit' (2013: 223).

Neither of these accounts of tales of dread is adequate, however. Freeland's account is too vague, for it does not sufficiently distinguish between horror stories and tales of dread. While the two genres certainly have much in common, and while there are doubtless borderline cases (such as those that Freeland discusses), there is nonetheless a useful distinction to be drawn between them. Carroll's account, on the other hand, is too narrow.

Not all tales of dread—including those which I take to be paradigmatic of the genre, such as Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’—imply a moralistic universe that metes out diabolical punishments. Nor do I subscribe to Carroll’s earlier distinction between monstrous *entities* and preternatural *events*. For the emotion that Carroll calls ‘art-dread’ can focus on preternatural objects or entities as well as events. A case in point is the recurrent narrative motif of the double or doppelganger—an object of dread *par excellence*.

### 3.

The underlying assumption here is that, like horror stories, tales of dread are defined by the emotion which is their central purpose to evoke in audiences. So what exactly is this emotion that Carroll and Freeland call ‘art-dread’?

Freeland characterises dread as ‘an ongoing fear of imminent threat from something deeply unnerving and evil, yet not well-defined or well-understood’. Like fear, dread involves a sense of danger, but is different in that it is ‘looser and less focussed on a particular object’. Horror, she notes, tends to be a response to a ‘fairly specific object’ (2004: 191). Freeland offers the following example of an object of dread: the threat of anthrax being transmitted through the mail. ‘Art-dread’, Freeland claims, is just the name for dread ‘evoked by or in response to an artwork’ (193).

As a *general* characterisation of dread, this is mostly well and good. But it misses something crucial about the kind of stories we are interested in. ‘Art-dread’ is not just any old dread. Not all objects of dread are objects

of ‘art-dread’, and that is not just because not all objects of dread occur in the context of art. Not all *fictional* objects of dread are objects of art-dread, either. All things being equal, a story about a terrorist threat which plays on people’s anxieties about anthrax being transmitted through the mail would not be a tale of dread. That this should be so is highlighted by the recent cinematic examples of art-dread which Freeland identifies: *The Sixth Sense*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Others*, and *Signs*. Surely it is not incidental that all of these stories involve a dread of something *supernatural*.

Now, I suggest that another—and indeed better, in the sense that it is more descriptive—name for ‘art-dread’ is ‘the uncanny’. Freud’s theory of the uncanny has oftentimes been co-opted as a theory of horror, including by Carroll, who thinks it ‘fair to surmise’ that horror monsters fall within the class of phenomena that Freud identifies as ‘uncanny’, ‘along with a lot of other stuff’ (1990: 174). In fact, what I want to show presently is that Freud’s essay on the uncanny offers the resources for *distinguishing* objects of art-dread from those of art-horror.

Freud’s theory of the uncanny is typically referred to in the literature as ‘the return of the repressed’. However, contrary to popular conception, Freud does not explain all instances of uncanny phenomena in terms of repressed infantile complexes. Freud also offers another explanation for why we experience certain phenomena as uncanny. This has to do with the apparent confirmation of ‘surmounted primitive beliefs’. According to this theory, we all inherit certain ‘primitive’ beliefs in animistic and magical phenomena—such as belief in the existence of spirits and in the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’—which, as educated adult Westerners, we have

largely, but not totally, ‘surmounted’. When anything happens in reality that appears to confirm such a ‘surmounted primitive belief’, we are apt to experience it as uncanny (Freud 2001: 247–51).

I have argued elsewhere that compared to ‘return of the repressed’, Freud’s theory of ‘surmounted primitive beliefs’ faces fewer serious objections and carries greater explanatory power in respect of the uncanny. ‘Surmounted primitive beliefs’ provides a relatively rich, and plausible, explanation for why we experience certain phenomena as uncanny: because they create the dubious appearance of the supernatural in the context of one’s experience of reality.

There are two key features of the account which are important for us here. First, the object or event that appears to confirm a surmounted primitive belief must be experienced as taking place *in reality*. Second, this incongruous object or event must bring about *uncertainty about what is real*. As Freud writes, this class of uncanny things cannot arise unless there is ‘a conflict of judgement as to whether things which have been “surmounted” and are regarded as incredible may not, after all, possible’ (2001: 250).

Together, these features of Freud’s theory hold the key to distinguishing tales of dread from horror stories. Albeit, I do not want to adopt Freud’s theory wholesale. There are significant problems with the theory as it stands. Specifically, these have to do with Freud’s characterisation of infantile and ‘primitive’ beliefs in terms of animism and magic. However, I suggest that these problems can be overcome if we re-frame this dubious appearance of the supernatural in terms of an *apparent impossibility*.

Thus, I propose that tales of dread centrally feature *apparent impossibilities which cause uncertainty about what is real*. From thence derives the peculiar *threat* that tales of dread specialise in.

Let me offer an example. Near the beginning of David Lynch's film *Lost Highway*, one of the two leading male characters, Fred Madison, is approached at a party by a slim, pale, sinister-looking man. This 'Mystery Man' tells Fred that they have met before. Fred does not recognise the man, and asks him where he thinks they met. The Mystery Man replies: 'At your house. Don't you remember? . . . In fact, I'm there right now'. At first Fred is incredulous. Then the Mystery Man produces a mobile phone and suggests that Fred rings his house—which he does, hesitantly. Apparently, the same Mystery Man answers on the other end. 'Fred, mirthful at first, as if it is a party trick of some kind, suddenly turns serious'. Angrily, Fred demands to know who the Mystery Man is and how he got into his house. 'The man laughs—identical laughs—both over the phone and in person', and asks for his phone back (Lynch 1995).

Mirthful at first, it is only when Fred's attempts to rationalise the encounter as 'party trick of some kind' fail that he 'suddenly turns serious'. This marks the point at which Fred evaluates the preternatural event as a *threat*. Such is the kind of dread we are dealing with here: 'identical laughs—both over the phone and in person'.

Notice how in this example it is ambiguous whether the object of uncanny feelings should be thought of as an *event* or an *entity*. Carroll's distinction between preternatural events and horrific beings is orthogonal to the real distinction. It is true that tales of dread may be *associated* with

preternatural events rather than preternatural objects. That is because events tend to be less epistemically robust than concrete objects—events tend to admit of a greater variety and nuance of explanation. Nonetheless, it is also clear that ‘art-dread’ can be directed at concrete objects.

In Saramago’s novel, *The Double*, Antoni Clara discusses with his wife the appearance of his uncanny doppelganger. ‘If I were you’, the wife says, ‘I would just wipe the matter from my mind, I would repeat to myself a hundred times a day that there cannot possibly be two identical people in the world’ (2004: 181). Thus, the apparent impossibility which troubles Antoni is the appearance of another who is *identical* to himself. But the point I want to make here is that, in this case, art-dread is clearly directed toward a specific concrete object. We must be careful not to conflate the *object* or *target* of art-dread with its *cause*. Contrary to Freeland’s characterisation, art-dread may be directed at specific concrete objects, but the cause of the emotion is necessarily something mysterious and elusive—uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility.

To sum up, just as ‘art-horror’ is not any common or garden variety of horror, neither is ‘art-dread’ any common or garden variety of dread. Where art-horror is directed at threatening, impure beings that are not believed to exist now according to contemporary science, art-dread is directed at threatening apparent impossibilities which cause uncertainty about what is real. Where horror monsters pose an immediate concrete danger to the subject’s physical wellbeing, objects of art-dread pose a psychological threat to the subject’s grasp of reality.

Having shown how to distinguish the emotions of art-horror and art-

dread, I will now offer some explanation for the affinities the two genres share. To do this, I turn to Todorov's theory of the fantastic.

#### 4.

Todorov offers a taxonomy of literary genres which feature preternatural events. He calls these genres 'the uncanny', 'the fantastic', and 'the marvellous'. Each genre depends on the reader's interpretation of preternatural events; whether, on the one hand, events are given a natural or psychological interpretation, which genre he calls 'the uncanny', or whether, on the other hand, they are given a supernatural interpretation, which genre he calls 'the marvellous'. The genre of 'the fantastic' exists between these: the fantastic takes place for the duration of the reader's hesitation between a natural and supernatural interpretation of events.

Now, before I go any further, I need to address an apparent tension here between mine and Todorov's use of 'uncanny'. For, on my account, the uncanny is dependent on just the kind of uncertainty about what is real that Todorov posits as the defining feature of the fantastic—which uncertainty is precluded by the genre that Todorov calls 'the uncanny'. However, this tension dissipates once we recognise a discrepancy between two different uses of the word 'uncanny' in Todorov's work in its English translation. First, Todorov describes the genre of 'the uncanny' using the substantive '*l'étrange*' ('the strange'); second, Todorov describes a certain kind of narrative event as 'uncanny' using the adjective '*étrange*' ('strange'). An 'uncanny event' is another name for 'an apparently supernatural event'

(Todorov 1975: 25), which, on Todorov's own account, is just the kind of event that bring about 'fantastic hesitation'. Thus, Todorov writes, 'without "uncanny events", the fantastic cannot even appear' (92). Moreover, 'uncanny events' are just the kind of events that we find in tales of dread.

Todorov's categories of the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvellous are insufficient to distinguish horror stories and tales of dread. Todorov's genres are dependent solely on the reader's *interpretation* of the narrative, whereas horror stories and tales of dread are both dependent on the kind of *emotion* that each is designed to evoke in the audience. Nonetheless, Todorov's account is helpful for understanding the boundary between horror stories and tales of dread, and how individual works can straddle that boundary to varying degrees.

The boundary between tales of dread and horror stories can be schematised using Todorov's distinction between the fantastic and the marvellous. Tales of dread are instances of the fantastic, whereas horror stories are instances of an intermediate genre that Todorov calls 'the fantastic-marvellous'. Both tales of dread and horror stories involve the appearance of the impossible in an otherwise ordinary world; but in the case of horror, the audience comes to accept the existence of the apparently impossible being—the monster. At this point the narrative transitions from the fantastic to the marvellous. As Carroll writes:

whereas the fantastic is defined by an oscillation between naturalistic and supernatural explanations, horror requires that at some point attempts at ordinary scientific explanations be abandoned in favor of a

supernatural (or a sci-fi) explanation (1990: 145).

An upshot is that horror stories often evoke art-dread for a time: specifically, up to the point at which the existence of the monster is confirmed. Once the existence of the monster is confirmed, the uncertainty about what is real that is necessary for art-dread is precluded.

In practice, though, the distinction between the two genres is not cut-and-dry. That is because the uncertainty about what is real that sustains art-dread admits of degrees. Specifically, uncertainty about what is real in a story—prompted by the appearance of an uncanny object or event—can vary along two dimensions. First, the point at which the audience gives up a natural interpretation can vary along the timeline of the narrative. Second, there are degrees of certainty and uncertainty about how to interpret a story. Given these variables, we can see how some works may not be more readily categorised as either a horror story or a tale of dread.

As Todorov points out, pure cases of the fantastic are relatively rare. Most narratives that engage fantastic hesitation end up confirming either a naturalistic or supernatural interpretation of preternatural events. Tales of dread need not sustain such uncertainty through to the end. For example, Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' takes the reader right to the cusp of believing that the eponymous house is haunted, only at the very end to pull back and affirm a naturalistic explanation of events. Conversely, M. R. James's 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad', for the most part plays on the reader's uncertainty about apparently supernatural events, only at the very end to confirm the existence of the ghost.

Tales of dread are stories *the primary purpose of which* is to elicit the emotion art-dread (just as horror stories are stories the primary purpose of which is to elicit art-horror). Thus, although ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ is an instance of ‘the fantastic-uncanny’, and ‘Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad’ an instance of ‘the fantastic-marvellous’, both may qualify as tales of dread if it is their primary purpose to elicit ‘art-dread’.

Borderline cases are those that centrally evoke both art-dread and art-horror, or where it is ambiguous whether the primary purpose is to evoke one or the other emotion. A good example is offered by Freeland in her book on horror, in a chapter which is aptly titled ‘Uncanny Horror’—Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*. Kubrick commented that he was attracted to Stephen King’s novel because it managed to ‘strike an extraordinary balance between the psychological and the supernatural’ (quoted in Freeland 2000: 217). To the extent that the narrative leaves it ambiguous whether or not there really are supernatural forces at work in the Overlook Hotel, *The Shining* should be classified as a tale of dread rather than a horror story.

## 5.

In this paper, I hope to have provided a coherent and convincing account of what is distinctive of the object of art-dread: an apparent impossibility that threatens the subject’s grasp of reality.

There are surely many interesting and pressing questions about the genre that I have not touched on. For a start, why, given that art-dread is essentially a negative emotion, do we value and enjoy these tales? Call this

‘the paradox of the uncanny’. One promising solution has to do with the peculiar kind of cognitive frisson elicited by uncanny phenomena. Tales of dread tend to be more diverse, unpredictable, and thereby more interesting than horror stories because in order to sustain the emotion, the audience must be successfully kept in the dark about the precise nature of the fictional object.

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## *Art and Life: The Value of Horror Experience*

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ABSTRACT. This paper investigates the value horror experience in relation to life. I advance an account of horror that captures its intriguing effect of disrupting and modifying the everyday experience of audiences, which has brought to my attention from teaching a course on horror film and fiction. One has to do with an audience's experience of madness, the other the experience of abnormality. I draw on Dewey's "aesthetic experience", Foucault's concept of "experience book", and the approach to the value of fiction developed by Timothy O'Leary (2009) and advance that some works of horror can effectuate what O'Leary calls "transformative experience" in audiences. The value of the transformative experience of horror in relation to life will also be examined. I will flesh out my account by offering a close reading of Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959) and argue that it has the potential to change the everyday experience of madness of the American readers in Bloch's times, and the experience of abnormality of the worldwide readers thereafter. I defend my account by showing its merit over, for example, the hedonic accounts of the appeal of horror, which maintain that the appeal of horror lies in pleasure. The inquiry is also an attempt to shield the horror genre against accusations raised by G. Di Muzio, who argues that horror films are immoral for they have corrupting effect on audience by desensitizing viewers' compassion for the victims.

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## 1. Introduction

Philosophers have long been puzzled by our persistent engagement with different forms of painful art, including narrative horror, despite the fact that such works induce intense, negative and painful emotions that we typically avoid in everyday life (such as fear, anxiety, disgust, despair, sadness and hopelessness). A number of theorists have advanced what Aaron Smuts calls “hedonic accounts”, arguing that readers/viewers derive pleasure from consuming horror fiction and that it is this pleasure that motivates them to do so (see Smuts 2007, 2014).

Hedonic accounts come in various forms. In these accounts, the pleasure of consuming horror fiction may take the form of the pleasure of physiological excitement due to an adrenaline rush (e.g. Morreall, 1985), pleasure at subversion (e.g. Wisker, 2005), the Freudian pleasure of the return of the repressed drives, or intellectual pleasure. As an example, Noël Carroll (1990) contends that the narrative structure of horror fiction typically proceeds from the onset to the discovery, confirmation and confrontation of a threatening and impure monster. The audience derives intellectual pleasure when they get to know whether or how the monster can be confronted. The painful emotions that the audience endures is the price paid for this intellectual pleasure.

The hedonic accounts have invited many criticisms that I cannot afford to rehearse in full here. One such criticism is that these accounts do not square well with the audience’s actual experiences: readers/viewers typically find the experience of consuming horror fiction to be painful and

not pleasurable (see Smuts, 2007, 2014). The hedonic accounts are particularly vulnerable to criticism if they take pleasure as the overarching value of, or motive for, consuming horror fiction. This is because it is possible for an individual to value the painful emotions felt when consuming horror fiction but not the alleged pleasures gained. For example, a student in my *Horror Film and Fiction* class expressed that the most valuable part of her viewing experience of *The Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002) is the profound feelings of futility in the face of the unintelligible, undefeatable evil.<sup>2</sup>

I have sketched the hedonic accounts in a way that highlights their dual function: on the one hand, they provide a motive for consuming narrative horror, and on the other hand, they advance an account for the value of narrative horror.<sup>3</sup> At this point, it should be noted that my concern

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<sup>2</sup> This case is suggestive of non-pleasurable yet worthy experience. Similar cases are sometimes put forward as responses to ethical hedonism. See for example, Robert Nozick, "Happiness," in *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989): pp.99-117 and Todd May, "Is Happiness Enough?" in *A Significant Life: Human Meaning in a Silent Universe* (Chicago, Illinois; London, England: The University of Chicago Press, 2015): 25-60. Smuts (2014) argues that painful art can enhance the worth of lives without necessarily enhancing our well-being or welfare. This paper is going to explore worth as such of horror fiction.

<sup>3</sup> The two should not be conflated, however. As Philip Nickel (2010) rightly notes, the former is a psychological explanation but the latter a philosophical inquiry. The hedonic accounts, as Nickel sees them, are merely providing a motivational factor for consuming narrative horror. However, I do not think it is necessary to follow Nickel in holding that

for narrative horror is more about what its value than what motivates people to consume horror fiction. Specifically, this paper explores the values of narrative horror other than pleasure, though I have no strong objection to seeing pleasure as a good worthy of pursuing. My inquiry is partly motivated by the observation that readers/viewers do express that the experience they have from consuming horror fiction is more profound than pleasurable experience. This inquiry is also a defense of the horror genre against accusations from philosophers like Gianluca di Muzio, who argues horror films are harmful in that they desensitize the audience's capacity for compassion. Spectators of slasher horror films "are attached to these films by a mix of curiosity for the macabre and a desire to feel strong emotions" (di Muzio, 2006, p.281). However, satisfying one's curiosity for the macabre and desire to feel strong emotions does not justify the harm that the films can bring to the audience. He concludes that horror films are morally bad.

I will not pursue the debate over whether horror films really have such a desensitizing effect on the audience. Instead, my strategy is similar to that of Philip Nickel, who, in response to Di Muzio's views and the hedonic accounts, argues for a value of horror other than pleasure and enjoyment. Nickel's position is that horror fiction "often dramatizes the ordinary or everyday world gone berserk and the transmogrification of the common place", whereby they afford epistemological value that is comparable to that

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pleasure has no place at all in a philosophical inquiry into the value of horror. A reason is that it can be argued that pleasure is a good worthy of pursuing and that horror fiction indeed affords pleasure.

of philosophical skepticism (Nickel, 2010, p.17-p.18). I, on the other hand, will draw on John Dewey's ideas of "experience" and "an experience", Michel Foucault's "experience book" and the Foucauldian approach to the value of fiction developed by Timothy O'Leary to illuminate how some horror fiction and films can effectuate what O'Leary calls "transformative experiences" in the audience in a way similar to a Foucauldian experience book (see O'Leary 2009). They also serve the roles of art envisioned by Dewey in *Art as Experience*: "art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association", by virtue of which it changes our self and how we see and experience the world (Dewey, 1934, p.254; hereafter cited as *AE*) Works of horror fiction are thus liberating on Dewey's account. They are ethically valuable in a Foucauldian sense because they promote an experimental attitude in the audience, which is conducive for the *telos* of ethics (that is, freedom). I start with two horror films that effectuated transformative experiences in two viewers respectively. Then I offer a reading of a piece of literary horror—Robert Bloch's *Psycho*, showing its potential for effectuating transformation on readers collectively.

## **2. The Experience of Horror: Repulsion and Freaks**

I now detail the cases that motivate the current investigation. These cases concern two individual viewers' interactions with two horror films respectively, in which the films disrupted and modified their everyday

experience of the subject matter at issue, and probably their selves as well. In one case, Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) had the effect of changing a student's understanding of people who experience mental disturbances. One of the student's family members is being treated for a mental disorder and claims to see ghosts. This student used to be annoyed when her family member made these kinds of claims, for she was informed by science and her subjective experience of a world in which there are no ghosts. From what she told me, I believe that she had always known that people who experience these kinds of mental disturbances may think and perceive the world differently, but she did not manage to grasp the significance of those different perceptions to them. *Repulsion*, however, engaged her in all dimensions—cognitively, sensorily, viscerally and affectively—and brought her into the mind of the disturbed heroine, Carol. This engagement is achieved, I think, via the progressively distorted filmic images showing Carol's subjective experience with the world. For example, via malleable spatial configuration, which is significantly indicated in relation to Carol's body, viewers are made to share Carol's progressively distorted bodily perception of her banal apartment and delusions. As Carol goes mad, the corridor in her apartment gets longer and narrower and the ceiling is lowered. In a later bedroom scene the ceiling almost presses on Carol's body. In another scene the spatial configuration of the bathroom in Carol's apartment is distorted. The bathtub in which Carol drowns the body of her first victim, Colin, becomes disproportionately small and is unusually distanced from Carol, who is at the bathroom door. This shot is an artistic attempt to show that the dead body is no longer perceivable in Carol's mind.

While the malleable spatial configuration allows viewers to share at a visceral level the claustrophobic spatial experience and distorted bodily perception of a mad person, the progression allows viewers to gradually step into Carol's deluded world, rendering it a unifying experience.

Susan Feagin argues that one of the values of fictional literature is its ability to enhance one's affective flexibility. Affective flexibility is a pre-condition for other abilities like experiential imagination, the ability to undergo mental shifts, emotional control and so on (see Feagin 1996, pp.248-249). I would say that this value was actualized for this student. I have mentioned that she had always intellectually understood that people who experience mental disturbances perceive the world differently. Since viewing *Repulsion*, her understanding of mental disorders was enhanced, and took on a new dimension. This enhanced understanding is not merely cognitive. A mere cognitive understanding is, to quote William James's understanding of the term, a mere "cold and neutral state of intellectual perception" (James, 1894, p.193). As Smuts explains, the enhanced understanding that art makes possible is essentially emotionally charged, meaning that one comes to *appreciate* certain events; that is, they come to affectively grasp and feel the significance of those events (see Smuts, 2014). In the current case, the student came to appreciate the different perceptions a person with a mental disorder may experience as if she had somehow lived through them herself. As they are capable of undergoing mental shifts, viewers and readers are able to allow the different experience brought about by their engagement with a piece of fiction to intervene in their usual way of experiencing the world. For the student in this case, in having come to

appreciate the aforementioned example of Carol's distorted vision of the bathtub, she also came to appreciate the significance of the perception of seeing ghosts to her family member.

Another case involves a student's viewing experience of Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932). Before viewing this film, she held the view that abnormality should be respected and tolerated—she presupposed that abnormality was an object to be treated in certain way, and had already drawn a line between normality and abnormality. However, having viewed the film featuring “the wicked normal” (e.g. Cleopatra) and the freaks, who not only have a strong sense of solidarity but are utterly at ease with their bodies with physical abnormalities (as represented in a famous scene in which the limbless human caterpillar lights a cigarette effortlessly using only his mouth and enjoys the cigarette like any smoker does), she felt that the normal/abnormal line became blurred. After viewing the film, she came to realize that abnormality is not entirely foreign to herself as an object to be respected and tolerated and that, in her own words, “we are all freakish in some ways”. This recognition had an effect on her future experiences: she constantly reminded herself of it when years later she produced a book on sexual minorities in Hong Kong.

It appears to me that existing accounts of the appeal or value of horror can do little to address the potential that horror fiction has for effectuating such a change in the audience. For instance, such an effect has no place at all in hedonic accounts, for it appears to be more a disturbing, shocking experience than a pleasurable experience. And how the experiences with the horror films interact with the audiences' everyday experiences in a way that

they draw on, and modify everyday experience remains inadequately explored in these accounts. A way to capture the change and the interaction in question, I think, is to draw on Dewey's concept of "experience" in *AE* and Foucault's "experience book". Although the two sets of concepts are said to be "powerfully polysemous" and "très flottant" respectively (see Schusterman, 2000, p.30; O'Leary, 2005, p.548), I think they jointly provide a theoretical basis for an account of the horror experience that motivates the current inquiry.

To start with, two features of Dewey's aesthetics that are particularly relevant to the current inquiry are his emphasis on the continuous relationship between aesthetic experience and everyday experience, as well as the indispensable role of the perceiver. Dewey, as a naturalist, deems that human life, like that of any living organism, is essentially in constant interaction with the environment, including the natural and the social environment: "Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment" (*AE*, p.22). More than a mere product, experience is also a matter of doing and undergoing that "are not impressions stamped upon an inert wax but depend upon the way the organism reacts and respond" (*AE*, p.256). It is a process, an activity in which "the organism brings with it through its own structure, native or acquired, forces that play a part in the interaction" (*Ibid.*). As the environment is not always conducive to human needs, the interaction can be bumpy, filled with resistance, frustrations, suspense, crises, obstacles and conflicts to be resolved. In such a flux humans take delight in the consummation of experience, when humans can see order, a sense of

harmony, unity, congruity or equilibrium. Dewey then conceives of “*an* experience” as an exemplary case of such an experience of unity. In contrast to the experiences that result from humanity’s constant interaction with the environment, which can be dispersed and distracted (i.e. “inchoate”), *an* experience occurs “when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment” (*AE*, p.36). It is a situation that does not have a mere beginning but an initiation, and it is “so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation” (*AE*, p.37). *An* experience is an exemplary, self-sufficient unity that “carries with it its own individualizing quality” that makes it stand out from experience (*Ibid.*). In other words, *an* experience emerges out of a continuous flow of experience.

Dewey deems that art, owing to its expressive nature and its ability to work in the experience of others, is the exemplary human endeavor for affording *an* experience. If experience is the interaction of an organism with the environment, then aesthetic experience can be seen as the result, the reward of the interaction between the perceiver and the work of art: “The word ‘esthetic’ refers to experience as appreciative, perceiving and enjoying. It denotes the consumer’s rather than the producer’s standpoint” (*AE*, p.49). As such, aesthetic experience is also a process, an activity that engages the doing and the undergoing of the perceiver. As *an* experience, aesthetic experience is an exemplary unity that stands out from the continuous flow of experience of the perceiver. It stems from everyday experience in the sense that everyday experience provides the raw materials, context, or situation for an aesthetic experience to emerge. Thus Dewey says, “the esthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by

way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, that it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience” (AE, p.48). Put together, an aesthetic experience is pervasively situated in the perceiver’s everyday experience.

Dewey’s ideas regarding the continuous relationship between aesthetic experience and the everyday experience, and the indispensable role of perceiver, I think, shed light on the *Repulsion* case just discussed. The film makes possible an aesthetic experience of madness to the student, and the experience emerges out of, and is situated in, her daily experience with a person experiencing mental disturbances. Dewey deems that the aesthetic experience that art makes possible is one in which the work enters the experience of the perceiver: “A work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it” (AE, p.110). Perhaps it can be said that while Roman Polanski (as the artist) attempts to convey the private experience of Carol’s madness to the public world, the student (as the perceiver), by “taking in” the experience, completes the aesthetic experience by allowing the film to re-create and modify her own experience.

However, it does not follow that the film has the capacity to work in and modify the experience of a perceiver only if the perceiver has firsthand experience with people with mental disorders. In fact, to Dewey, experience is not necessarily subjective, private and personal. Recall that Dewey’s experience is a matter of the interaction of an organism with its environment, “an environment that is physical as well as human, which includes the materials of tradition, institutions as well as local surroundings” (AE, p.256). It follows that any members of a community may have a

collective or shared everyday experience with a subject-matter at issue. The everyday experience with madness, then, is not necessarily constituted of one's firsthand experience with people with mental disorders but of the materials of tradition, institutions and local surroundings.

This brings us to Foucault, whose works expose how modes of everyday experience are insidiously shaped by what Dewey calls "the social environment". Like Dewey, Foucault refuses to see everyday experience as merely subjective and private but as "the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (Foucault, 1984, p.4). This form of experience is "a kind of long-term, background experience that we share with our culture and our time, and that gives the world to us in certain form" (O'Leary, 2009, p.6). For Foucault, certain forms of experience are historically variable and thus contingent (see O'Leary, 2005, p.549). However, Foucault does not merely aim at describing the contingent factors that insidiously shape modes of everyday experience. As stressed in *The Use of Pleasure*, he also tries to incite readers "to think differently" (Foucault, 1984, p.9). By exhibiting the historical-cultural contingencies that constitute one's modes of everyday experience, he seeks to modify them. His historical yet critical studies on sex, madness and punishment aim to serve as an "experience book", in which "experience" takes the sense of "experiment", offering the readers an experience that "one comes out of transformed" (Foucault, 1980, p.239). This is Foucault's idea of a "limit-experience", one that "wrenches the subject from itself" (Foucault, 1980, p.241); that is, one that "tears us away from ourselves and leaves us no longer the same as before" (O'Leary, 2009,

p.77).

Recall the changes the horror films brought to the two students just discussed: in the case of *Repulsion*, the student came to *appreciate* the significance of the different perceptions a person experiencing mental disturbances may have. This appreciation may have acted on her everyday experience of madness, softened her stubborn resistance to madness and changed the way she interacted with her family member. The changes, I think, can also involve a recognition on the part of the audience that individuals' perceptions of the world can differ significantly. It undermines their everyday experience of the world and commonsense understanding of reality. The audience may come to realize that their understanding has been shaped by the knowledge given to them through education and narrowed by their firsthand experience of the world. Something similar can be said of the case of *Freaks*, which seemed to soften the student's division between normality and abnormality. In a sense the films fulfill what Dewey calls "art's office"—they break through barriers and differences, they unify by "building up the complexity and richness of the individual personality", and they change one's self by composing differences (*AE*, p.254). The films also function like Foucauldian "experience books" in that they produce what O'Leary calls a "transformative experience", which "helps us to detach ourselves from ourselves, to re-orient ourselves toward the world, and to modify our ways of acting in the world" (O'Leary, 2009, p.6).

### **3. Psycho as a Fictional Experiment**

If the above account of the transformative experience that the horror films brought to individual viewers sounds promising, then I venture to take a step further and suggest that some other works of horror fiction can have similar effects, not only on select individuals but also on readers collectively. One such piece of horror fiction, I think, is Robert Bloch's *Psycho*.

In an attempt to characterize his *Madness and Civilization* as an experience book, Foucault says that it enables one to “establish new relationships with the subject at issue: the I who wrote the book and those who have read it would have a different relationship with madness, with its contemporary status, and its history in the modern world” (Foucault, 1980, p.242). It may be interesting to note that Bloch indeed talks about the effect of writing *Psycho* on him as the writer: “I discovered, much to my surprise—and particularly if I was writing in the first person—that I could become a psychopath quite easily” (cited in Winter, 1995, p.21-p.22). Nevertheless, my subsequent discussion of *Psycho* focuses on the effects it can have on readers. I will examine how *Psycho* offers readers a fictional experiment that has the potential to change their relationship with madness. As is well known, the protagonist in *Psycho*, Norman Bates, is inspired by a real serial killer from Wisconsin called Edward Gein, who was found to have murdered, decapitated and eviscerated at least two women in 1957. Bloch later explains that when he wrote *Psycho* he knew nothing more about Edward Gein than the murders. He supplied him with a motive to kill: “the Oedipus motif seemed to offer a valid answer, and the transvestite theme appeared to be a logical extension” (Bloch, 1962).

Bloch's choice of the Oedipus motif is indeed an attempt to draw on the readers' everyday experience of madness in creating this work of horror. As a matter of fact, Bloch explains that his frequent use of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists in his works of fiction "is a result of observing their status in fact" (cited in Olivares-Merino, 2013a, p.75). A quick look at the cultural context in Bloch's times as detailed by Eugenio M. Olivares-Merino (2013a) can help us understand Bloch's comment. First, psychoanalysis was fervently embraced in the late 1940s and 50s in the United States and was deemed to be a prestigious therapy. The simplified versions of this field of knowledge were made widely accessible to the public through magazines. Added to this, it joined forces with other domains when it permeated through popular culture via movies and literary fiction. Some psychiatrists (e.g. David. H. Keller) produced works of fiction and appeared as authorities at cultural events like the Science Fiction Convention. It was also common for psychoanalysts to illustrate pathology using literary texts. Recall that Foucault sees experience as an effect "of a particular arrangement of fields of knowledge, ensembles of rules, and forms of relation to the self", which "involves the way in which an object is seen and conceptualized for a given culture", "the institutional practices of internment and the forms of knowledge which develop within and bolster those institutions" (O'Leary, 2005, p.548; 2009, p.79). Perhaps we can say that the "Freudian dogma" was a major constituent of the background experience of mental disturbances or madness among American readers in Bloch's times. The authority of the doctors and the popularity of Freudian psychology jointly constituted a structure of everyday experience that

shaped the way mental disturbances and madness were seen and conceptualized within this culture.

However, Bloch is suspicious of Freudian psychology and of psychoanalysts. He comments that psychotherapy is “an art rather than a science” (cited in Winter, 1995, p.22). In a similar vein to what Foucault says in *Madness and Civilization* of “the medical personage” that were called upon to treat madmen, Bloch claims that psychiatrists had replaced clergymen as authority figures: “they have become the modern priestcraft. They have supplanted the religious infallibility of previous centuries” (Ibid.). In sum, his frequent use of Freudian theory in his work is more a result of his sensitivity to how it constitutes his readers’ everyday experience of madness than his endorsement of the theory.

Regarding *Psycho*, Bloch openly admits that he utilizes the Oedipus motif in this work simply because “it [“Freudian dogma”] is currently in general acceptance” (cited in Olivares-Merino, 2013a, p.78). The Oedipus motif appears at the very beginning of the novel, when Mother vehemently criticizes her son’s reading habits. In response to Mother’s accusation that what he reads is filthy, Norman replies,

Psychology isn’t filthy, Mother! [...] But I was only trying to explain something. It’s what they call the Oedipus situation, and I thought if both of us could just look at the problem reasonably and try to understand it, maybe things would change for the better. (*Psycho*, p.15, hereafter cited as *PS*.)

In fact, Bloch is using the Oedipus motif as a veil to misdirect his readers. As Olivares-Merino insightfully notes, the real success of *Psycho* lies in Bloch's using the Oedipus motif to deceive his readers into believing that Mother is the only real threat while Norman is the victim (see Olivares-Merino, 2013b, p.109). In other words, having framed the readers' minds in the everyday experience of madness in the Freudian doctrine, *Psycho* proceeds to undermine this experience. A shocking effect of this novel for the readers is the gradual realization of the awful truth: Mother is not a threat after all (in fact, she is even not real), and the real threat had always been Norman Bates. As Lila says at the end of story, "the horror wasn't in the house [...]. It was in his [Norman's] head" (*PS*, p.171).

If, as Olivares-Merino suggests, Bloch's real success is the use of this oedipal cover-up, then the aforementioned shocking effect works for readers who were misled into seeing the fictional situation through the Freudian lens (let us call them "ordinary readers"). For these ordinary readers, the transformative experience may involve a realization of how stubborn and un-skeptical they had been in the face of clues suggesting an alternate scenario. One such clue is ingeniously mediated through the character Sam. Shocked by the fact that that his fiancée, Mary, had run away with a large sum of stolen money, Sam's everyday experience of people cracks and he becomes skeptical:

Funny, Sam told himself, how we take for granted that we know all there is to know about another person, just because we see them frequently or because of some strong emotional tie. [...] Once you

began speculation about that, once you admitted to yourself that you didn't really know how another person's mind operated, then you came up against the ultimate admission—anything was possible. (*PS*, pp.82–83)

Thus viewed, the shocking effect in question may have to rely on the ordinary readers stubbornly adherence to their everyday experience of mental disturbances in the face of what they read.<sup>4</sup> The transformative effect hinges on whether *Psycho* is capable of shocking the readers out of their dominant, background experience of mental disturbances. It may prompt them to reflect on how their reading of the fictional events was limited by their background experience, and how they were misled by the knowledge that they thought they had at their disposal in knowing about mental disturbances. The Oedipus complex was a handy yet an over-simplified attempt to capture the complexities of, and the horror that possibly resides in, a human mind.

Foucault remarks that the “truth effects” of fiction lie in the transformative experience that a book makes possible (see Foucault, 1980, p.243). The truth effects of fiction can be understood as “the creative and

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<sup>4</sup> Horror films that deceive audiences in similar ways include *The Others* (2001) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999). The former deceives viewers into believing that Anne is a loving mother trying to protect her children from the intruders, while the latter deceives viewers into believing that Dr. Malcolm is helping while the child-patient Cole is being helped. Both films involve a subversion of mother-children and doctor-patient relationships respectively.

productive power of the book in the context of a particular historical moment” (O’Leary, 2009, p.87). I have just offered a reading of *Psycho* that has this effect. One may now ask if this means that *Psycho* has effects only for ordinary readers who are situated in the context of a particular moment—what about readers who were not distracted by the Oedipus situation that Bloch deceptively plots? Indeed, I gauge that there were readers like that even in Bloch’s times. Furthermore, readers around the world since those times may be less influenced by the Freudian theory as the ordinary readers did. Many readers may be well informed about the story due to its popularity, which especially grew after the release of Hitchcock’s movie adaption in 1960. As J. M. Nieto García points out, “if we know before we start reading the novel that Norman and Mother are the same person, we are likely to read some elements in the novel differently” (Nieto Garcia, 2013, p.61). Let us call these types of readers “informed readers”. Can *Psycho* carry out transformations in these informed readers?

I suggest that the potential transformative experience of *Psycho* for the informed readers can be the singular, “subjective, genitive” experience of madness that the work makes available to them.<sup>5</sup> *Psycho* engages readers in a fictional experiment that tests what kind of “titanic work of mental delusion” is possible.<sup>6</sup> It explores how a deluded mind can operate. Bloch

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Gutting says that the treatment of the “experience of madness” offered by Foucault’s *The History of Madness* is an objective one in that it is about “the way in which normal people perceived those who were mad” (Gutting, 2005, p.77). In this sense, the treatment is not a “subjective, genitive” one.

<sup>6</sup> This term is borrowed from Olivares-Merino, 2013b, p.114.

concludes his 1962 article “The Shambles of Ed Gein” that “the real chamber of horrors is the gray, twisted, pulsating, blood-flecked interior of the human mind”. *Psycho* can be seen as Bloch’s fictional experiment to see how the interior of Norman’s mind can be led astray by the experiences given to him, including his background experience of madness.

As mentioned above, Norman casts his situation with Mother in the light of the Oedipus complex. In this sense his background experience of madness is, like the ordinary readers, founded in “Freudian dogma”. The plot then unfolds through Norman’s perceptions and interpretations of situations, which conform to the oedipal situation he orchestrates. The Oedipus complex provides him with the means to legitimately fabricate himself as a passive victim-self in a love-hate relationship with Mother. Mother is possessive and violent; she would even kill “the bitch” who flirts with her son. Norman victimizes himself in his recollections—for example, he remembers how Mother smashed his head against the mirror when he was young and how this incident renders him pain and distorted vision whenever he looks in the mirror. Despite his hate towards Mother, he is also a loving, concerned son who insists on taking care of Mother himself. He is even willing to conceal Mother’s crimes. Put differently, then, *Psycho* is a fictional experiment to show the human mind’s astonishing (or in Norman’s case, terrifying) ability of fabrication, and the extent to which the process of fabrication involves one’s using his background experience and knowledge as raw materials.

Let me explain. We learn at the end of the story that Norman’s fabrications are first set off when, after killing his mother and her lover,

Norman imitates his mother's handwriting and writes a suicide note addressed to Norman himself. In the process, Norman becomes Mother. Echoing Bloch's own experience of writing in first person as a psychopath, the process of writing as if he was Mother had a powerful, disintegrating effect on Norman's already unstable self. Norman later retrieves Mother's corpse from her grave, preserves it and keeps her at home with him. Occasionally he also dresses like Mother. These are Norman's fabrications in their most extreme forms.

Even Norman's belief that Mary is a "bitch" who flirts with him is a fabrication that forms as a result of both Mary's sexual appeal (which drives him to peep) and an interplay of what has been given to him—namely, the fact that Mother used to say that women are bitches, the aforementioned traumatic experience with mirror, and the whisky that works him up and allows him to think later that he is passing out. It may sound odd to say that the whisky is something given to Norman. Yet his decision to drink is causally linked to what Mary says to him earlier: "You live alone like this and everything is bottled up" (*PS*, p.37). After Mary has receded into her own room, Norman feels like "he couldn't bottle it up any longer" and immediately the word "bottle" reminds him of a drink (*PS*, p. 43). Through the peeping hole, he finds that Mary is undressing and "gesturing" to him in front of the mirror (while in the previous chapter, readers are told that Mary was only admiring her body and tossed herself a kiss). Together with his distorted vision of the mirror image that makes him dizzy, Norman decides that Mary knows that he is watching and is toying with him. Exactly as Mother says, Mary is also a bitch. This belief supplies Mother with a motive

to kill in his oedipal drama, and Mother does it when he is drunk and passes out.

On Foucault's analysis, the experience of madness in the modern Western world involves seeing madness as a determinable object that can be investigated, studied and explained scientifically. Correspondingly, "the subject capable of understanding madness was also being constructed" (Foucault, 1980, p.254). Similarly, Norman takes himself as a subject that is capable of knowing the madness of Mother and himself. Ironically, this further complicates his mind, causing him to lose his grip on reality. We have already seen how he psychoanalyzes his situation with Mother. Added to this, Bloch presents Norman as "a compulsive reader" (Olivares-Merino 2013b, p. 106). On numerous occasions, Norman affirms that he reads a lot and knows a great deal. When Mary suggests that he put Mother in an institution, Norman responds,

*'She's not crazy!'* [...] *'She is not crazy,'* he repeated. *'No matter what you think, or anybody thinks. No matter what the books say, or what those doctors would say at the asylum, I know all about that.'*  
(*PS*, p.36).

Norman also conceives of himself as a knowledgeable grown man "who studied the secrets of time and space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being" (*PS*, p.92). Later he calmly reveals to Sam that he knows, as if alluding to Dr. Frankenstein, how to revive Mother from "what we call suspended animation" (*PS*, p.149). In particular, as a subject who is capable

of knowing madness, he shows a sense of self-awareness of his own mental problem. His diagnosis is that “he might even be the victim of a mild form of schizophrenia, most likely some form borderline neurosis” (*PS*, p.149), though clearly he underestimates the severity of his condition. At one point he interprets his behavior of washing hands as a compulsion, “particularly during the past week. Guilt Feeling. A regular Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare had known a lot psychology” (*PS*, pp.94-95). In his mind, the behavior is symptomatic of guilty feelings of complicity in Mother’s murder of Mary. The truth is, however, he is only washing hands after shaving. Recall that it was common for psychoanalysts in Bloch’s times to illustrate mental pathology using literary texts including Shakespearean tragedies. Here, what facilitates Norman’s fabrication is the knowledge of mental pathology that was partly constructed, and made accessible to the public, through fictional literature. In short, Norman’s taking himself as a subject who is capable of knowing ironically further prevents him from seeing who he really is. Perhaps it can be said that the horror in *Psycho* lies in the fact that it prompts us to consider the possibility that we might be over confident in knowing our selves. As Sam concludes in his skeptical reflection,

Anything is possible. Talk about not knowing other people—why, when you came right down to it, you didn’t even know yourself. (*PS*, p.83)

One may note that this reading of *Psycho* seems to posit the readers as mere spectators of the titanic delusion of Norman’s mind. So how does it engage

them to the extent that it effectuates a transformation? Here is my conjecture. As we can see from the discussion above, Norman confidently believes that he knows a lot. He experiences the whole situation as real. More importantly, he experiences it as a coherent set of truths, though they do not correspond with reality. Through Norman, readers also experience the deluded world of a psychopath as a coherent, unifying whole. It is *an* experience of madness. Readers are constantly provided with intelligible explanations for the various situations Norman faces, though these situations may look strange. Norman's motives and reasons for his actions are all understandable. Readers can follow Norman's chains of thoughts leading up to his actions. They can probably appreciate, i.e. to feel the significance of his reactions in response to different situations, and grasp what other fictional characters and events emotionally mean to him. Readers may even admire his thoughtfulness in devising plans to protect Mother and to cover the murders, or feel anxious for him, for example, when he is questioned by the detective Arbogast. While Polanski's *Repulsion* engages viewers in Carol's deluded world via its progressively distorted filmic images, and Browning's *Freaks* engages viewers in the life of the freaks partly by consistently showing how they are at ease with their deformed bodies, Bloch's method is to persistently present Norman's madness as a set of coherent truths that is meaningful to any sane reader. For us, coherence is a criterion of truth, a sign of reason and sanity. Yet Norman's deluded mind operates coherently, just like what we believe how our own minds work.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, as Coltheart and Davies in *Pathologies of Belief* (Oxford:

This, I think, is also one of the most disturbing elements of *Psycho* that prompts transformative experience in readers, particularly those who have “a perception of madness that admits no meaningful alternatives to standards of normality, one which rejects any beliefs of behaviour that deviate from these standards” (Gutting 2005, p.71).<sup>8</sup> Carroll interprets the name “Norman” as “neither man nor woman but both”, rendering Norman as a borderline case of an impure monster in his definition of horror (Carroll, 1990, p.39). Alternatively, Nickel is inclined to take the name as an “ironic suggestion of normalcy: a normal man, an everyday man” who constitutes our everyday reality, and the horror of Norman’s story is “about the darkside of seeming everymen” (Nickel, 2010, pp.25-26). While both interpretations refer mainly to the movie version of Norman, I would suggest that in Bloch’s novel, the name hints at a critical reconsideration of conventional distinctions between reason and the unreason, “normality” and “abnormality” as well as of what “norm” is.

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Blackwell 2000) shows, many deluded people (such as Capgras patients) hold a highly coherent set of beliefs.

<sup>8</sup> Gutting says that this is a perception of madness against which Foucault’s outrage is directed.

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